



8/25/07

To my fellow parishioners,

How can I convey the significance of my recent trip to Guatemala, and more specifically, Chichicastenango. My experiences with everyone on the trip, the girls in Chichi, and everyone else I came in contact with were such a blessing. At the risk of sounding cliché, I must say that in exchange for my expenses, time, and effort, I received much more than I expected or even deserved in return.

For as long as I can remember I have loved to travel, but this was so much more than a trip. From wandering the cobblestone streets of Antigua to the Mayan ruins at Takalik to swimming in the awe-inspiring Lake Atitlan surrounded by volcanoes, every phase of the journey was unforgettable and pulled off without a hitch thanks to Allan, Kathy, and George. My time in Guatemala was more fulfilling and more consequential than anything I have done or accomplished in a long time. That may not mean much to some of you considering that, as I write this letter, I am only a day into my twenty-second year, but I think you get the picture.

From what I saw, the girls in Chichicastenango are some of the more privileged people in all of Guatemala, a country where, I was told; it is considered a luxury to have any surface other than dirt as the floor of one's home. I can only speak to the environment I knew them in. They are undoubtedly better cared for at the school than where they were before, and yet still they have so little. Every night they sleep in the same room with forty to fifty other girls. Their lives are entirely uncluttered and uncomplicated by the nuisance of modern technology and there is so much more we take for granted that they have never experienced. For example, having kitchens full of food at our disposal or not having to stand in the bed of a pickup truck with ten other people when we travel. However, they go about their daily lives, as everyone we came upon did, with smiles on their faces and love in their hearts. Each one of them was so gracious, so genuine, and so kind. It was my great privilege to have met them.

During our time in Chichi, it was a pleasure to do all that I could to help the girls and they appreciated it so greatly. It was such a simple joy to have the girls come and sit, one by one, and allow my brother Brian and me to test their vision while fumbling with Spanish instructions on how to operate the focometer. My soul stirred when I realized how truly thrilled these girls were to have us there. I can't remember the last time I felt so wanted.

When I crossed the street from the school to where the dental team was doing their work, I saw children having multiple teeth pulled while hardly shedding a tear. Someone pointed out that these children, while obviously in pain, were better behaved than most American kids would be during a routine checkup. With astonishing maturity, these children, some as young as five or six years old, climbed into the chairs and sat patiently



while they were being taken care of. They knew we were there to help them and it was obvious that they wanted to make it as easy as possible for us to do that.

Countless times during those eight wonderful days I found myself thinking, "If I had one wish right now, I would wish that the rest of my family could be here with Brian and me." I anxiously await the day when I can return and show my parents and two younger brothers this country which I have come to hold sacred.

I would like to thank everyone who came on the trip for making it one of the busiest, happiest, most memorable weeks of my life. I especially want to thank Allan and Kathy for all their hard work and what a huge part of their lives this mission is. They are truly remarkable people and they deserve all the praise that we can muster. I would also like to encourage each and every one of you to contribute in any way you can to our partnership with the Children of God in Chichicastenango - whether that means donating a few dollars to the cause or making the trip south, as I plan to for years to come, to be moved and inspired by these amazing young girls.

One night around the dinner table in Takalik, my brother spontaneously stood up, raised his glass, and quickly thanked everyone else for what a great trip it had been to that point and expressed his hopes for the remainder of the trip and our work with the girls in Chichi. Then another stood and spoke his mind, and another, until only Allan remained silent. Finally, our fearless leader stood and, bracing himself on the back of his chair with Kathy at his side, struggled through tears to tell us all what our purpose and our presence there meant to him, to the girls, and to his beautiful home country. There wasn't a dry eye in the house after that.

From the depths of my heart, I wish you all the kind of profound joyfulness I experienced that night and throughout my trip.

Your brother,
Hayden Sewell