

Hello!

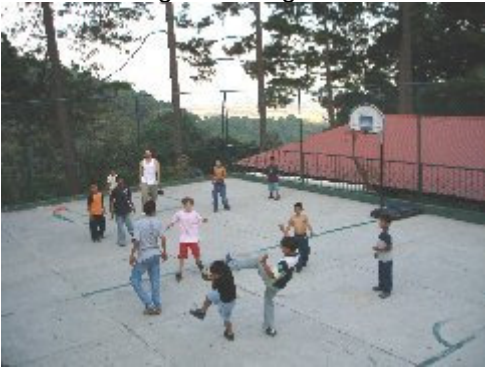
The time that Aaron and I spent in Guatemala was great. I got back Friday night, January 12th. My luggage got back Saturday night. I didn't get my mail until Tuesday the 15th. I'm still trying to catch up on mail and work.

Here's a recap for the people who donated shirts, socks, backpacks, balls, lanyards, hackie sacks, frisbees, flashlights, toothbrushes, dental floss, DVDs, combs, hats, \$, wristbands, slinkys, school supplies and more.

We left the day after Christmas with quite a bit of luggage. Not much of it was for us... our clothes were in our carry on bags and backpacks. Yes, all this stuff is for the boys. Two 18 Gallon Rubbermaid tubs, two suitcases and then our own carry on bags.



Our first day greeted us with beautiful weather and the weather continued to improve. It was around 50 degrees at night but sometimes got into the mid 70's during the day.



Here are some of the boys on the sport court. We have a great view of Guatemala City from the sport court. We're at an elevation of about 5000 feet and about 30 minutes outside the city. The small village where Hogar Miguel Magone is located (El Aguacate) consists of very poor people.... many don't have running water or electricity. Some of their houses are huts or shacks with minimal furnishings. We have electricity at the orphanage and cold water... no warm or hot water. No heat either of course.

We were lucky to get tickets to the Guatemala City Zoo and we went there a few days after we arrived. We had about 50 kids with us and maybe 7 adults. It's a nice zoo and we all enjoyed the day. To save \$, I went out to the van in the middle of the day with 3 other kids. We had an assembly line going and we made about 100 peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. I brought the peanut butter with me from the US... it's less expensive here. The kids enjoyed the panes de manteca de mani con jalea (peanut butter sandwiches with jelly). The girl in the picture on the right is the founder's daughter. A teacher is on the far right of the picture.



Since we were already in Guatemala City for the day with all the boys, we decided to go to the shoe store after we left the zoo. Shoes were on sale for only a couple more days. The shoes for the small boys were about \$10 a pair (US) but the larger boys shoes cost \$30 a pair. Wow... what a madhouse. We bought 27 pairs of shoes that day and a few days later, we bought another 14 pairs. A couple of boys missed out as they were leaving the home (2 got kicked out for stealing and lying) and a few of the boys were not residents yet. Here's 13 year old Gustavo with a few of the younger boys, waiting for their feet to be sized. Usually they get hand me downs or whatever might fit. Going to the shoe store is not a normal experience for them. Some of the younger boys got Batman or Superman shoes with lights! They loved those. The Exchange Club of Pinole-Hercules donated \$750 for shoes. Thanks to the Exchange Club of Pinole-Hercules, these boys got new shoes for the start of their school year which began in early January. They have summer vacation from October until mid-January.



These are some of the boxes. I wrote each boys name on the tongue of each shoe and also on the box. Thank goodness for Sharpie pens.... I brought an assortment of colors in my suitcase.



