Last Full Day

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First up was a school past Higuey where Wilson's twin boys live. As

we approached the town Wilson called and found out that the boys

weren't in school so we decided to go to their house. The boys were

very serious but appreciative of the bookbags and school supplies. As

usual, word got out that we had arrived and a mother came with her new

born who had ring worm on his chest. We explained that it was

contagious and decided we would get medicine at the pharmacy in Higuey

for her. Next stop was Wilson's daughter's school in Higuey but due

to the time of our arrival, a bit past 12, the kids were all streaming

out. In all the chaos it was the most we could do to just find

Wilson's Daughter Michelle and get her home.

We explained to Wilson that we wanted the school supplies to go to the

children with the most need, so instead of going back to Michelle's

school at 2, we decided to instead go to a school in a worse part of

the city. What we thought was a school for a few children we soon

found out was a school for 1400. The kids were everywhere and due to

a miscommunication with Wilson, so were the supplies we brought. But

Sue used her teacher voice and soon all the supplies were in order and

we entered the school. The administrators were very thankful and they

went to the different classrooms and collected the children with the

greatest need. They lined up outside the door and we handed them

everything we had one by one. Sadly the supplies we bought were not

enough, but we were able to put smiles on many faces.

All of our supplies depleted we headed back to the hotel, making a few

stops on the way to drop off some of the medicine we had bought

earlier at the pharmacy. We got back to the hotel with one hour to

spare before heading back to Joel and Elizabeth's house. Juanito

picked us up right on time (a rarity here) and we gave him the rest of

our footballs and volleyballs as well as food for two families.

It is hard to describe the comfort and familiarity that we felt at

Joel and Elizabeth's. It is like we have known them our whole lives.

They showed us pictures of their wedding and we showed them pictures

from Sue and Ray's wedding. After that we just talked for hours about

the culture and church and about how God was working through all of

us. It was through this discussion that all of us came to understand

that what we were doing was good but it wasn't enough to come here

once a year like some sort of Santa Clause. Joel and Elizabeth want

to do so much more to help the many children and families in need.

They already work tirelessly for the community but the just don't have

the resources to make a difference. Joel proposed the creation of a

foundation called "Luz de Esparanza", Light of Hope. It cemented in

our hearts what we already knew and we resolved to do everything we

could upon our arrival back to the states to support his mission.

Tomorrow we will go to the bank and figure out a better way of

transferring resources. Ernie's friends have already agreed to create

a website to support the transparency needed in such a mission. It

won't be easy but we knew in our hearts it was right.

We capped the night off with a trip back to the church for a powerful

sermon and moving music. The message was of transformation... not

tomorrow.. now. Of change... not temporary... forever.

A Busy Day

A busy day

First of all you will have to excuse our broken English at this point we have been trying to speak Spanish so much we have lost track of English. Our day was action packed. First was off to the Clinica to deliver the duffel bag of medicine from the day before. We happened to pass the doctor as she walked the mile to the clinic from the road. We happily opened our taxi to her as well as the woman and child walking with her. We all piled in the taxi and started the slow trip over rough terrain to the clinic. Upon our arrival we dumped our bag and were happy to see the surprise on the doctor's face. Jen went through all the medicine and explained what each was and we manged to take some pictures. When we were leaving we happened to pass a house where a family lived that Wilson knew. He stopped and the woman expressed her concern about the clinic and how low they were on medicine. We were so happy to tell her that we had delivered new medicine so she could bring her daughter who had flu like symptoms. Right away, she was able to take home antibiotics and medication similar to Tylenol Cold and Flu from our donations. After giving a very nice 76 year old man a ride to the bus stop we were off to the preschool

Sadly the preschool was closed until 2 so we were forced to go to a nearby beach and relax. It was so hard to put on our bathing suits and lay in the paradise but we managed. Some children came by and as usual the second we opened the taxi more children came out of the wood work. We passed out balls and t-shirts and one of the boys let us take pictures as we rode his donkey.

