



Dear Friends,

During a recent visit in the home of Petronila Baten, I watched her: peel a banana, rise from a chair, pick up a rag and wipe the table, grab a broom and sweep a portion of the cement patio floor where we sat. We do these simple acts without thinking twice. But, two weeks ago, Petronila wasn't able to do any of them. Only twenty-seven years old, Petronila suffers with crippling Rheumatoid Arthritis.

"It began three years ago," she told me, "when my right arm went stiff, and I couldn't bend it! A week later, the left arm stiffened!" A local nurse injected her with anti-inflammatories, but even so, the stiffness and pain continued and then traveled to both of her legs! "I moved like a *'puro roboto.'* (pure robot.) *"Yo lloraba, 'Qué es, por qué estoy así?'"* ("I cried, 'What is this, why am I like this?'"")

Her family frantically searched for answers. They went to the free local health post here, then the state hospital and private doctors in Playa Grande. She received injections, popped pills, took vitamins and most of all, prayed. After a year, she was surviving on anti-inflammatories and just barely functioning. Her husband's mother and sister lived next door. They helped Petronila with the basic care of her house and family.

Then she became pregnant. The doctors performed a C-section, and little Marcelo (her third child) was born. After his birth, she got worse, and pain held her prisoner in bed off and on. By now, the family was out of money.

One evening, Petronila's mother-in-law came to me. "Would I be able to help?"

I learned that they still hadn't gone to the parish clinic in Playa Grande. "Let's try there," I said.

Ixcán Ministries paid for transportation, lab work and medication. We watched. We hoped. But, after six months, Petronila's condition barely improved. Shortly thereafter, I learned that the family had sent her to Huehuetenango where traditional healers prayed, burned incense, bathed her in herbs, and told her she had been 'cursed'. One month later, she returned to Santiago Ixcán even worse, bed-ridden, not able to feed herself. She moaned and cried from the bedroom; her pleas for help echoed throughout the house.

At this point, Petronila's husband moved her and their children to live with his mother and sister to care for them full-time. His sister said to me, "Her husband cried and said, 'I don't know what more to do!'"

A month ago, following a Sunday service, the Catholic charismatic prayer group invited me to accompany them to pray for the sick. Our last visit was with Petronila. The prayer group had been praying a Novena – nine days – for her healing. This Sunday was the ninth day. We entered a semi-darkened bedroom where Petronila sat at the edge of a bed; her legs dangling. My stomach was tied in a knot to see her still in so much pain, but, I joined the cacophony of prayers crying out to God for help, for healing. Sweat dripped from our faces in the crowded room. A candle flickered from a table, a make-shift altar, propped against the wall. We begged God for mercy.

Then I remembered.

I went home and opened the suitcase where I had packed all of my deceased mother's (Joell's) medications. I found the zip-lock clear plastic bag with the words 'Arthritis' written in a black marker in my mother's handwriting. Inside were two small green plastic bottles of pills. I googled the names of the meds on internet and learned they were strong. A doctor had to determine if they could be used to help Petronila.

My personal doctor in Playa Grande, a Cuban woman who I trusted, held the small green bottles in her hands. She said, "This medication is good for RA. Look, there is a rheumatologist, at the hospital in Playa Grande. Take her there. He knows what he is doing. This is his specialty."

A rheumatologist in the hell-hole hospital in Playa Grande!?! I would never have known! Why hadn't Petronila been referred to him before? (I have no answer to this question - this is Guatemala.) I thanked her and left for Santiago Ixcán, urgent to share the news with Petronila and her family.

A few days later, I drove Javier Gonzalez, Petronila, her mother-in-law and two sisters-in-law, in our mission 1988 four-wheel drive Toyota truck to Playa Grande hospital two hours away. The doctor, a balding man in his 60's, like an angel from heaven, gingerly touched her disfigured knees and explained, "Look how swollen they are and hot to the touch. Without medical treatment, Petronila, within the next five years, would have been bound to a wheel-chair or in bed, in pain for the rest of her life!" Within an hour, Petronila was hooked up to medication via IV fluids, sweet relief on the way. We left with prescriptions, lab work orders in our hands and a mandate to return in a week.

The doctor prescribed my mother's medicine during our second visit and only after lab work had been done.

Petronila's progress has been amazing! After the first doctor visit and taking the prescribed medication, she was able to walk and even bathe herself. After the second visit, I witnessed her small but monumental acts. "We didn't know this doctor existed, *hermana*," her mother-in-law, Patricia, said to me later. "Neither did I," I said. "Neither, did I."

Petronila's not thinking that it is Easter Season, she is not Roman Catholic, but a strong Evangelical believer; but I am thinking of Easter and Petronila, literally, rising from a chair that a few weeks ago she couldn't get out of without help and without pain.

Sometimes God answers prayers miraculously, and sometimes the answers come in two green medicine bottles. If I hadn't remembered my mother's medication she had used to control her own RA, and if I hadn't brought them, I would never have learned of a doctor so near, yet so far, who was the key in unlocking the door to Petronila's healing.

It is still early in Petronila's recovery. But, I have hope that if she stays on this healing path, she will continue to improve and live a somewhat normal life.

And that is resurrection.

Thank you for your generous support of our ministry in the Ixcán jungle. We can't do what we do, without you. May God bless you and yours in this Easter Season of resurrection!

Jesus is Risen, He is Risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



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.

Contact us or send a donation to:
Ixcán Ministries
PO Box 51
Mandan, ND 58554

www.ixcanministries.org
ixcan_ministries@yahoo.com
Marlane Peterson, President
(701) 426-9276

Purchase Ixcán Creations products at:
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