



Dear Friends,

I have been back in the U.S. for a little over two months and I am thinking of the words I recently heard from my friend and relative who said, "Life is suffering." She tells me this after she heartbreakingly shares that her sister has been diagnosed with a very serious illness. I sit with her and listen knowing there is nothing I can do but this – be with her and listen – and pray.

In this short period of time here I have been exposed to the suffering that comes from loss - primarily death - of a friend, of a friend's husband, a friend's brother-in-law, a friend's close friend, a friend's father and closer to home the death of my godfather- Cletus (Jake) Jacobs.

I received the call while writing in a Mandan coffee shop. The caller ID said Wyoming and the woman's voice on the line sounded familiar yet unknown. It was my godfather's daughter (my age), and she said, "Kathy, this is Joanne, and I'm calling about my dad." My heart sank. *He has died, hasn't he?* And then after learning more details I asked, "When is the funeral?" Joanne gave me the date and without hesitation I said, "I'm coming."

As an adult, I hadn't seen my godfather for many years. The last time was about 12 years ago when at the last minute my mother (who had been recently diagnosed with cancer) and I decided to go and see Jake in Sundance, Wyoming.

Jake and his wife, Flo, welcomed us with open arms. We caught up on each other's lives, reminiscing over coffee and Flo's delicious home-cooked meals. Jake was a good photographer, and he shared with us photographs he had made into slides that he took while he and my parents were stationed at Fort Lawton army base in Seattle, Washington. I was born there. Jake and my dad became close friends and when it was time to baptize me, my dad asked him to be my godfather. "I chose Jake because he was a very good man and a good Catholic," my dad tells me now.

He chose well. Even though distance and time separated us, I remember as a child receiving a birthday card with money and balloons inside every year from him, until I got older. But even after the birthday greetings no longer came, I still felt a bond with him. Now I understand why.

I drove the 5 hours to Sundance, through long stretches of desolate South Dakota farm and ranch country just in time for his memorial service that evening and his funeral the next day. Even though I was a stranger amidst Jake's very big family, Joanne, Flo and relatives embraced me as one of their own. I learned a lot about my godfather at the sharing during the wake. I was struck by his hard work ethic, his love for family, especially his grandchildren, but mostly I was struck by his prayer life. In Jake's obituary his grandson beautifully wrote, "Each evening he would retreat into a sacred solitude – leaving behind the day's demands to settle into peaceful communion with God. Cletus would open his Bible, allowing the scripture's timeless wisdom to flow into his heart. Then, he would guide his fingers across the rosary beads, each prayer a step closer to the Divine. This nightly ritual was more than routine; it was the life of his faith – a quiet, unwavering devotion that nourished his spirit and anchored his soul in grace." *Well then, I think my godfather had something to do with my mission vocation.*

The three-day visit was meaningful for me personally and I was glad to be there, just to be present to the family in this tender time of loss and grief. Flo, repeatedly told me, holding my hand or after a hug, "Thank you for being here. Thank you for coming."

I did very little but just showed up. And I received more than I gave!

I am reminded of an important aspect of my mission work in Guatemala and apparently here in the U.S. – *the ministry of presence*.


A kind word, a prayer, a hand on the shoulder, a hug, a cup of coffee, a card, a listening ear... Often these small acts of solidarity and presence are rarely termed "ministry." But today, I see that in the face of such sorrow and suffering in the lives of many of my friends, in my powerlessness to do any big thing– the one small thing I can do is to be present in their pain. And I hope this makes the suffering just a tiny bit lessened, assuaged, doable.

And somehow, I trust in God 'just being with' the other is enough.

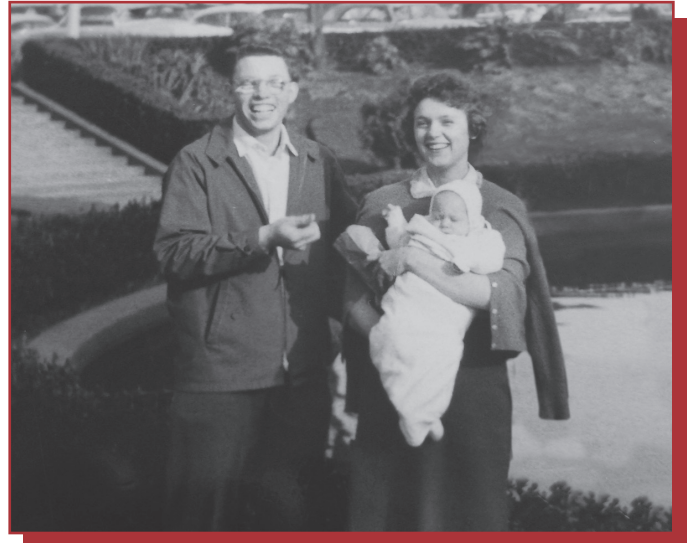
Thank you for your prayers, financial support, and for those of you who live near me in the Dakotas - your presence.

May God bless you and yours in this Autumn time of the changing seasons. Know you are in our prayers

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider



Jake, Joell and Kathy

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## Mission Update:

Our mission outreach and educational projects are functioning well under the supervision of Javier Gonzalez and Carmen Jimenez with the local project committees and access with me by telephone.

Kathy has been struggling with right knee pain - a deep strain of the MCL ligament and mild osteoarthritis. She is getting good medical care and is improving daily. No surgery is needed. She will be spending the month of September in Columbus, Ohio in the home of friends to dedicate time on the book she is writing.

### 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.

Our programs include- Scholarships, Community Library, Women's Micro-business, Medical, Housing, and Food Assistance, Spiritual and Pastoral Accompaniment, and Promotion of Peace and Justice.

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

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