

May 14, 2005

Lunches For Learning Partner  
Address  
City, State Zip



Dear Partners:

In early April we became concerned by the relative silence out of Honduras - no email communication, no pictures, plus we were expecting a request for additional funds and vitamins and we had heard nothing after the initial reports in February starting the new school year. We suspected Roxana was having difficulty with the technology and was afraid to voice this for fear it would jeopardize the program. Although we hadn't planned for a second visit to El Amatillo so soon, when the subject was brought up in committee, we all agreed a trip was needed (1) to verify the program's startup was on track, (2) to inspect supplies and the accounting ledger, (3) to examine the communications facilities and options for transmitting digital camera pictures, and (4) to provide some training in basic computer and email procedures depending on the facilities available.

Although my technical background was ideally suited for evaluating and structuring the communications requirements, my health wasn't very good; I was scheduled for major surgery on the 21<sup>st</sup> of April for my lower back. A recent flare-up resulted in an ambulance ride to the emergency room and a week's bed rest - so, you can understand my wife's reservations... she thought I was crazy to consider this in my current condition. Well, my passport was current and I had the technical qualifications, so I agreed to join Ron and just prayed that my back would hang in there for the four days we'd be out of the country. There were others praying for me as well and I did OK. To those of you who knew of my situation and now, following successful disc replacement surgery and a 5-day hospital stay, let me just say "Thank You."

Unlike Ron, I've only had one other visit to a third world country, so I wasn't calloused to the plight of the average Honduran. As an Assistant Scout Master, I love roughing it with our boy scouts on camping trips in the woods. No matter how short the trip, it never fails, we always welcome the final day because we get to go home to a hot shower and modern conveniences. This experience was similar. Most of these people experience daily living conditions that are worse than what we experience when camping with our boy scouts. Our motel was luxurious by their standards; we had running water, but only one pipe and no water heater. Running water isn't drinkable; you are susceptible to water-borne parasites, not to mention mosquito infections like malaria, human botfly, and some insect that infests thatched roofs with a bite that leads to sometimes fatal Lyme-like symptoms. The pool looked inviting until seeing all the water bugs swimming below the surface, but that didn't stop plenty of other people from swimming. I used bottled water to brush my teeth, applied DEET insect repellent twice a day, and hunted flying insects in the motel room each night before retiring.

In the province of Valle, Honduras where El Amatillo School is located, it is a rare home that has running water. In larger communities, I noticed commercial trucks making door-to-door deliveries of water. Women were often seen walking along the roadsides carrying clay jars, balanced on top of their heads. Most rural homes appeared to be from one to four-room square buildings

constructed of clay or concrete block with tile roofing. Every tiled roof looked ancient. The poorest homes used bamboo laced plaster walls with thatched roofs. Cows, oxen, horses, donkeys, pigs, goats and chickens were seen loose, foraging along the roadsides for what little grass and seed was growing in this arid region reminiscent of our southwest. The animals, even the dogs and one cat that I saw, were all malnourished, just skin and bones with their ribs and their shoulders pronounced. The people in comparison looked somewhat dirty, but really pretty good, much better than what I remember of Haiti, where so many kids had not a stitch of clothing. We aren't looking at starvation but the poverty is still very humbling. Kids wore lightweight printed cottons with popular logos like Nike, Adidas, etc... We witnessed a typical market vendor in a local bazaar with the back of his pickup truck piled high and customers just digging through the mixture of shorts and t-shirts, and haggling over the price. Our translator, Isel Rivas, bought two pairs of shorts for a total of one dollar, an inflated price with us present.



An inspection of the school grounds found no running water, 3 buildings, each a simple one or two room block structure for: (1) preschool – abandoned with no teacher and unused at this time, (2) kindergarten – used, but with a damaged roof, (3) grades 1-3 in one room and grades 4-6 in the other room (see pictures to the right). The classrooms were neat and clean with decent blackboards, chalk and children's artwork for decoration. A sign had been erected in the schoolyard acknowledging and thanking us for the lunch



program. Behind the kindergarten stood the only toilet, a two-stall outhouse in total disrepair with no privacy, no doors, only the three outer walls standing, and a partial roof overhead (See photo on left below ).



We decided something would need to be done to address this, but not directly through the Lunches For Learning program. Our lunch is prepared less than a mile away in Roxana's kitchen and is carried to the school. The lady hired to do this work is paid only \$60 per month by LFL for her effort. Roxana is paid only \$75 per month to cover her administrative expense. Each of these figures is inadequate compensation in my opinion, and I suggested we revisit this upon



returning.

