

LOS HERMANOS



Villanueva Brigadistas Newsletter — Volume 6

Spring 2018

SAVING A LIFE IN THE COMMUNITY OF OBRAJE

As a 30-year veteran of the Brigadista program, Ramiro knew exactly what he needed to do. A pregnant woman in his community of Obraje had intense labor pains and was bleeding. However, the clinic in the town of Villanueva was 25 km away and no one in Obraje had a vehicle.

Following his training protocol, Ramiro called Dr. Alma Rosa Cadena in the town of Villanueva to inform her of the situation. As there was no ambulance available at that time, Ramiro knew he needed to mobilize the members of his community to respond. He crafted a makeshift stretcher of tree limbs and a hammock and assembled a team of 10 other men to carry the woman towards Villanueva until the ambulance could meet them. It was hot and the work was tiring, so they brought several horses so that the men could take turns carrying the stretcher and riding the horses to rest without having to stop.

IT IS BECAUSE OF COMPETENT, COMMITTED BRIGADISTAS SUCH AS RAMIRO, AND THE COMMUNITY NETWORK OF VOLUNTEERS THAT HAS BEEN DEVELOPED IN OUR SISTER COMMUNITY, THAT NOT A SINGLE WOMAN IN THE VILLANUEVA REGION HAS DIED IN CHILDBIRTH IN OVER 20 YEARS!



Ramiro (in light blue shirt) supervising the transition of the patient to the ambulance.

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COMMUNITY IN ACTION BY JANE HUGO

What does it mean to you to be a part of a community? To build community? To serve a community?

Going to Villanueva in February 2017 was a rich experience in community. For almost a year, a group of would-be travelers from All Saints and St. Lucy's met to prepare for a visit to our Sister Community in Villanueva, Nicaragua. Slowly, each of us learned a little about one another - our families, our work experiences, our interests, and what drew us to Villanueva. We learned facts about maternal health in Nicaragua and Villanueva, heard stories from previous travelers, practiced some Spanish, and we worked together on breakfasts, a presentation, and collecting medical supplies. Not until we said our goodbyes at the Syracuse Airport and began our journey, did it seem like we began to gel. At that moment, we began to rely on one another and share life together.

It had been a long time since I'd traveled with and lived with a group of people that I didn't know. But, as soon as we were past airport security and on our way, small conversations began that were the first of many opportunities to get to know one another better. Once in Nicaragua, group living gave us a crash course in community. I shared sleeping quarters in a Nicaraguan family's home with three other women on the trip, took turns using the outdoor shower in the evening, ate all my meals with the group and our Villanueva hosts, took walks together, was one of 10 in the back of a pick-up truck riding out into the country side to visit a clinic. We sang together, prayed together, cooked together, and laughed together.

I also got a glimpse of the depth of community that has sustained the Maternal and Infant Mortality project and Brigadistas Program in Villanueva for over twenty years. The Directiva works as a team. As Marie Antonia said one day, we make decisions together and when one speaks, she or he speaks for all. They share a commitment to improving the health of the 30,000 people that live in the 56, small, rural, impoverished communities that make up the town of Villanueva.

The Brigadistas are volunteer health promoters in their small communities. Over and over I heard them say that they do their work to help their community, even if that means walking miles to visit homes or to attend a training at the program center.

Through relationships, the community members identify their health needs and solutions. Of greatest importance is addressing the most pressing needs that affect the community, not just individuals. And so, the solutions need to benefit the community as a whole, not just a few individuals. In the process, each small community is challenged to contribute whatever time, talent, and resources it can so that they own the solutions too. I heard a story about one community that wanted to have more first aid supplies available. Its contribution was building a cabinet to hold the supplies that were going to be donated. That community was proud of that cabinet.

The Villanueva Maternal and Child Health Project had much to share with us about being and taking care of a community. We are all connected; es verdad que somos hermanos.

A PLACE TO LAY MY HEAD

Our February 2017 travelers' primary mission was to learn about the work being done in our Sister Community and listen for ways in which we could help. One of the 56 communities that our Brigadistas serve is called Rancho Pando. On a day trip to Rancho Pando, our travelers learned that although the community had a designated building for medical services and examinations, there was no bed for examinations. As a result, pregnant women who wished to be examined by the Brigadista or doctor had to go to a neighboring house in order to be seen. There was little privacy which made some women reluctant to get necessary checkups.

The Directiva asked the travelers to allocate funding for the purchase of a new bed and a privacy curtain, and now Rancho Pando has had an examination bed and curtain at its "casa base" (base house). This is a small example of how our mission trips allow us to discern the needs of our Sister Community and respond.



A traveling doctor examining a pregnant woman in Rancho Pando on a new bed donated by the All Saints/St. Lucy's community.

