



APRIL-MAY 2008

Misión México, Dando Amor, Vida y Esperanza A.C.

Hola a todos,
Greetings to you all.

My promise of sending a smaller newsletter each month has flown out the window!

I think this has been the hardest one for me to, find the time to write, but finally, here it is!

We hope you are all well.

The family of 'Mision Mexico' have had a number of illnesses over the last few months which has taken it's toll on everybody.

At the moment and for the last two months, we have had many children with Chicken Pox and also, fevers that last two or three days. There have been children and volunteers with colds and flu and also, diarrhoea and vomiting. I, myself, have been quite ill with headaches and migraines over a long period of time, unable to keep up with the heavy demands of work here. Though, thankfully, after a visit to a clinic in Guatemala City, I am now free of these problems.

Alan is absolutely exhausted and in need of a good break. He has been working for over ten months on the new refuge and has been challenged to the limits. Working here is not like working in Australia or the U.S. and, dealing with all the factors that go with building in a third world country, as well as being a father to around 40 children, is and has been, a huge task.

The new refuge is coming along nicely. Along with the building team there have been many volunteers have worked hard to help finish the building. A chapel/creative learning center is still being constructed that will hopefully be completed in the next two weeks. The chapel is being built in the memory of John and Jacqui Mather's son Sean, who died while I was in Arizona in November '07, attending fundraising events organized by John to help build the new refuge. The chapel already feels like a special 'place of peace' even though it is not finished. God Bless you John, Jacqui and family.

A 'bodega' (shed) is being built to store all the surfboards and camping equipment with a section that will be used as a workshop for surfboard repairs. This 'surf shack' was made possible through a surf sponsorship donation from the **Norm Innis Foundation** in Australia. 'Thank You' Norm and Veronica.

We are hoping everything will be ready for us to move in, in approx. six to eight weeks.

It has been a long slow process. We started this project over four years ago but soon ran out of money. The last four years have kept us busy trying to raise the funds needed to build the refuge.

We are extremely thankful to all those who have donated to the building fund over the past few years. In 2007 there were events held in Melbourne, Sydney and Arizona, which made it possible to continue with the construction. All the profits, from a CD recorded in Australia, were forwarded on to the building fund and, there were a few large personal donations received as well.

Some local people and businesses here in Tapachula have helped with donating sand, gravel and cement and also some windows. And, for the rest of the building process, we have been receiving generous discounts.

We are so happy to announce that we have received grants from the **Australian Embassy, Canadian Embassy and Rotary International.** These grants have and will enable us to buy furniture, appliances, mattresses, bedding, and playground equipment etc..
THANK YOU Australia, Canada and Rotary for this much needed help.

To all who have given so generously to this project, either by donations, grants, items or volunteer work, we send our most heartfelt thanks. The refuge would not have come to completion without your support.

The 'Grand Opening and Blessing' will be on Saturday 28th June. We extend a cordial invitation to all, to attend this very special occasion.

The address of the new refuge is;
Albergue, Mision Mexico, Dando Amor, Vida y Esperanza AC
15a Norte, #9, Centro, Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico.

There are a number of hotels in Tapachula for accommodation. An invitation with this information will follow.

Obviously, while others have been working on the new home, there has been a continuous dedicated group of people who have been working with the children, teaching them or cooking for them. I must say, working with these children is not an easy task. As I have mentioned many times, they come loaded with emotional baggage and behaviour problems and dealing with this is draining. There are many times when a child doesn't show respect for one thing or another and a volunteer is needed to discipline. Usually, the child who needs to be disciplined continues to show no respect and it becomes a battle of the wills or, sometimes we might say strengths. One has to remain strong and this is hard at times. Some of our volunteers have been punched

or bitten. This doesn't happen often but it has happened and usually by children around the age of 3yrs to 7yrs.

Of course not all the children are disrespectful but there are a number of them who test you to the limits.

Also, you must understand, that we have some children whom nobody else wants, children who are not accepted in other refuges, such as 11 year old, Saulo.

Saulo was abandoned by his mother when he was around 1 1/2yrs suffering from severe malnutrition. He was then adopted while he was still quite young. Apparently, after a number of years, he became too difficult to handle and was given back to an orphanage once again. He lived in the orphanage for some time but was 'moved on' (kicked out) because of his bad behaviour. When 'Mision Mexico' received him he was a 'nightmare', to say the least, and was soon suspended from school for a year! Saulo was, and still is, hyperactive. He is disrespectful, steals and often has a 'foul mouth'. Now though, this child is receiving therapy from a psychiatrist and is showing an improvement. He still has a long way to go but at least we can see some progress which gives us hope.

As you know, we accept volunteers from all over the world and the majority of them have not experienced any bad mishaps during their travels but recently we have had three incidents that have been serious.

We feel we need to make everyone aware that living or visiting a third world country can be dangerous.

We have had one volunteer who almost experienced 'date rape' and has now had to deal with these horrible memories. The man that seemed to be the perfect gentleman turned out to be not so perfect.

People need to understand that this is a different culture and certain behaviour could be misunderstood.

Also, dress sense is important, not that this volunteer didn't dress appropriately, she did, but western people attract attention and if you dress inappropriately you will attract much more negative attention.

Another volunteer had left on a vacation to Guatemala and on her return, not far from the border, she was attacked.

She had missed her coach and bought a ticket on a cheaper bus line from Guatemala City. She was **not** told that the border crossing was closed after 9pm when she purchased the ticket and as she was nearing the border the driver said that it was dangerous and that he would help her to find a safe place to stay the night.

