



Volunteer Summer 2007 Weekly Update Highlights

From VS Honduras – July 13, 2007

Dear family and friends,

Our shoes are layered with cement and clothes covered in dirt, our water bottles are scratched, and our group feels closer than ever, like family... Here we are approaching the trip's mid-point.

Last week ended with a beautiful and delicious Shabbat, thanks to Lindy, Arash, Kendall and Sarah Goodwin who cooked a tasty Honduran/Italian dinner. They made pasta with homemade tomato sauce, guacamole and tortilla chips. We also continue to love Abby's fresh-baked kosher challah. Later that night we enjoyed each others company while playing cards and scrabble.

Saturday morning, Isaac kicked off our educational session with a discussion of last week's *parsha*. After questioning and debating the concept of sacrifice, which was the focus of our talk, we transitioned to the AJWS core curriculum. With the use of both secular and Jewish readings we critically analyzed the costs and benefits of our being here in Honduras. Our conclusion was that it was of course beneficial for our group to be volunteering here, but we acknowledged potential issues this raises. We questioned whether or not we were taking jobs away from Hondurans, and we talked about why so many people of the community want to move to America, what that means to their lives and local economy. On the work site, we feel that we are slower than the Hondurans, we are certainly not construction workers and they could work faster without us.

We also acknowledged the huge benefits that we bring by being here, for us and the community. The town and store is getting great publicity as we are helping to build the first two-story building in the area. For the group we are gaining hands on experience and as we are witnessing inequality we know we will be better advocates for things like fair trade when we return home.

Reports from both work sites bring news of progress and promise. At the store site we are beginning to see real evidence of the second floor. On Tuesday, with everyone's help, we took 210 cinder blocks up to the roof with a most efficient technique, recently coined "the human block chain." Starting from one pile of blocks on the ground, we handed them off to each other, one by one, across the road, up a ramp, and onto the roof. Throughout the week the blocks have been, and will continue to be, laid to form walls.

Work at the school site is just as exciting, despite "countless last days" finishing touches are still being put on the fence. David, a dedicated community member managing the work site (not Kleinstein) spent time mentoring the school group in the art of *tirar nesclar*, which is basically using a trowel to swing cement onto the frame of the fence. Using the only metaphor he thought we would understand, he explained "it is like baseball".

There have been a couple other fun activities going on at the school. Josh, one of our group leaders initiated a garden project in which 50 students planted corn and fruit vines in front of the new fence we have put up.

Another activity recently added to our weekly schedule is a physical education program for the students at the school. Once a week for two hours, we take three groups on to the soccer field and lead activities such as tug-of-war, relay races and yoga. We were pleasantly surprised at the students' passion for yoga. Their concentrated efforts to improve their skills is a clear indicator of how much they enjoyed this newly introduced exercise.

This past Saturday night, we participated in community movie night, which was done in an effort to raise money for the school. A classroom was turned into a movie theatre with a large generator, which powered the TV and lights. We really enjoyed being part of the excitement as well as having some cold soda for the first time in a long while.

As we begin to form close relationships with members of the community, it has come to our attention that almost everyone is related here in La Union San Antonio de Jure. With Bernardo and Odullio's (good friends and COMAL associates who live here) we have started to draw up a family tree.

Also we have been fortunate enough to make several visits to the homes of different community members. In the last week, we've spoke with the town's midwife Dona Lola, and the town's kindergarten teacher Sonia. Dona Lola shared many of her experiences and knowledge. She focused on the common use of certain herbs to aid in pregnancy and delivery.

Sonia told us stories about life in Honduras, including the role of women in the community and the history of the town's establishment and how it has changed over the years. Some of her most striking stories circled around family and friends struggles to reach the United States*. We look forward to continuing these interactions and discussions.

Last night we hosted a goodbye gathering to bid Kate a farewell. Some friends from the community joined us in a mini sing-a-long and talent show which featured Kate's unique and impressive yoga moves, Tali's juggling, and a dance performance by Jenny and Wendy (Odullio's 13 year old daughter). The night ended with cake and a new rendition of the song "My Girl" which was transformed into "Our Kate". We sent Kate off with a life-sized card created by Ariella and signed by the entire community.

After our successful adventure last weekend, where we explored caves and soaked in natural hot springs, we are all very excited for the much anticipated beach trip this weekend.

Love your happy Honduran workers!
Jennifer Netburn and Sarah Goodwin

* Honduras has a population of roughly 7 million. Nearly 500,000 Hondurans live in the United States.