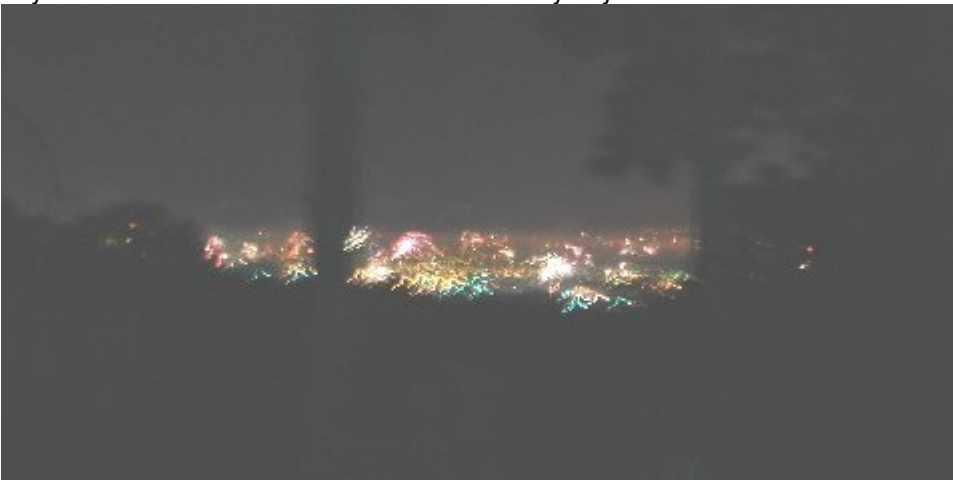
Sunday, December 31st was quite a special day for the boys. They got a lot of food for dinner that night. Families in Guatemala REALLY like fireworks. Every family buys fireworks and lights them for hours and hours. The light show over Guatemala City was amazing and it went on from dusk until at least 1 am when I gave up and went to bed. Our boys were given fireworks and all of them



lit them on the sport court. I watched.



Thank goodness some of the boys slept in the next day. It was peaceful while I was doing my 45 minute power walk for exercise. I was always up by 5 am as I heated/prepared breakfast for all the boys and teachers. Beans for breakfast... every day. That's the norm.



Night time view of Guatemala City and the fireworks.



Then it was Oakland Raider Day. The Oakland Raiders donated hats for each boy, shirts for each boy and Dominic Silvestri of American Home Mortgage donated black lanyards and plastic name tag sleeves for each boy. Boy was that an exciting day for the boys. We had to write their names in their hats and shirts. Some of the boys wore their shirts every day for days and days... but they really are supposed to change their clothes every day.



Enrique loves his new shirt and Jose is waiting for his.



Little Raider fans!



In the TV room. During the school year, they can watch a movie on Saturday. No TV during the week. Just imagine.... 45-50 sweaty boys in one small room and no ventilation. Yes, these boys eat beans every day and you know it when you're in the TV room with them!

Ah.... Aaron and I headed to Antigua on January 2nd. We checked into a decent hotel for the one night we were there. The market in Antigua is spectacular. I love wandering in it and talking to the local people. Many of the vendors are women with their children. They are just trying to make a living. The market is there every day. There are Guatemalan handicrafts, clothing items, food, bags, shoes, fruit, meat, and almost everything in between. I love being there.... I could stay for hours. We did stay for quite a while as Aaron out-shopped me and bought tons of gifts for his friends at home.



A fruit vendor in Antigua. Isn't it lovely? Antigua used to be the capital of Guatemala.



Selling meat (it hangs there all day long) in the market in Antigua.

We got up the next morning at 5:15 to hike the volcano.... Pacaya. It is an active volcano but the lava was not flowing on January 3rd. It did flow a few days later. Oh well..... It was a strenuous hike up the mountain (once we finally got there... the van kept running hot, the driver got lost, we had to keep stopping to check the engine, etc)....Some people opted to ride up the mountain on horses but Aaron and I walked up. It took over an hour to walk up to the lava flow area.



And yes... we were in the cloud cover. It was a wonderful hike.



Canadians arrived at the Hogar on January 5th! The Canadians were a group of 14 college students and one professor from Quebec. They were coming to tear down and rebuild the bakery in the local village. They used the orphanage as their home base for beds and food. Right away, 6 of the 15 got sick. They were working pretty hard, eating quite a bit and they weren't used to the food in the orphanage. (The cook uses lots of oil) Boy... did they change their eating habits. I kind of started overseeing their food and food choices and they slowly got better. Since the Canadians tore up the village bakery, we made a deal with the village bakers. The village bakers started using the idle orphanage bakery in exchange for some fresh bread each night. Mmmm that pan dulce is good. I was hungry all day long once the bakers arrived... you could smell yeast dough rising and bread baking.... all day. No fair.....they weren't sharing with me when I came to the bakery for smells!





This was Verb Yellowball day.

Each age group got a ball (thanks to the Hilltop YMCA), Yellowball wristbands and the Y even donated a pump. They didn't have a pump to inflate any of their balls so that was a popular thing to bring with me. The kids divided into teams and played dodge ball, soccer, kickball, etc. And... the boys also got to try hackie sacks... some just juggled with them.



Taking freshly baked bread back to the village shop to sell.