After drying off and finding some bread at a local store we headed back to the preschool. The children were so glad to see us. We made bracelets and read them stories. Once the kids figured out that they could see themselves on our cameras, we became very popular as they made faces and posed for us. After an hour of visiting we were forced to leave in order to get back to the hotel in time to change for church.

Juanito, a pastor at a church local, met us with our hermano (brother) Joel and we were off to a church very close to the hotel. We thought we were going to the church just to see it with Juanito and meet a few kids. What we found instead was at least 25 kids awaiting our arrival and many many more on their way. News had spread of our mission and all of the kids wanted to see us. We nervously set up the projector and movie for them to watch (a very special treat as many had never seen a movie before) The first show was veggitales which they didn't seem to understand. After more children arrived Joel led all the kids in song until Ernie figured out the projector. We started "Los Milagros de Jesus" (The Miracles of Jesus) and everyone was enthralled. To our dismay the battery for the projector failed half way through and we had forgotten to bring the power cable. But as Joel has taught us there was "No Problema." Juanito gave Ernie a ride back to the hotel and while he was gone Joel and Sue wrote down all the names of the children so that they could find the ones in the most need. The cord worked and we were able to watch the rest of the movie without incident. They were very happy and the pastors loved the message.

As we left Joel explained that he had found a man there who was in great need. He wanted us to meet him. Manuel is 22 and 1 month ago he had a terrible accident. He was climbing a coconut tree, as is common here, and fell on his back. The doctor told him that there was severe spinal damage and that the surgury would have to be performed in Santo Domingo for $1200 US dollars. Manuel has no family and no one to care for him. For the past month he has simply dealt with the pain and tried to get by using crutches. We took down all of his information and the name of his Doctor. Joel explained that his survival was a miracle and that normally people who had that sort of accident just died. He also explained that with the disaster in Haiti it was difficult to have "non emergency" surgery at this time because most of the operating rooms are taken by the earthquake victims.

We promised to help as much as we could and to find a way.

Another day of ups and downs but as we explained to Wilson... we are starting to understand and all we can do is try.

Day 4

Day 4

Today was an interesting and overwhelming day. It started out like the others with breakfast and catching the taxi at 9. Today our first stop was Higuey to go to la farmacia for the clinic in the mountains. The farmacias here have everything you could ever want and no prescriptions neccessary. After a lot of discussions between the woman working and Jen, we figured out the most cost effective and needed drugs. We had to play a lot of charades to explain what was needed since medicine does not have the same name as here. It was comical to the people around us as we explained diuretics and had to give a detailed explanation with hand motions. It amazed us how easy it was to get some drugs such as antibiotics or phenobarbitol(anti convulsant narcotic) and also how cheap they were.

After a few more stops we were off Wilson's house for lunch. We arrived to find his wife, daughter and son outside excited to see us. As soon as we opened the doors though the news spread through the small community that we were there and children seemed to be coming out of the woodwork. We were quickly overwhelmed by the sheer number of children requesting shoes or school supplies. Shoes were so hard because we only had so many sizes and there were more older children than we had thought. Eventually their mothers joined them and the scene became too hectic for us to control so we had to close the van and declare to the onlookers "No Mas." The children that were left joined us in making bracelets and Rachel led an activity to make stars out of paper. Wilson's wife served us a great lunch of rice and chicken which we ate gratefully. They even sent someone to the local store to buy coca-cola light for Sue. Wilson's daughter, only 8, was so welcoming and very much wanted to go on the plane with us back to Estados Unidos.

Next stop was supposed to be a quick trip to see Raimi who's surgery we had helped pay for 2 years before. He was healthy, but again we found that as soon as we opened the taxi doors we were surrounded by people looking for much needed provisions. We handed out tooth brushes and what was left of the shoes but eventually had to just shut the doors and head back to the pharmacy. One of the women we had met had a daughter, 11, who was special needs and very much required phenobarbitol and adult diapers - we assured her we would pick some up at the next pharmacy we went to.

