

April / May 2007

How do I even begin to describe the incredible time and what we got accomplished in the April/May 2007 trip to Hogar Miguel Magone orphanage in Guatemala? I hardly know where to begin. Guatemala is truly another world away from California. Where is the reality? What makes life real? Life in Guatemala at the orphanage is real. There is a real purpose to the days and nights spent working at the orphanage. Read on and I'll try to describe some of the things that we did and what we got accomplished.

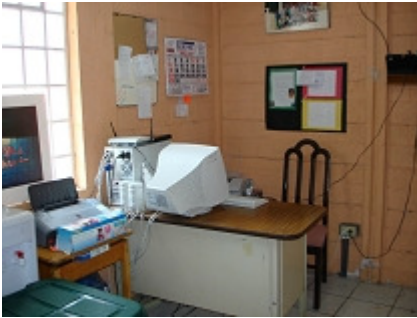
Brian is a new volunteer. He lives in Vermont and he and I timed our arrival at the airport in Guatemala within a couple hours of each other. I was waving an Orphan's Hope Project t-Shirt so Brian could easily find me in the airport. Nicoline, the English teacher, picked us up and brought us to the orphanage. We spent the next day adjusting to our surroundings and getting Brian familiarized with the grounds. Plus, he had a big job ahead of him. He needed to learn the names of all the boys! Brian and I worked on a punch list of things to buy, things to do and get done on this trip so that we could go shopping the next day. Here's a picture of Brian in the carpentry shop with Hector 'Tito', one of the older boys.



We were lucky to have the use of Monica's truck on the next Monday. Monica works at the orphanage and she was willing to be our driver for the day. We started out early in the morning but we weren't finished until around 9 pm that evening. We stopped at PriceSmart (similar to Costco) and proceeded to buy a brand new Dell Computer for the administrator's office. This computer is 4GB and has all the bells and whistles, complete with a flat panel monitor and a printer with a scanner, copier, fax, and a picture port. This purchase was made possible with a generous donation from Wayne & Kathleen C., from New Hampshire. After we purchased the computer we took it to Monica's house so we could go to the lumber yard without worrying about losing the computer. We got a long tour of the lumber yard, something you can't do in the US. It was a lumber mill.....we saw the trees being cut and the owner took us all over his mill. We finally decided that we wanted plywood and we were directed to another place. Many wrong turns and one way streets later, we found what we were looking for. We purchased sheets of plywood and got it loaded on the truck. At other stops, we also purchased drill bits, concrete screws, fasteners, starters & fluorescent lights, bars for closets, locks, hasps, hinges, and many other odds and ends that we knew would be needed in the coming weeks. We finally had our lunch at about 4 in the afternoon. Monica told me that her car was hungry too so I filled up her gas tank and we were off to run more errands. Brian also needed to activate his cell phone and that took a while. It was a productive day and we were pleased to have transportation. Then we had to load all the computer boxes in the back of the truck... on top of the sheets of lumber. And three adults had to squeeze in the cab of the truck with all the other purchases. We tied down the computer and I was glad to see the gates of the orphanage with every item intact and accounted for. It was a long day and it was a good day.

We measured, we cut, we planned, we painted, we moved things and we were busy. Now that we had a computer, we needed to renovate the office and make it safe. Cords were re-routed and a shelf was made for the new computer. Brian even built a locking cabinet above the new computer shelf. Other shelves were built and painted. The office became much brighter and much more functional. The boys were disappointed to find out that they were not allowed to use the new computer. They too were excited to watch the progress as we made changes. Here are 3 pictures... the old office, a partially finished office with the old computer and then the new computer was finally installed. That old chair kept collapsing and it needed to be replaced. So, on another day, we went back to Office

Depot where I bought a new rolling office chair, some organizational trays and paper. The rest of the office will get painted and reorganized. New window coverings are being made for the window as well. Check out the new and improved office.



Before w/ many cords, old chair.



Paint, cabinets, shelves, new chair.

