

March 29th Reflection

JULIE, JULIE, JULIE! (I was told to say that)

Now on a more serious note:

46 is the number of days we have left of this trip, and by the time everyone back home reads this it will be 45. This means that we are already halfway through our experience; quite honestly I have no idea where the time has gone. It seems as though we have only been off the plane for a few days, yet at the same time I know that for me personally it feels as though I have been here for years. Everything feels so natural, waking up early in the morning, watching the sun peek out over the mountains, and then starting our day at ten to eight, going out and digging trenches, or moving mud one, teaching English, cooking for 50 people, and even painting schools (I am one of the worst painters in the history of humankind) and so much more! We try every weekend to go to the orphanage, and although it hasn't always worked out, the girls are still happy to see us, and love spending the few hours that they do with us.

Everyone has already heard of most of the people we have helped, and most of the things we have done, but at the same time, can never truly know these stories because they haven't been here, and seen the things for themselves. It's something that pictures could never do justice to, they do show some things, but could never truly show the depths of the problem. Some stories are so heartbreaking that you just want to jump in and give everything you have, and everything you will ever have, just to know that their lives are a little better. For example, Alba is a lady we are currently building a house for. She is 22 and has three children, the youngest of them being only a few months old. She is unable to produce sufficient breast milk to feed her youngest, and her husband just took off one day and never returned. Alba's father is supporting her and her children as well as his own family on a mere 30 quetzals a day. (which amounts to about \$3.75 American). He is the one that pays for the formula for her son. Nicole decided that she was going to do something, and so on Saturday we went out and bought the formula for the baby. It cost her 75 quetzals. That means that 2½ days of work is what it takes to buy this child his formula. It also means that half of his work week is devoted to this child, and still leaves him very little money to buy for the rest of his family. It is a complete mind blowing experience, and gave me even more appreciation for how hard my parents work to provide for me, and the extent Ted and Miriam go to simply to feed the nineteen of us .

On that note, Camp Esperanza has grown to become home, and for me to picture home as anything different is impossible. I can't think of what life was like before Guatemala, I mean I obviously remember people, experiences, but as I reiterate the point that everything feels natural here, I cannot see how I could go back to a completely westernized society, wake up in the morning to see everything completely different. Looking for "Tortrix" at the local "tienda", or standing outside of a corner store, because often times you don't go into them.

Recently I heard a staggering statistic, Americans spend on average 3 times more on video games, (which is approximately 5.5 billion dollars per year) than they do on literature, and school materials for their children. Hearing that and then looking around at the quality of the schools here, absolutely disgusted me. North America seems to think that video games, those parts of technology that turn people into mindless drones, is more important than providing good work materials for their children, and striving towards a better tomorrow. Meanwhile, the children that we see in the schools here, oftentimes don't even have enough money to buy pens and pencils, and books to write in. They will come to school with scrap pieces of paper that you never see again, and are still one hundred percent focused on learning, and trying to create a better life for themselves and their families. This to me really hammers home the idea of taking everything that God has blessed us with in North America for granted. We are given the best materials, and have the best opportunities available to us if we choose to pursue them, yet majority of kids still yell and scream, drag their feet, and just plain don't care when it comes to going to school, and most times we even have transportation to and from.

Guatemalan children on the other hand, get up first thing in the morning, with no complaints, and walk to school, sometimes for hours, and still, don't complain. They get to school, schools that are made of tin, schools that have been known to get so hot that the children quite literally cannot breathe sitting in the classroom. Yet they go, day after day, hoping beyond all hope that it will help them eventually, and one day they can get out of the endless cycle that they have been enslaved to for so many years.

Jonathon