

## Thanksgiving

This holiday means very little here in Honduras. As everything that originates in the United States, Hondurans are aware of it, but there are no particular traditions or celebrations that take place. Oddly, in the major cities, they make a big deal of Black Friday, and the day after Thanksgiving still is the official start of the commercial, Holiday / Xmas season. Though he doesn't descend any chimneys and children do not leave cookies and milk for him, even Santa Claus appears in these days. But Thanksgiving is exclusively a part of a cultural heritage in the US. Laura and I have been here in Honduras for the last four Thanksgivings. We have missed all of the particulars related to this unique holiday, and we have done our best to recreate its feel among friends and expats here. Our success in this has grown over the years. In our first year, a pumpkin pie at a barbecue restaurant was the best we could do. The following year, we planned a traditional meal, but the loss of electricity relegated us to Chinese food. The third year we came real close, even with turkey, but the bird slaughtered by a local farmer didn't have the same taste. Finally this year, even with a great many challenges, we managed to put all the components together and introduced a Thanksgiving feast to Camasca, Intibucá. It was truly a special celebration.



We started our fourth Thursday of November at our bilingual school with our staff from our nutrition program and about seventy-five mothers with their young children. MANI, Mejorando La Alimentación de Los Niños de Intibucá, had scheduled the post hemoglobin test for a sample group of children receiving the nutritional supplement, Chispuditos. So we worked on Thanksgiving through the morning. But, it certainly created an interesting, ironically quite appropriate, backdrop for the celebration of plentiful harvest. The hemoglobin test on the children would demonstrate whether the nutritional supplement was overcoming the threat of malnutrition in the children enrolled in the program. In fact, the tests confirmed the effectiveness of the product. The children are healthier. I didn't really need the test to see this. We saw the same kids with the same mothers six months earlier when the program had first begun. This day, the children were more engaged, more present, and they cried more when the doctor pricked their fingers to draw blood. Those desperate, vacant looking stares - the unresponsive, apathetic expressions that no child should ever know - were replaced by loud screams and jubilant smiles. Children nourished experiencing the richness of life with the fullness of sorrow and joy.

After our work from the morning, we struggled to prepared the meal, working under the challenging conditions to get the smells, the taste, and the presentation just right; a true Thanksgiving. We then received our guests. The four Honduran workers of our nutrition program, Kate, our American friend

and consultant for the nutrition program, Honduran Edman and his American wife, Jessica, and their two children, Tino and Penelope, and two young volunteers, Helena and Raul, from Spain, all arrived with Thanksgiving fare to add to the harvest. Our international celebration began. We were thankful for the food, the Americans savoring familiar, but wanting, tastes and the Hondurans and Spaniards experimenting new cuisine. We were thankful for one another and most especially for the rare privilege to serve.



Grandfather, grandmother, and twins in MANI Program.

And today I reflect on this Thanksgiving and the others I have spent here in Honduras. So much I have longed for this celebration to be like the ones I so thoroughly enjoyed in the United States. And yet even so, I think my being here in Honduras, and being part of this mission of Shoulder to Shoulder, has given me an understanding and appreciation of the meaning of Thanksgiving that I had not, and perhaps could not, gain in the United States. Should not our bountiful harvest, the richness of life found in the preparation and presentation of wholesome food, be enjoyed fully by all? Should there be children in our world lacking basic nutrition such that life remains elusive and distant? Should not we all come together to share ourselves with others; this great privilege of life? Finally, should we not all dedicate our time and energy to serve our common humanity? In this there is the giving of thanks.



Boy and girl enrolled in nutrition program

Shoulder to Shoulder is helping to take away the hunger of our world.

**Share the bounty of your harvest!**