

Not According to Plan

From the beginning, the Wyoming brigade did not seem to follow the normal course.

I wanted to meet my young cousin Alex's friend who was on the brigade with University of Wyoming. Generally the brigade trips arrive on a Saturday night and stay in one of the hotels in La Esperanza. Laura and I see them there and give them welcome and an introduction to Shoulder to Shoulder. But as luck would have it there was a motorcycle meet in La Esperanza and all the hotels were booked. The brigade stayed in Siguatepeque on Saturday night, a city an hour earlier along the road. They did pass through La Esperanza on Sunday and did some sightseeing. We went out looking for them. La Esperanza is a pretty small town. Twenty-three people from Wyoming wandering around the streets do not tend to blend into the crowd. Though we searched for quite some time, we never found them. We were disappointed, both for not giving them good welcome as well as for not finding my cousin's friend.



Things didn't seem to be meshing for us or for the brigade. The road to Agua Salada is a challenging one even in the dry season. This year, the rainy season has extended itself on the Frontera and the bus would not be able to ford the rivers and mud that cross the roads. The twenty-three participants plus their translators herded themselves into the back of pick-ups to make the journey from the Concepción clinic. A bumpy road sitting on the sides of a pick-up bed, somewhere along the road the doctor's passport must have popped out of his back pocket and fell into the mud. They searched that afternoon, but couldn't find it. The doctor would have to go back to Tegucigalpa and apply for a new passport in order to be able to return to the States. He decided to stay with the brigade in Agua Salada for Monday and Tuesday and return early Wednesday morning. That same Wednesday morning, Laura and I would walk out to Agua Salada, too late to see the doctor, but perhaps I would meet my cousin's friend.



Say aaahh!

There were a lot of people who came to see the brigade. The brigade was now down one doctor (they only had three to start) and the electricity had shut off. Everyone was a bit rushed. I couldn't remember my cousin Alex's friend's name, but I did remember she was a good friend of Alex's girlfriend Ana. So I just started indiscriminately asking. I got some strange looks from the participants, forgetting that this was the first time we had met and they had no idea who I was. They also didn't know Alex's girlfriend Ana's friend, and I was making a complete fool of myself. The electricity came back on and the brigade more readily treated the patients. Laura and I sat down with the brigade leaders, Joanne and Linda. When we left some time later, I had still not found my cousin's friend.

It must have been something about this week, the stars aligned in some strange formation, because nothing seemed to go as planned. I couldn't find my cousin's friend, the doctor lost his passport, and the electricity went off. This was not the end. Some of the participants went to see the waterfall. As I said, our rainy season here in the Frontera has inexplicably extended itself. The hikers got caught in a torrential downpour. That same downpour once again caused the electricity to fail. On this occasion, the brigade team was meeting with the community and giving them a slide show. No power, no slide show, and no dance to end the night with the community.



In some ways nothing seemed to be going right. But, perhaps we confuse “going right” with “going according to plan.” Certainly things weren’t going as planned, but people were being served, new relationships were established, and old relationships were deepened and confirmed. Maybe things were going right after all, but we had to let go of our expectations to realize it. One of the women from the pregnancy club was not present at the session with the brigade. The brigade decided to make a home visit to see her. It became clear why she had missed the pregnancy club. Indeed, she was already in labor. The brigade visit was made just in time to witness the miracle of life entering the world. There among the doctor and some nursing students, a child made its way among them. Well I suppose that this did not happen according to plan, but still I guess it was something that happened right.

The doctor paid for and got a new passport in Tegucigalpa, and after having done so, a farmer in Agua Salada turned in the original passport found along the side of the road. Oh, well. I still had not found my cousin Alex’s friend. The brigade was in La Esperanza once again on Saturday, and once again, we went looking for them. At first, we found no one, but then a few buying souvenirs. One had bought a machete for her boyfriend and she was also going to a barber to have her eyebrows done. They knew my cousin Alex’s friend who was friends with Alex’s girlfriend Ana. Ruth Lewis was her name and I finally met her on the last day of the brigade. We had a nice chat and I told her to tell Alex to come and visit his older cousin.