

## **THE RETURN: Helping Hands Medical Mission Trip Reflections** *by Ana Caballero*

The return back to Milwaukee may have been one of the hardest things to do in my life. A sense of loss, frustration, and guilt overwhelmed me as I landed on familiar American territory. I did not want to leave my new family, I did not understand why I was privileged to be born into such a fortunate family, and lastly I knew I could not go to sleep at night in my own bed without thinking about those who sleep on concrete floors. Needless to say, I felt sick to my stomach. I just spent a week with those who have nothing and here I come home to everything and more. We always hear stories about how people learn about the poor and their happiness, but this was different. This was personal. I wanted to change their lives for the better. I was so uneasy with the fact that those people will never have the opportunities that I'll have.

Yes, it was hard for me to let go of the people I met and the experiences I had. But they are a part of me—I am the people of Quintana Roo. They have taught me so much about myself, my faith, and how to better my own life. The funny part is, they did it by just acting like themselves (except for the children of course—they were extra energetic!).

First clinic day, we visited Presumida. We traveled about an hour and a half to visit this little village with dirt roads, huts, and the happiest people I've ever met. Everyone was so willing to help us unload the boxes of medications and to set up the clinic. I worked alongside Kathy and Sheri as one of the Pharmacists. We were assigned a small room (no windows, fans, or any type of ventilation) with 2 bookshelves, a desk, and a chair. Being the first day of clinic work, we were trying to figure out a method to all this madness. Hour after hour passed and we were working hard. I found myself getting caught up in just doing work. Yes, I was having fun but I was not fully experiencing the people around me. So I decided to take a little break to see whom I could talk to. To the right of the Pharmacy, there was a line of little old ladies sitting in chairs and to the left of me, there were little kids playing 'King of the Hill' on a dirt mound. To the left I went!

Without any hesitation, I started talking and joking around with these vibrant children. Once I started high-fiving Luis, all 15 of the kids needed to be high-fived too. So there I am, laughing with these kids when all of a sudden twins (Marcos and Luisa), dressed in their school uniform, started tickling me. My first instinct—run! Wrong decision, especially when 15 little kids are trying to tickle you! I look behind me to see all the kids running after me with their big brown eyes wide open, smiles on their faces, and arms extended towards me. There were too many; I was caught! For a second, they all stood there hugging me. An hour passed by and all the missionaries were beginning to pack up and started loading the vans. But not me, I spent my time with my new friends. After a cart-wheel competition, balancing/ballet/dance off, and a "look at how fast I can run" competition, it was time to go. I didn't think it would be hard to leave these kids, but sadness consumed me. I told them I had to go back home. Luis immediately latched onto my leg and wouldn't let go. He said, "If you stay 1 more hour, I'll walk home with you". My heart melted. Luisa added, "If you stay 1 more hour, you can have my bike to ride home!" Again, my heart melted. There was nothing more that I wanted to do than to stay there. "When are you coming back?" they all asked. At that moment in time I was not even thinking about next year, I was just thinking about a shower! I looked at all of them trying to hold back tears, smiled, and

said "Next year, I will be back next year". Fifteen frowns turned to fifteen smiles. Luis, my little leg leech wouldn't let go. As tears continued to build up in my eyes, I bent down and gave him the biggest hug, which then led into a big, hug from all these kids. We were family.

The whole trip back to our hotel, I was silent, trying not to cry. I already missed them.

These young kids taught me so much about love, friendship, and happiness because I saw God in them. They did not buy me a new Tiffany ring, they did not take me out for dinner, they did not help me with my homework, they simply smiled, laughed, and experienced life with me.

This was only one experience of many from my trip that I am so thankful for. These people have nourished my mind, body, and soul. I came back knowing that I could never be the same and rightfully so, I never wanted to be the old Ana. I am born again.

I promised myself that I would take 5 minutes after I woke and before I fell asleep, to thank God for all that has happened throughout my day, to pray for those with little, and for protection over my new family.

Please don't be mistaken by my message, you do not need to travel far away to experience this. There will always be people in need of help-physically and spiritually within our community. Reaching out to strangers can be somewhat discomfoting, but if you can get past it, you will receive such a wonderful sense of fulfillment.

I learned a new word in Quintana Roo. "Buen provecho" which means take advantage of, enjoy fully, and to appreciate. Usually this is used in the context of food, but I deemed it appropriate in applying to life. I think we take for granted excessive comforts, rush through life, and completely miss the graces of God on a daily basis. This trip has taught me to take advantage of the present, to fully enjoy the people around me, and to appreciate the experiences in my life.