

# **Puentes de Cristo Team Report**

## **June 5-15, 2004**

Echoes of their voices bounce in my head as I gaze out of the window. The shacks that line the filthy land of Mexico are packed in so tightly reminding me of a tightly knit blanket. Yet, within the horizon lies so much more, so easy to be overlooked. People live here, people like me, with feelings, hopes and dreams. Despite their daily struggles, they are happy. To them the little that they own is nothing, for importance lies on family, friends, and mostly on God. I admire them for living this way. For a second I wonder if I am the unlucky one, maybe I am wrong in all that I possess. To me it appears that they have the advantage, for not being so attached to material goods. I know that I am right. I may be luckier for having running water, a stable house, and an education, but these people have taught me that happiness in life is not found in a new car or a fancy house. The beauty in life comes from our families and everyone around us who loves us.

As I gaze out of the plane window I can't help but remember each and every one of them. I can still hear their voices, ricocheting around in my boggled head. I can still see their faces, their distinct images haunting me, their pain like a fresh cut on my soul. Their stories have become mine to tell the world.

Despite the sadness I feel now, I find it impossible to overlook all of the good that was done. I feel proud of the work accomplished. God put together an amazing team, each person bringing their own talents. In such little time, our team of twenty was able to work together in amazing ways to get more done than anticipated. Upon arriving to the work site, the team found a small house being shared by several families. Behind the house was a small area that appeared to be a trash dump. They said this would be the location of the new house that our team would be building. To say scattered would be an understatement, but rather trash from many years had been piled here. Old clothes, shoes, drink bottles, baby dolls, mattresses all had begun decomposing. Many of us found this site disgusting and wondered, "Why anyone would want their backyard to look like this?" We understood a little better when we were told that it costs money to have your trash hauled away, and understandably, many people, when choosing between a clean yard or a meal, pick to eat. This leaves trash scattered in the streets and yards.

Digging footers for this house therefore involved not only digging through dirt, but digging through the trash as well. Regardless of the dirtiness of the conditions, the team accepted the task without any complaints. Two days later, after footers were dug for the site, the team formed a big circle and manually mixed numerous loads of concrete. Despite the difficulty, everyone was eager to work and with such a large group; we were able to get tremendous amounts of work done. Laying block went extremely quickly. I have no doubts that God was helping us as we all worked through the heat of each day. What would have normally seemed impossible to a group of unskilled volunteers suddenly was completed. Leaving the work site the very last day, the team had all walls built completely. Back at the church, several team members stayed behind to paint the dirty walls of the nutrition clinic and kitchen. The appearance of them when we left was much improved.

It was our first full day in Mexico, Sunday. My back was going stiff from sitting on the hard pews. The air was still except for the quiet breeze of the rotating fan, offering moments of relief from the heat. They said that the temperature that day was above one hundred, but the temperatures kept climbing in the church due to lack of descent ventilation. Despite the lack of comfort for everyone, the strangers around us, that would become our brothers and sisters just in a day or so, were filled with joy. I watched as the children marched in the church in a straight line at the given opportunity. They had been dismissed to go to Sunday school an hour earlier. They were going to the front of the church. But instead of sitting down, they line up at the front, and at the given cue from the pastors oldest daughters, they open they mouths, and with enormous amounts of soul, belt out a beautiful song of God's love.

I feel Goosebumps travel down my arms, not because the fan has stopped on me, but because I know that these precious children are singing with their hearts. The children all have special glows on their faces. A young boy named Guillermo looks up as he sings, as if he is in search of his God in the heavens. After they sing, the children smile proudly and sit down. Marta comes and squeezes between the people on our crowded pew. Behind her follow four more. What did sit three comfortably moments before, now held us with five children on our laps and between us.

The pastor announces to them that the next day, our team will be leading bible school. We can see the anticipation in the children as they look at us with grins. With a theme this year of "Odyssey's in the Sea", we worked hard that afternoon preparing skits, posters, decorations, lessons, and crafts for the week. The same children from church that day showed up, each bringing a handful of friends. Close to one hundred and fifty participants showed up the last day. Due to overwhelming amount of donations, the children left the last day anything but empty-handed. Each day in bible school, the children learned a new story, from Moses parting the Sea, to Jesus calling his disciples to be fishers of men. The children especially enjoyed the skits. The children were invited to participate in many of them, as the pastor of the church read out the story. After each story, the children colored a corresponding picture and completed activity sheets to remember the story by.

My eyes feel wet. Tears well up in the corners of my eyes. There is a strange feeling in my heart as I say goodbye, as if part of me is being stripped away. A knot forms in my stomach as I hug the children one last time. It is time to go now. I can't bear to look back. They say from space there are no borders. Simply green land spanning over the merging countries. As I cross the border and enter back into my homeland, I know that from way above I have never left. I have been home all along, as I was accepted into the hearts of so many in Mexico. I leave here with a full heart. I depart this place with a smiling soul, with countless memories, and God's love.

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