Roxana showed us the food stored in a corner of her kitchen (see picture on right below) and an accurate, thorough hand-written ledger detailing all financial transactions, the meal preparation,

student attendance and daily consumption. My personal confidence in Roxana's integrity and accountability was reinforced by this diligent bookkeeping. Time did not permit me to copy all of her records, but I created a spreadsheet duplicating her format and recorded the beginning data and totals. Now, we just needed to devise a workable system so that this information can be transmitted to us by email. We learned prior to our departure that Roxana was offered a higher paying position with better conditions elsewhere in the school district, but decided to stay here because of the work we were doing to improve this situation. Roxana has applied for government supplied grain to supplement our supplies, which will extend our finances and may allow us to add a school. There are 40 schools with similar needs in the Valle Province School District.



We allowed two days for travel, Thursday, April 14 and Sunday, April 17 leaving Friday and Saturday for investigative work and training. Friday was a complete washout because we encountered a total power failure all day in Santa Rosa De Lima, Roxana's preferred Internet Café, just over the border in El Salvador and there was no guarantee that it would be back on line before our departure. So, Saturday, our final work day, we selected an alternate Internet site in Nacaome, the town where our motel was located, about 40 miles from El Amatillo. Although we lost power numerous times Saturday while working with the local equipment, we found that it was possible to connect the camera, access Roxana's email account and transmit a picture. We worked from 7:30 AM until 6:30 PM to successfully transmit a handful of photos while training Roxana to access the PC, connect the camera, login to her email account, create an email message, attach a picture, address it, and send it. I created one group contact list for Roxana to use when sending pictures and a second contact list for sending text messages. We practiced each objective a few times but didn't have enough time to allow her to run through everything from top to bottom on her own. The proprietor was knowledgeable and receptive to what we were doing and after listening to the procedures, he agreed to provide Roxana assistance when she returned – hopefully twice a month. Ron and I thought that it would be in our interest to develop this contact if Roxana continues to struggle with email and attachments. I was pleased with Roxana's progress, but wish we had another day or two to work on this: technology is even more alien for an adult in Honduras than it is here. The donated digital camera Roxana was using had developed a problem with what appeared to be moisture. The most recent pictures recorded in the camera were useless and I was unable to correct the focus problem. The only option available was to leave Ron's Nikon which uses the same type of memory chip and connects to the computer in the same way. We had no time left for new camera instruction and had to trust that Roxana would figure out the differences. We brought the original camera back with us and Ron looked forward to telling his wife, Elise that her camera was staying in Honduras.

If the warm reception we received upon our arrival Thursday evening at Roxana's house is any indicator, the lunch program has made a big impact. About 50 children and a half dozen



parents came out and then waited more than three hours to greet us on a school holiday. The children had put on their Sunday best and seemed genuinely happy to see us (see pictures enclosed). They had prepared a small program with hand colored artwork and sang a series of popular children's songs to us. I quickly realized that we all desire the same things for our families and these children were no different than my own at their age. The love and thanks expressed for our little contribution was extremely rewarding. I squatted down and let the children crowd around to look at pictures on my camera screen and was rewarded with laughs and giggles as they saw each other.

It was apparent that Roxana has a huge heart and will do just about anything we require, especially if it means more can be done for the children. We are extremely fortunate to have Roxana's local participation. We are also fortunate to have such caring people here at home. From the bottom of my heart, I offer my thanks to each and every one of you for your generosity. It is a good thing we are doing for these little ones, so less fortunate than we are here in the United States.

Sharing the simple love of Christ Jesus –

Yours truly,

Jeff Bohman

Jeff Bohman

P.S. At right are two more pictures taken on this trip. The first is a typical roadside house along a major highway (CA5) in the rural Valle Province of Honduras. Below it is a picture of the landscape as seen from behind Roxana's house. Cattle were seen grazing in this area. Except for the school grounds and Roxana's house where the kids greeted us, the remaining pictures were taken from inside our vehicle. I never did gain the comfort level to step out of the vehicle to target people or the local community for photos. Roxana will provide us with more pictures of the children, food preparation, her records, and her surrounding community as she gains familiarity and comfort with the camera and the computers for email at one of the two available Internet Cafés. We will ask Roxana to devote up to 6 hours twice each month in order to travel to a Café and to email us.

