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Dear Friends,

In 2003, Karen Jimenez and Kelly Tennison, at that time single, young women, visited me in Santiago Ixcán. We had met at Common Hope, a U.S. non-profit organization based in Antigua, Guatemala where they were working as long-term volunteers and where I would go to rest when out of the Ixcán. I told them stories about my life in the jungle and they asked, "Can we come and visit?" "Yes!" I invited. So, they did.

Their friendliness, command of Spanish, and ease in the culture immediately gained them a natural "in" with the people. During their visit something special happened. Karen recalls, "We noticed that the school had no books and felt that the children in the village could highly benefit from a library. So, we thought, let's ask family and friends back home to help us with monetary donations. I believe we raised about \$7000.00!"

I've heard it said, "Children are made readers on the laps of their parents." That works if the adults who are parents can read and books are available. In most rural areas in Guatemala the general populous doesn't have extra money to purchase books.

Moreover, In Santiago Ixcán most of my adult women friends never learned to read. Women weren't considered 'worthy' of education. Their place was in the home birthing and raising children, cooking, cleaning or in the fields picking cardamom or at the river washing clothes. "My eyes are covered," Rosa Ijom, an Ixil woman explained putting her hands over her eyes when asked to read words from the Bible. I know the women feel less than, hindered, impaired when they can't decipher the words on a page. Boys on the other hand, were sent to school and learned to read. That was then...



Once Karen and Kelly had the funds, the one-room library was built adjoining an end classroom from the junior high school building. The two women were present during the construction, painted the interior, and had tables, chairs and wood shelving made and filled those shelves with donated books. When they left; the library was placed in the hands of the junior high school teaching staff.

Someone painstakingly had categorized all the books according to the Dewy Decimal system and the library was open during school hours to students in the junior high school. Without someone officially responsible for the library, over time, the books were misplaced and disordered. Left unattended they were subject to the natural elements of the Ixcán jungle namely, termites, that gnawed tattered pages and destroyed some of wooden shelves. Help!

About two years ago, Professor Samuel, the director of the junior high school said to me, "Could you get the library running again?"

I consulted with Ixcán Ministries Board of Directors and they unanimously agreed that I pursue reviving the library. So, community leaders in education and I, formed a local volunteer committee to oversee the library project. The committee searched for possible candidates in the village and found Juana Velasco, one of our young, capable, unemployed teachers. Juana was excited! Ixcán Ministries hired her to be our first official librarian.



The problem was no one in the village knew what a library really was and how one functioned.

I consulted Common Hope's librarian and she led me to an organization in Antigua, Guatemala that does training for librarians. We sent Juana and then acting president of the library committee, Miguel Solis (her father), to Antigua to learn. In addition to training, the organization donated hundreds of thin paperback children's books for our Ixcán library!

Between trainings, Juana spent long hours cleaning, categorizing, and putting into order the books old and new. She cleaned and organized the library space itself. It wasn't easy. Finally, we reopened the door of the ordered and fresh library space to the children in grades pre-school through primary coordinating planned visits through their teachers. I knew we were making progress when I heard five year old Moises, my little neighbor boy tell me, "*Hoy, fuimos a la biblioteca!*" Today, we went to the library! He was excited.

Once the idea caught on children inundated the small over crowded space and Juana could no longer run the library program alone. To help her, we hired first one person who didn't work out, then another who moved away months later. Meanwhile, Juana had married and had become pregnant. Now what?

Juana felt that under the circumstances she should quit her job; but, God had other plans. Her husband, Rolando, was very supportive of her working out of the home and is also a teacher. He felt called to help. So, we hired Rolando and now he and Juana run the library! They live only about five minutes away and we worked out a schedule that would fit everybody's needs and still offer regular hours for the library's operation.

We are still learning and developing. Presently the children from grades pre – 6th come in turns to the library in the mornings to read and to receive reading reinforcement. In addition, Rolando works two afternoons a week for children, youth or adults who need a book for research, homework, or just for the joy of reading a good story. The country newspaper the *Prensa Libre* is purchased once a week and brought from Playa Grande to be available for those who want news. Some of the younger children during recess come to do coloring pages, read and just hang out with Juana!

Who would have known that the dream of two women from the U.S. would get children excited about books, about reading in a remote jungle village?

We hope that the children of Santiago Ixcán continue to expand their worlds through the magic of good books. I recently read a quote from Vera Nazarian that says, "Whenever you read a good book, somewhere in the world a door opens to allow in more light."

Let those doors open. Let the light shine.

Sincerely,

Kathy Snider

Mission Update:

Just a recap of our involvement in education: In 2000, we were blessed by a generous donor from the U.S. to build a Jr. High School; later we developed a scholarship program for local youth who can't afford to go to school, and we revitalized the library that Karen and Kelly built. By these means we hope to empower boys and girls to read, study and learn. (It's working! This year there are 39 girls and 61 boys studying in our Junior High School!)

Library news: We recently replaced all the original shelving in the library with new shelves made from a better, longer-lasting wood.

Note: If anyone wants to donate money to go directly for the library please indicate so on your check. We are in desperate need for a bigger space!

The house for Cándido and his family (from our December newsletter) was built in mid-January...they are happily relocated in their new home.

Alicia (from our October newsletter) is alive and well!

Kathy is presently in North Dakota doing reverse mission activities, writing and overseeing the mission through contact with on the ground leadership in Santiago Ixcán.



Cándido and his family



Alicia

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcán Ministries is a Christian lay mission serving as a ministry of presence with the Maya people in the Ixcán jungle of Guatemala. We act as a bridge between cultures for the exchange of gifts to transform lives and society.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible.

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LIBRARY