The driver then drove her to an isolated place where he pulled a gun on her and raped her. He kept her hostage for the whole night and gave her clothes back to her in the morning when he set her free. The rape was bad enough, but, imagine the whole night not knowing if you would be alive the next morning.

This volunteer was so shaken up that she did not report the attack to the police but just made her way back to her accommodation in Tapachula. She had very limited Spanish and would have been afraid of the police for all the rumors that one hears about.

Another incident was when a volunteer ended up 'locked up' in a Mexican gaol/jail overnight because she was involved in a car accident. Nobody died but a child was taken to hospital unconscious which meant that the 65 year old lady was taken into custody. The ordeal was frightening as she had no phone and couldn't speak the language. She was taken in the back of a VW beetle to about six different places, having to get in and out of the vehicle at each location where she was taken inside while they typed up paperwork. When we, that is, our son-in-law, a lawyer and I, met up with her (for the second time) after a few hours, she mentioned that she was very thirsty and hadn't been offered any form of liquid. It was late at night when I asked at the desk if they could give her a glass of water and I was told to go and buy it down the street!

Her final destination was the 'lock-up' where she was taken into a cell with a cement slab for a bed, no bedding and absolutely no privacy.

We managed to get a blanket/rug, another bottle of water and a sandwich for her but, you wouldn't believe it, we had to pay \$200 pesos (\$20 US) for them to give it to her! She was not given anything, not even toilet paper.

At this stage, we had an agent from the insurance company (her car's insurance) with us but they wouldn't allow him to see her.

She had to spend the night locked up, not knowing what was going to happen to her.

It was a frightening experience and something that should never have happened. It has made us aware that if one is travelling, especially in a third world country, then it is extremely important to have insurance.

The good news is, that she did have insurance and by 9pm the following night she was released. The little boy was okay and released from hospital and now everything is being handled by the lawyer for the insurance company.

As this letter is already getting too long I will give you a brief update on a few of the activities that the children are involved in:

Dentists- We have a few dentists helping the refuge now and many of the children are receiving treatment. There are three children with braces and a few more that still need them. Thank you Mary Ellen, Karla, Adriana and Carlos.

Swimming. Most of the children became 'slack' while I was away in January and stopped going to swimming training. I am happy to report that 25 children are now in training. There are 10 of these children in more serious training while the others are just learning to swim for one hour each night at 8pm. There are still eleven who need classes. Classes have been provided free to us. Thank you Club **Aquarius**.

Beach: A big Thank You to John Flanagan who, for so many years, allowed us to go to his beach house every Sunday to enjoy a day of swimming, sun, surf and sand. Each Sunday we had a routine of swimming in the pool, then to the beach, back to the pool, lunch (usually hotdogs), then a 'serious' game of football, then swimming again before heading home exhausted!! The older boys just surfed till they dropped.

This is where the children learnt the basics of swimming before attending Aquarius. Even though we had 40 children to watch it was a form of relaxation for Alan and I, it was a change from the normal routine that we really appreciated.

Unfortunately John is unable to lend us the house anymore and we are really going to miss it. John, you were amazing and we can't thank you enough, God bless you.

Surfing: Many of the children are doing well with their surfing. A few of the older girls are also taking an interest which is good to see. The conditions are not always good for learners unfortunately so they don't get to practice as often as we would like.

School: Most of the children are doing well though, we are having trouble with a few who are finding it difficult to concentrate and learn. We have a few new children who are not in school as yet due to arriving too late in the year. One of our older boys, Leonardo needs a professional motivational talk to help him focus on his future. He is a great kid and could be anything he wants to be. He is also an incredible swimmer with such talent, though, would give it up tomorrow if he could. Can get 9's (out of 10) for his school work but is happy with 7's. He is 16yrs and studying in an adult learning school which he is being sponsored for.

We need your prayer support for him to help him set some goals and become motivated. We will look for ways to encourage him and get him through this difficult time.

Many people here think a grade 6 level of schooling is all that is needed (primary school).

Without a good education, and a trade or Uni degree, life will be difficult for these kids. This is what we are here for; 'To open doors for them to help them become the best that they can be'.

Mary Ellen (the dentist) is also helping the refuge in many other areas for which we are extremely thankful. Mary Ellen has been writing letters looking for help or thanking people as well as trying to get more support for us.
Gracias Mary Ellen

Deborah Grossman: A Scottish volunteer from Australia, who was here for around five months is now on the board of directors for the new Mision Mexico Australia Inc. in Canberra Australia. Even though Deborah is living back in Sydney, Australia she is also still helping with the administration work of the refuge. Thanks Deborah.

Support: It is a wonderful thing if we can support each other so we ask you to please look at our web page and support the companies that are supporting us.

Mother's Day: Hope all you mothers out there had a wonderful day. I ask God to bless each and every one of you.

Being a mother to six of my own, a grandmother to seven and now with around 40 more children, has been an incredible challenge but also, a great adventure and along with all the trials, there are many rewards.

A beautiful memory of Motherhood and what love is all about, is, waking up to find 4 yr old Sammy next to me in bed and then him leaning over me, giving me a good morning kiss, with his large head, cross eyes and face covered in chicken pox sores and telling me he loves me!!

Finally, Alan and I are happy to announce that on the 2nd January, another grandchild was born, a little girl, Kiah, to Aaron and Lupita. Two weeks later, on the 16th Jan. another grand-daughter, Kayli was born to Brooke and Paco. Then, on the 23rd January, Aaliah was born to Rohan and Ana. All three grand-daughters, Oz/Mex beautiful little girls are doing well and each baby is the first born for the proud parents.

God bless you all,
With love, Pam, Alan and all at Mision Mexico