Just imagine... this huge orphanage had only one phone in a locked office.... no answering machine. The old phone had a poor signal due to the age of the phone. You always have to run and find the key to open the door and then find the person who the call is for. Then the phone usually wouldn't work unless you were close to the office. (The boys aren't allowed to get calls). So.... I went and bought a 4 handset cordless phone answering machine for the orphanage..... 5.8 Mhz.....we're getting high tech. I also bought a fax machine for the orphanage as they didn't have one.



One Monday, the laundry woman didn't show up because her baby was sick. The laundry piled up from Sunday and Monday so... I did the laundry. I think it was about 10 loads before I gave up.

Every item had to get hung up with clothes pins. My hands got tired. This is a line that telescopes out to trees.... then you have to figure out how to get the dry laundry off... especially before the rains started that night. Then you take it down, take it inside and fold it. Yikes....



Thanks to three organizations, CASA of Sonoma County, CASA of Contra Costa County and the Pinole Rotary Club, we were able to give each and every boy a brand new backpack for the start of their new school year. Boy was there excitement in the air that night. Some of the boys knew I had brought new backpacks with me and some of them asked me every day when they were going to get them. I wanted to wait until just before school started. It was worth the wait.



We All Got New Backpacks !



Back Pack night !



This is a typical room for the volunteers... 4 beds in a very small room.



School started.... oh no! I have tarea (homework) already. This was the first day of school in the local village school. The majority of the boys walk 1 3/4 miles each way to get to school in a town called Satellite. It's not so bad to walk there... it's downhill. But then... when school is out for the day, the boys have to walk back and it's almost all uphill. I enjoyed the walk... sometimes I'd walk just to go to the market to get fruits and vegetables. Ok... it's not really a market... just a few vendors and tiendas in the little village. But it sure tastes good.



Another night when all the boys got new t-shirts, new socks and new combs.... thanks to all my donors.

OK... what's this? It's chicken feet soup. Many of the kids love it. The butcher shops donate the chicken feet, kidneys and livers and since all the orphanage food is donated, we find a use for everything. Soup anyone?



I found cases of brownie mix in the bodega. We couldn't use it as we don't usually have a baker in the orphanage. I talked Lise into baking

brownies for the boys. She cooked 12 boxes but it was on the day that I left to come home..... boo hoo. Lise lives in the village with a local family and loves being in Guatemala. She supervises the village bakery.



Karen, the founder of the orphanage. She's amazing.



Lise, the Canadian professor and me.

But have no fear..... on my last night... the director of the village bakery made me my own batch of brownies since it was my last night. I divided it up among the volunteers and some of it went on the plane with me. Boy... the taste of chocolate after 2 1/2 weeks without any was a good thing!

We shopped for school supplies and that was very interesting. We donated supplies to village children as well so we had to make up over 55 bags of supplies. Some items are toilet paper, masking tape, toothpaste, construction paper, glue, pencils, tissue paper, specific colored binders, yarn, craft supplies and so much more. The children in school have to bring all the school supplies for the school..... they even supply the school with toilet paper. It was chaotic, confusing and frustrating to make up the bags for each child. Different teachers and different schools wanted different items and sometimes we had to put down a bag and come back to it later when we had the necessary item. Luckily, our kids had the new backpacks to carry things to school.

There is so much more to tell about my 2 1/2 weeks there. We sized the kids for school uniforms, we took them to school for advancement tests, we picked up food donations from various places, we took them to the Dr., to the Dentist, we broke up fights, we talked, we played, we supervised, we walked them to school, we served all their meals and drinks, we washed dishes, etc. We just did what had to be done.

And would I do it again ! ABSOLUTELY !

I will be going back (it will be my 3rd trip) on April 22nd for another 18 days. I love it there. The boys are wonderful..... they didn't ask for this life. They are being taken care of, they are not on the streets and thanks to my donors, we now have 7 boys in private school instead of the 2 that were in private school last year. The boys do all the work in the orphanage....cleaning the floors,

bathrooms, rooms, yard work, etc. I think most of them know they are lucky to be there. And I feel lucky and privileged to be able to go there and work for 2 to 3 weeks at a time to do what I can.

If you are interested in donating items or money to help the boys, that would be greatly appreciated. This is a project dear to my heart and I will continue to do this. Call me if you have questions.

If you have frequent flyer miles that you can donate for future trips.... that would be great too. I can go there more often if I get some miles donated.

Thank you for reading my little summary. Bless all of you for helping make their days and their futures a little better. I salute you and your involvement.

**Diane Springer**