



Dear Friends,

It was night and raining, even so Demaisia and her 12- year old daughter Petrona, trudged through the mud from their home on the other side of the village, about 40 minutes away, to see me.

I invited them to sit down, offered a hot drink, and then listened. Demaisia, her thin frame draped with a towel over her shoulders, spoke passionately, "Petrona wants to study."

"The deadline for taking applications for our *beca* (scholarship) program was a month ago. We distributed the first payment to the recipients a few days ago. Why didn't you come earlier?" I asked. I knew Petrona had been one of our scholarship students last year for first year *Basico* (7th grade).

"Petrona's grades dropped last year," Demaisia began, "she was sick."

I looked at the young girl sitting across from me, the only daughter of ten children, and I knew how hard she worked. Her soft waves of brown hair pulled back from her face revealed the yellowish waxy color of her complexion and the lack of color in her lips. "Petrona, doesn't look well now," I said.

"Let me see what happened last year." I pulled her file. "Yes, I see she was doing fine in the beginning of the year, but in the last quarter, her grades dropped significantly." "She was sick and couldn't study. It wasn't her fault," Demaisia reiterated. "And this year when school was brought up, her father said, '*Petrona no merece estudios*. Petrona doesn't deserve to study.'" "So, we gave up."

"Oh...." my heart beat faster and I repeated her father's words, "Petrona doesn't deserve to study." Meaning Petrona is a girl, meaning Petrona needs to stay home and work, meaning Petrona's studies are taking up money that could be used in many other needed ways.

"Petrona," I turned to her. "Do you want to continue studying?" And she raised her downcast gaze from the floor, looked up at me and said, "*Si, yo quiero*." "Yes, I want to."

I turned to her mother, "Demaisia, are you willing to allow Petrona to study?" (Meaning she will forfeit her only daughter's needed help for a big part of the day.) "I am. She wants to continue. I don't want to deny her the opportunity." "And her father, will he allow her?" I queried, knowing that he really is a good man. "He won't prevent her as long as I'm in agreement and her education is mostly paid for," she said.

"I'm concerned about Petrona's health. The first thing we need to do is get her to a doctor. Let's get her to the clinic with the sisters in Playa Grande for a check - up. Then, let's get her back in school. I'm going to give her a scholarship for this year. Her grades were good last year until she got sick."

Through the years, many people have come asking for financial assistance for a sick family member in order to get medical help. I have an agreement with the Sisters of Charity in Playa Grande who run Santa Teresita, a clinic equipped with a lab, doctor and pharmacy. I write a note authorizing lab work, consult and medicine up to a certain amount which the person presents at time of service. At a later date, I pay the itemized bill. In most cases, in return I ask for service of some sort to be done by a family member of the patient at a later date. In this case, Demaisia is going to continue helping her sister, a single – mother who lives a stones’ throw away with child care.

Later, I learned that Petrona was filled with parasites, malnourished, and alarmingly anemic. The doctors said that her hemoglobin was so low that if she had started to menstruate it might have killed her. This is the sobering report they gave me. We will continue to follow up medically with Petrona while she is studying.

Before Petrona left, I placed my hands lightly on her shoulders, looked her in the eyes and said, “Petrona, you deserve to study.” Her face lit up with a big smile. That young, sick girl walked through the door of my house into the darkness with the light of hope.

Thank you for being a part of our work with the materially poor in the Ixcán jungle. We are deeply grateful, as are Demaisia and Petrona.

Sincerely,


Kathy Snider



Mission Update: Kathy returned to the U. S. on Feb. 14th to be with her mother, Joell, who has recently been diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Please keep Joell and Kathy’s family in your prayers. Thank you

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcán Ministries provides a prayerful, pastoral presence through lay missionaries living in solidarity with the poor of the remote Ixcán jungle of Guatemala to learn from as well as to assist both spiritually and materially the people with whom life and ministry are shared. The organization strives to be a bridge between two cultures and nations allowing for the exchange of varying gifts between the rich and poor for the ultimate purpose of empowerment and transformation of lives and society.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible. You may contact us at:

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