



*In every thing give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.
-1 Thessalonians 5:18*

Dear Friends,

In October 1998, Hurricane Mitch plummeted Central America, and according to the Prensa Libre newspaper it pounded the Ixcán region of Guatemala on the 27th of that month. That was the day 20 years ago, I moved from Playa Grande to the village of Santiago Ixcán.

It was a memorable beginning.

As such, I chose October 27th, 2018 to mark the 20th anniversary of Ixcán Ministries' presence among the Maya people of Santiago Ixcán and area. And true to form, on that day, it rained... hard.

Despite the rain, we celebrated. Marlane Peterson, President of the Board of Directors, and hundreds of people of Santiago Ixcán and the neighboring Q'uechi village of San Antonio Tzeja, joined me in the Catholic church to remember, worship, and most of all, to give thanks.

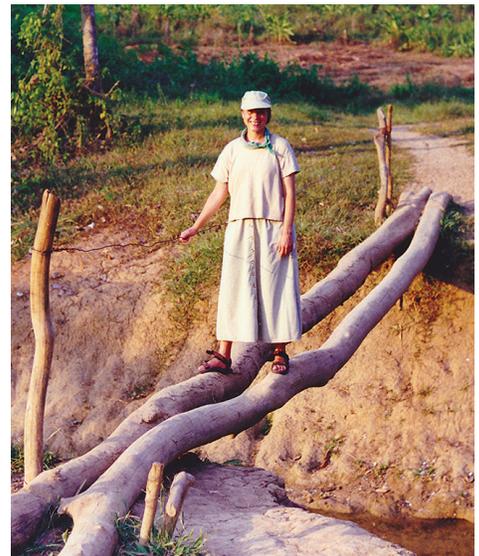
Simple guitars strummed and marimbas toned praise. At the time of the offering during the liturgy, persons representing all our ministries: catechist formation, women faith sharing groups, the Jr. High School, the scholarship program, the library, the women artisan weavers and jewelers, the poor, the sick, and the children, walked forward from the back of the church, one by one, carrying lit candles.

It was a rainy blessed evening of stories shared, gifts given, breaking of the Bread and the sharing of the Word.

I thought, in light of our anniversary, that it might be worthy to go back and recount my arrival to Santiago Ixcán. Here is part of that story I wrote in a newsletter 20 years ago ...

"One, Two, Three ... push!" The three men heaved their weight against the red pickup truck; wheels spun, mud flew, tires stuck in a foot of mud. We were only a mile or so away from our destination – the little store near the bridge spanning the Xalbal river. *Please God, help us out of this!* I prayed. My travel companions, bathed in mud, good-naturedly joked as they pushed the vehicle from behind. They smiled as I pushed at the side, dodging the shower spewing from the wheels. After about 30 minutes, the truck lunged forward – free, and we jumped back into the cab as the vehicle slid and swerved toward the Xalbal River.

"We can't go any further," our driver informed. "You'll have to walk." *Thank God the store is only 5 minutes away,* I thought. The three men with me just happened to also be going to Santiago



Early 1998 photo

Ixcán. Without my asking, each one grabbed a cardboard box filled with my possessions. “What would I do without you all?” I said, more than grateful, as we trudged toward the store. As we approached, I wondered whether the men from Santiago Ixcán who were assigned to meet me and carry my possessions on mules would be there waiting?



Early 1998 photo

Light drops of rain began to fall just as we arrived at the solitary store. My heart fell. No one was there for me. I didn't want to sit there; and I knew the path would only get muddier and harder to walk on as the rain continued. I looked at my good Samaritans and implored, “Can I go with you?” (Not knowing that my presence would slow them down). They looked at each other and nodded, “Yes!” So, I left the boxes at the store and began the long walk to Santiago Ixcán, this time not to visit – but to live there.

“Thanks, Chus,” I said gratefully, “for waiting for me.” I vaguely recognized his face as one of the workers on the construction of the mission house. The other two men had long disappeared from sight, accustomed to walking on these muddy paths and had stepped up their pace due to the rain. Chus, on the other hand, held back making sure that I was taken care of; giving me his hand when I tottered and steadying me when I slipped. He didn't have to. He hadn't been assigned to. He just did it. And the light rain picked up into a downpour pelting us with each step.

We walked an hour on the trail and met two men mounted on mules. They were my guides. “Hey, you guys, what happened? You weren't there at the store!” I shouted over the din of the rain. “Sorry! We got a late start due to the rains.” “Could you please pick up my boxes at the store near the bridge and I'll meet you at the mission house?” They said, “yes,” and rode in the opposite direction; the rain-soaked nylon sheets covering their shoulders flapped in the wind.

Chus and I forged up a muddy, steep incline. “I can't believe this! Never in my life have I experienced anything like this!” I shouted to Chus. After three hours on the trail I



We thank God for twenty years of ministry in walking with the people of the Ixcán jungle.

This is truly God's work that flows from a call and the gift of grace to respond, "Yes." It has been an amazing journey.

We thank you, our benefactors, for your generosity of prayer and financial donations given throughout the years to sustain and empower this ministry.

We thank God for you.

***Happy Thanksgiving
to you and yours!
Give thanks.***

was completely sopped; never mind the rain poncho I had on, sweat soaked my clothes and the pounding rain rendered it useless.

Mud, mud, and more mud. Chus gave me his hand. "Poco a poco, Hermana," (Little by little, sister) he would say over and over. The rains pelted us without mercy. My legs began to shake from exhaustion. Then, I stepped into a hole of brown wet goo that poured into my rubber boots just below the knee. Now when I stepped, I heard the swish, swish of feet that swam in watery cold mud. I couldn't help it, tears flowed down my cheeks mixing with the rain. I lifted one foot up and then down. And for some reason, I began to sing.

In the midst of that jungle, in the pouring rain, I sang Silent Night - "All is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child, holy infant so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace." And I forgot the rain and the mud. The words and the melody strengthened and comforted. Like the holy family, I was on a long walk to give birth; not to a child, but to a new life in mission - a new home in a village called Saint James of the Ixcán.

Throughout the five hour journey to Santiago Ixcán when I most needed a hand, Chus gave me his.

I arrived at the Little Flower mission house safely that day. All my possessions came two hours later, with boxes wet but everything inside intact and dry. That day and evening, Hurricane Mitch swept through Guatemala and the Ixcán. The mission house in Playa Grande where I had lived with the Franciscan Sisters was flooded and they had to be evacuated in the early hours of the night. Water rose to the roof of the store near the river where my things had been left and the large suspension bridge we had crossed spanning the Xalbal River was completely washed out.

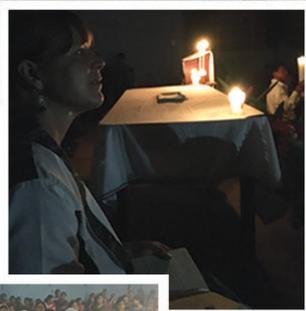
Perhaps it was more than just coincidence that it was Chus who accompanied me to Santiago Ixcán that day. Chus is a shortened form for the name Jesus - Yeshua - in Hebrew meaning "to deliver, to rescue."

Sincerely,



Kathy Snider

20th Anniversary Celebration



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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