FOCUSING ON IXCÁN

EYE CARE AND EYE HEALTH EDUCATION FOR THE PEOPLE OF THE IXCÁN REGION OF GUATEMALA

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JESUSA

by Scott Pike

In the last 30 years of doing the work of Enfoque Ixcán, I have been blessed to meet some amazing and wonderful people. People who have endured hardships beyond my belief. People who lack education, but have wisdom and skills I can only hope for.

One such person is Jesusa. Jesusa is a tiny woman who wears her 76 years well, dark hair, a steady gait on the uneven ground around her home, and attentive. In my conversation with her and her niece, Paulina, Jesusa was welcoming and engaged. I tend to ask a lot of questions, but she was kind to give thoughtful answers, even though I'm sure she had better things to do.

When the violence of the Guatemalan civil war came to her village in Ixcán in the early 1980's, Jesusa and her family fled to the jungle. -After a few weeks hiding out from the soldiers, they made their way on foot, through the jungle and hills, to Mexico. They found refuge there for 13 years. This is also where she started her family, giving birth to the first of her 5 children.

Raising 5 children isn't easy, especially when one lives in a dense jungle without running water, electricity, a telephone, and no roads. All travel was on foot or horseback and the nearest doctor was 3- 4 hours away. Jesusa, her husband (now deceased), and their family were subsistence farmers. They grew what they needed to survive and took personal responsibility for their health and well-being.

As we talked, with Paulina helping when our Spanish wasn't working and Jesusa had to switch to her Mayan tongue, I couldn't stop being impressed by the resilience and courage this small woman embodied. The hardships I've lived with pale in comparison, yet here we were nearly the same age and a comparable amount of wrinkles. I found myself deeply admiring her strength.

Life in Jesusa's village has improved in the last 30 years. The village has had electricity for 10 years. A single spigot near the front door was installed a couple of years ago to bring water to her home. She no longer has to carry water from the river for cooking and cleaning.

Enfoque Ixcán has changed over that same time period. When we started providing eye care, glasses were hard to acquire and the thought of eye surgery, like for cataracts, frightened people. A couple of years ago, Jesusa was having difficulty seeing. Paulina had to lead her when she walked. Jesusa had headaches from straining to see, and she had to sign documents with her thumbprint, when someone guided her thumb to the spot.

Last October, Jesusa came to the Enfoque Ixcán clinic and our eye health promoters diagnosed cataracts and made arrangements for her to travel with a group of other patients to our partner eye hospital, Visualiza, 6 hours away. On this trip she had

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SCAN ME

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surgery on both eyes creating a new chapter in her life.

Now, Jesusa is able to weave and sew again (she made the top she's wearing in the photo), read again and gets around on her own. With a big smile she told me, "Paulina is free! I'm no longer a burden to her." We all laughed together.

There's one other group of amazing people I've been blessed to know during these 30 years. It's all our generous donors, probably you, who have made Jesusa's surgery possible and given her purpose and dignity in her final years with her family and neighbors. Look at her photo, and think about what your support is doing.

THANK YOU!

JUANA AND CESAR

If you're in your forties, you have probably experienced, or soon will experience, presbyopia. This the time when your eyes begin to lose their ability to focus on near objects, like reading, sewing, trimming your nails, smart phones, etc. No big deal—or maybe it is a big deal. This is the time in life when bifocal glasses and reading glasses become helpful for near tasks.

When this time comes, most people make a trip to the drug store and find some 'readers' that solve that focusing problem, or on your next trip to the optometrist, your prescription includes bifocal or progressive lenses. Life goes on. It wasn't that easy for Juana and Cesar. They knew that glasses may help them, but they didn't understand what was going on. "Am I going to go blind?" "Do I have cataracts?" "Do I need eye surgery?" Eye health education wasn't something included in their schooling. And, neither of them had ever been to an eye doctor. The nearest eye doctor was 5 hours away, on public transportation. They didn't have the time or the money for a trip like that.

I was in their village in Ixcán in February. They own a little eating place (comedor) and my group ate a few of our meals there. The food was good.

Early in the week I had noticed that both of them were having trouble seeing up close. You may know the sign. They were holding near objects at arm's reach to see more clearly.

They had recently had a basic eye exam at Enfoque Ixcán and I was able to deliver their reading glasses later in the week. Their reaction, smiles and looks of amazement, said it all.