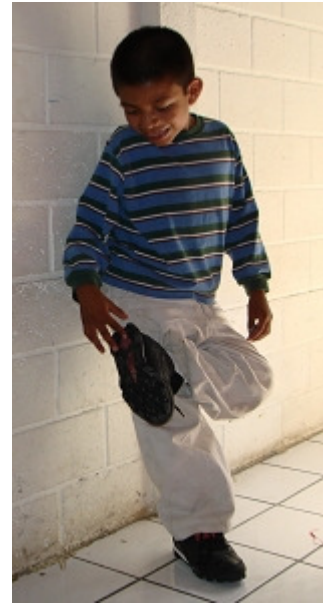


The new Dell Computer !

Brian and I walked (sometimes ran) the boys to school in Satellite every morning. They don't have the luxury of taking the bus or getting a ride. It's 1 3/4 miles to school and we always have to hustle. Some of them lag behind as they aren't all that excited about getting to school with huge backpacks full of books on their backs. Sometimes we'd switch off and carry their backpacks. After seeing the boys go in the school gate each day, Brian and I would usually buy fresh squeezed orange juice, compliments of Rosie the OJ lady that stands at the street and squeezes the oranges. After our juice, we'd have to walk up the hill.....all 1 3/4 miles... straight up. We found a shop near the school and sometimes bought additional screws, paint, varnish, latches, etc. We were lucky to find most things that we needed. We also spent quite a bit of time getting keys made. We have keys for every door at the orphanage and every key is different. Sometimes the key guy was there at 8 am... sometimes we had to wait. And it seemed like we continually needed another copy or two of certain keys.

It wasn't all work. The big box that got shipped in early April arrived at the orphanage on a Sunday afternoon. The boys knew that a box of goodies was arriving and that day was an exciting day. They knew that I had many things for them. We moved the box into my room where Brian and I unpacked it and sorted things. One of the wonderful things about the box was that there were so many items for the boys that came from so many generous people and organizations. Some of the items were: ESL books for the English teacher, reading books for the boys, 150 new t-shirts for the boys, socks and underwear for all the boys, new hats for all the boys, 50 adult t-shirts, peanut butter, new canvas bags for all the boys, 13 hand knitted blankets for the little ones, 50 new Beanie Babies, construction papers, other English books & materials, flag football games from the Oakland Raiders, folders and stickers, jeans & shorts, Sharpie pens, hundreds of toothbrushes and more. The items were given to the boys on various days so they never knew if they were getting something that day or not.

An added bonus was one pair of black shoes that I had put in the shipped box at the last minute, because the shoes had been donated and because there was room. But what was I going to do with one pair of shoes? Pedro and Diego are pequenos & they were fairly new kids at the orphanage. They are 8 and 9 year old brothers. We don't know their names or who their parents are. They're probably afraid to tell because they're afraid that they'll be sent back. Anyway, I found out that Diego didn't have any shoes. And the orphanage had not gotten around to finding him a pair of shoes that fit and that he could have. The one pair of shoes that were in my box had been meant for Diego to have. They fit him perfectly. You should have seen him jump up and down, laugh, cry, hug me, kick, dance, look at his shoes, touch them, etc. He even tried to climb up the wall. He was so excited when he put the shoes on and when he realized that I was giving them to him. This boy was truly grateful. It made his day and it certainly made mine. It was one of those perfect moments that I will remember the rest of my life. Here's a picture of Diego with his shoes. He kept saying "Gracias Diana" for days and days. And that smile! I always had lots of hugs from Diego, day after day. When I tell this story, I still get tears in my eyes. Such joy! It is so simple to give.



Here's Diego wearing his new shoes. He could hardly believe that they were his that he could keep them.

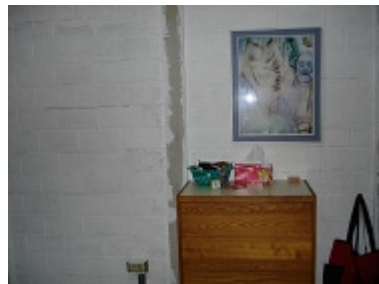
We had a 30 minute flag football video and we let the boys watch it to learn something about flag football. I had printed up the rules while I was in the U.S. (in Spanish) and we gave them to the boys to read and study. They don't know how to play American football, much less flag football. They know how to play soccer. We took them up to the fields and let them toss and catch the ball. The older boys are much more interested in the game. And we had some sore arms from tossing the balls. We'll keep trying. Thanks to the Oakland Raiders, the boys now have a new game to play.