December Gift Baskets for Brigadistas

On the second Wednesday of each month, the Brigadistas travel from the 56 “sectors” to the program center in Villanueva for training. Some Brigadistas have to leave their communities by 4:00 a.m. in order to walk to the bus stop and catch a bus that will get them to Villanueva by 8:00.

In December, instead of having a workshop, they have a celebration to recognize the efforts of these volunteers who serve their communities. The party consists of a special meal, cultural presentations, songs and dancing. They even ask the director of the Ministry of Health to come and personally thank the Brigadistas for the integral service that they provide.

Part of the funding that All Saints and St. Lucy’s provide to our Sister Community goes to pay for gift baskets which the Directiva gives out to each Brigadista. They have three “levels” of basket, with the more substantial baskets being given to volunteers who have been most active in their communities and most dedicated to attending trainings. Baskets consist of practical items including sugar, coffee, tomato sauce, beans, toilet paper, matches, soap, and tooth paste. Brigadistas also get a bag of bread which they can share with their families. Each basket costs about \$20 and is much-anticipated and much-appreciated by the Brigadistas.



Gift baskets for our Brigadistas

NICARAGUA REFLECTIONS

BY MARIJANE REILLY

A mission trip was a bucket list item. I wanted to travel to help people. I always thought it would be in Africa, but when Kip Hargrave talked about a trip to Villanueva, Nicaragua at Mass one Sunday, I thought this might be for me. With packed bags, passport in hand and nervous anticipation, I joined my fellow travelers at Hancock airport a year ago February for my adventure, heading to Managua, Nicaragua and then on to Villanueva.

About the third day in Villanueva, I admitted to myself that I didn’t like Nicaragua much. It was near 100 degrees daily. Instead of lush green or blue waters with soft breezes that I’d imagined, there were endless miles of emaciated dogs, horses and cows. Dust and dirt made my skin gritty. Along a sometimes-paved -and- sometimes- not two lane highway, there were small structures; most hewn from discarded boards, torn cloth or canvas, rusted tin and tree limbs. Some were homes and others were outhouses. The same plastic chairs were everywhere. And, day after day, at The Center, we weren’t doing anything. Just sitting around. What were we supposed to do? I thought we should be accomplishing something; they needed so much. And we waited endlessly to do anything. I wasn’t sure I was happy I came.

It wasn’t long before I changed my mind. It was the people. They had so little and yet gave so much. I discovered that I was the one who needed help. Candida, my hostess and every bit a nurse, took care of me, not the other way around. Every morning when I came to the kitchen, she was dressed in her black skirt and crisp white blouse, full of energy for her day.

She greeted and talked to me for several minutes in Spanish. I didn’t understand one word, but I imagined she was asking if I had slept well, and was I comfortable. I felt her gratitude for my coming, as she rubbed my arm and squeezed my hand in hers. Her skin, so much darker than mine, was surprisingly smooth. We laughed together but neither one of us knew why. My coffee, just the way I liked it, was waiting for me every morning on the table, and my laundry was clean and folded in a pile that sat at the bottom of my bed every night.

She was so proud of her stone home, inherited from her grandparents, with huge shutters that opened to the street. Used to closed doors, privacy and some quiet, her house was open to the street and noisy. Roosters crowed; dogs barked; people sang, children laughed, adults argued long into the night. I felt exposed and found it hard to sleep amidst the noise.

This reflection to be continued in the next issue of Los Hermanos!



Isabel (center) with his daughter, Marlin, (also a Brigadista) and Isabel's three grandsons

Who are the Brigadistas? Spotlight on Isabel from the Community of La Consulta

Interviewed by Charles Clinton, February 2017. Transcribed and translated by Charles Clinton and John Clinton.

Charles Clinton: Isabel, what motivation does someone have to be a Brigadista and how long have you been involved in the Brigadista program?

Isabel: Well, I have 30 years of experience as a Brigadista, and my motivation is to help the people in need.

Charles: What does a Brigadista do to help the community?

Isabel: We give talks to inform the community on how to prevent illnesses. We do home visits for pregnant women and children younger than 12 years old.

Charles: Yes, and what is the name of your community?

Isabel: My community is called La Consulta, and it is 12 km [7.5 miles] away from [the program center in Villanueva].

Charles: What is a problem that you would like to see resolved in your community?

Isabel: The problem that we have is that vehicles can reach our community, but it is still far away.

Charles: On behalf of our community, we thank you for your many years of service, and we hope you continue to do so.

Isabel: We as a community, and I as a health worker, also give thanks for the support you provide and the sacrifices that your community and your church make for us.

Contribute!

If you wish to help support our Sister Community and their efforts, you can make a tax deductible contribution as follows:

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Be sure to put in the memo section: "Sister Community"

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Our travelers taking a ride to visit one of the communities served by the program.