This is why Enfoque Ixcán continues to work in Ixcán, Guatemala. We bring clear, comfortable vision, at an affordable price, to folks in need.

The reactions of Juana and Cesar were all the payment I need. That, plus knowing that now they could live more enjoyable, comfortable, and productive lives, fills my cup to overflowing. Little gifts like this are so easy to provide, yet so beneficial. Your donations to Enfoque Ixcán go a long way and are so very appreciated.

Thank you!

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MEASURING SUCCESS

by Scott Pike

Occasionally, we must check the progress of our organization. This is a good time to do just that.

When Enfoque Ixcán started 28 years ago, our vision statement said, *"The vision of Enfoque Ixcán is for the people of the Ixcán region of Guatemala to enjoy their rights to affordable eye health and vision care."*

Since 1997, Enfoque Ixcán has examined 24,798 patients, dispensed 11,072 pairs of glasses, and funded 986 cataract surgeries. We are proud of this measure of success. We have made eye care accessible to the Ixcán region. As our business has grown with the opening of our clinic in 2021, it has become difficult for us to manage employees, schedules, equipment maintenance, banking issues, etc. from 3,000 miles away.

To solve this problem and to increase the accessibility and availability of eye care in Ixcán we have contracted with Visualiza, an eye care organization in Guatemala committed to serving the poor. The contract is for Visualiza to manage our eye clinic in Ixcán.

Visualiza Eye Clinic Services

Visualiza has 4 eye hospitals in Guatemala and 13 Vision Centers. Our clinic will become an additional Vision Center for them. For over 20 years Visualiza has been our resource for eye surgeries and other professional eye care when patients with severe eye problems come to our clinic. We are very familiar with each other's work-and they have been a trusted friend for Enfoque Ixcán.

Scott with the Visualiza crew

The goal of both of our organizations is to better serve the poor in Guatemala with essential eye care. Having them manage our clinic will bring a new level of professionalism to eye care in Ixcán. Each Vision Center is staffed with an optometrist and an optician. Patients needing surgical care will continue to be taken to one of Visualiza's eye hospitals.

Visualiza's outreach program of vision screening will allow people in more remote areas of the region to receive eye care in their home villages. They also have an active promotional plan so more people will be aware of eye care services.

Since overhead costs are now eliminated, 100% of your donations will go toward making eye care affordable for the poor in this remote area of Guatemala. Enfoque Ixcán solved the accessibility issue, now we can continue to concentrate on affordability. Visualiza operates on a "break even" basis, which is a model that has worked well in their many vision centers and hospitals.

Of course, our success in providing eye care to Ixcán could never have happened without your support. Our 362 individual donors have supported Enfoque Ixcán with over ½ million dollars over the years. And, donations going forward will be even more beneficial to the people we serve since all funds sent to Guatemala will now be used to pay for or reduce the cost of eye care services.

To learn more about Visualiza's social services programs go to: https://visualiza.com.gt/social-programs/

We look forward to your kind and generous support. At a time when there is an abundance of depressing news in the world, it's nice to know that good things are still happening and that *you are a part of it*.

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BECOME A MONTHLY DONOR

Donors like you contribute more than 95% of our operating budget. This makes you a critical partner in our eye care mission. If you become a monthly donor, your ongoing, reliable support will provide a steady stream of income. This ensures our patients are able to receive essential eye care, like glasses and cataract surgeries, as needed and when needed, in a timely manner.

To sign up, go to our website, www.enfoqueixcan.org,

then click on DONATE NOW and select SET UP A MONTHLY DONATION

From there choose to donate through PayPal or set up the monthly donation through a debit or credit card….it's that simple! **Your gifts significantly improve the quality of life for the people of the Ixcán.**

SPEAKING OF DONATIONS..

Quail Roost Foundation

We received an unexpected and gratifying contact from a "Quail Roost" foundation member who had been looking on GuideStar for an organization that fit their mission of: *Investing in the creation of a more just, healthy and sustainable world.* Enfoque Ixcán fit their mission and after a conversation with Scott, they approved a small grant and sent a check to be used for General Operating Support. The closing statement in the grant letter reads: "On behalf of the Board and staff of the Quail Roost Foundation, please know that we are happy to support the important work you are doing, and we look forward to hearing about your success." What a lovely and wonderful surprise!

FYI, Enfoque Ixcán is listed as a non-profit which has earned GuideStar's highest "platinum" rating.