Another project that got started on this trip was the planning of the room renovations for the two rooms that the volunteers sleep in. They are pretty basic rooms – brown cinder block walls, poor lighting, 4 beds, no closets, no shelves, cold water showers that don't work well, no window coverings and worst of all... old, stained, lumpy, saggy mattresses on the beds, old pillows and no mattress covers. We started working on the rooms on this trip but the real work will be in August when the two college boys come from New Hampshire. Some things are already changed. The lights got cleaned and changed. We now have three beds in each room. We added a shelf to the closet and a towel holder. Brian built a shelf and added a bar for hangers in the closet. Now I can hang up some clothes.



Dark walls throughout the rooms



Painted walls, new dresser & picture



A real closet !

And... I started painting. You can see what a difference a little paint makes. The water now comes out of the shower head, instead of spraying the wall. The windows will get proper window coverings soon. We will be buying new mattresses, mattress covers, new pillows, matching comforters, sheets and other items in August. You won't be able to recognize the rooms after we're finished. Ahhh..... a good night's sleep is essential!

The new walk in freezer got installed while I was there. We received a \$5,000 donation from Mike & Helen C. for a new freezer. Their donation paid for the demolition of the old, non-working walk in freezer and it paid for the purchase and installation of a brand new walk in. It is beautiful. I watched the progress every day and it is a real asset to have. Now we can store and use all the frozen donations that we receive. We never know what food is going to be donated and now we can accept all of it. Life is good.



Part of the old freezer



Interior of new freezer



Gleaming new freezer

One of the most exciting things that happened on this trip is that Brian felt the need to stay. Yes, he's living there now. He knew there was so much that needed to be fixed, repaired, replaced, etc and he also knew that he could teach the boys new skills in the carpentry shop. Brian is a carpenter by trade and there's a carpentry shop on site that has not been used for months. Brian is now the on site handy man and carpentry teacher. We cleared out a little one room house for him and he moved in after I came back to the US. He gets a little more privacy in the house and it leaves the other room empty for additional volunteer workers. He is learning Spanish and is a great role model for the boys as he is calm and kind... wonderful attributes to have in a worker at the home. We are so lucky that he decided to stay and the boys and Karen are lucky to have him on site. He can stay for 90 days at a time without leaving the country. He leaves at the end of July but has timed his return for the day that I return with the two college boys from New Hampshire. Watch out ! There's work to be done and it will get done in August.

As I was in airports and in Antigua, I seemed to notice more US couples with Guatemalan babies. And yes, I just had to talk with many of them. These families that I spoke with were usually picking up their newly adopted children, mostly babies that were about 8-10 months old. These were the children that they had waited for. The process takes an average of 14 months from the beginning of the adoption process to the final conclusion and the general consensus is that the cost is about \$25,000 to adopt one child. It was so heartwarming to watch the parents with their children.

While I was in Guatemala, I was the speaker at a Rotary Club meeting in San Cristobal. My Spanish got me through it but I wish it had been better. I am hoping that this Rotary Club will fund some future projects at the orphanage. My university contact (and my ride to the meeting) will be getting together a team of university students who will sort clothing donations at the orphanage on a regular basis. That will be a big help. And, there were two firemen at the meeting so guess what?! I have arranged a visit to the central fire station in Guatemala City. All of our boys are going to go in August. They have never been to a fire station and we know how exciting it is for young boys when they visit a fire station. It should be educational as well as fun.

Because of your generous donations, we were able to accomplish so much. I brought many things to give to the boys and everything we bought is needed and is useful. In addition to the changes and improvements, we also donated \$3,100 to Hogar Miguel Magone during this trip. This money will be used for the general operating expenses, for cleaning supplies, for utilities, for carpentry supplies and for all those items that are needed to keep these boys alive and thriving.

I could go on for hours and hours and tell you so many more things that happened. It was a great trip, it was a productive trip and I'm ready to go back. I am scheduled to go back in August but if I can, I might sneak away in June.

On the web site, we have posted individual pictures of the boys. I took these pictures in May. There is a picture of each and every boy. You can see their name, their age and there are height markers so you can see how tall they are.

Thank you for reading this summary and thank you again for all you do. Many of you donate again and again and that is greatly appreciated. Pay Pal is up and running on our web site and that makes donating more convenient.

Till the next trip !

Sincerely,

Diane Springer

www.OrphansHopeProject.com