They next pharmacy was not run as well as the first so it took us a long time to explain our needs and get the required medicine. They still did not have enough insulin so we were forced to go to one more pharmacy which turned out to be the worst of the stops yet. We asked the pharmacists what the dose was and suddenly she got into an argument with Wilson about how she wasn't a doctor so she couldn't say. Eventually we calmed the situation down and left with what we needed.

We decided it was too late to go back to the clinic today so we went to Wilson's grandmothers to deliver the insulin as well as visit the mother we had met with the now 6 day old baby. As we approached the woman's house the children began following yelling "gringo's! gringo's!" to announce our arrival. The mother and her grandmother were excited to see Jen and her supplies. We found the newborn in bed with his mother sleeping. His mother was very grateful for the supplies as Jen painstaking explained every detail of doses and what we had brought. To celebrate our arrival Wilson had his friend invite us over for coco.... we thought this was hot cocoa....we were wrong. Instead, Wilson's friend took a machete to a coconut and stuck a straw in it for each of us. We were grateful for the drink but were surprised by how filled they were. We stayed for a while and talked until it was time to head back to the hotel.

The last memorable event happened at dinner when Mario our waiter announced our arrival all of the waitstaff appeared to show us pictures of their nino's y nina's. Apparently word had gotten around that we had school supplies and vitamins. We gave out what we could and promised more for tomorrow.

It was a day filled with up's and downs, the joy of giving to the grateful children and the sadness in having to close the doors to the van because we had no more to give and yet there were still so many mothers and children with needs. We really came to appreciate our amigo Wilson and how willing he was to jump right in and help. God works through everyone but it was particularly apparent with him.

January 27 - Tuesday Update

Up early and waiting to go, island time is something you need to get use to, for us it's pretty much "hurry up and wait". We spent the day driving around the region with our driver and friend Wilson. He brought us to his grandmother's village where we visited with the children and helped them make bracelets, the older children were at school so this gave us a great opportunity to work with the younger kids who are usually pushed aside. We tried to explain the idea of "friendship bracelets" to them and we were all happy to be right there doing such a small thing with new friends. We gave out volleyballs and softballs for the kids who wanted them and all of the parents were genuinely happy we were there. Tomorrow we will return with some shoes, we noticed many little toes hanging over the edges of their well worn sandles. Many of their houses are made from corrugated metal and it touches your heart to see all the tiny pieces of clothing newly washed hanging from barbed wire along the front of the house. Wilson's Grandmother has diabetes and getting the insulin and keeping it cold is an ongoing problem.

Towards the end of our first stop a grandmother approached with a 5 day old baby boy. We don't think he even had a name yet. Jen's face was beaming as that Grandmother handed that baby over to her. We were able to give vitamins for the mother and will bring more supplies for the baby tomorrow.

Our spanish is getting better, Wilson has been a huge help. Our next stop was a school well off the main road on a mountain side where we gave out the rest of our supplies. We thought we had more with us but apparently the school is growing so we will go back tomorrow.

The last stop of this short day out was to a local clinic. The doctor was in and understood english so we asked her what was most needed. She showed us that almost her entire supply of medications was expired. Everything from Penicillin to Condoms. She made a list for us to buy tomorrow when we go to the city Higuey. On the way out the door I noticed a crumpled piece of paper in the bushes. I picked it up and was surprised to find that it was a prescription that someone had thrown away. I asked Wilson who explained that the nearest pharmacy for uncommon medications was in Higuey and the local people had no means of transportation so the prescription was useless to them.

Tomorrow we are going to go to Higuey and to the pharmacy and a large school in a very poor area. Lots of balls to blow up and supplies to sort. More tomorrow.

January 26 Update

Article Pic

We will follow up this email with pictures and video but we wanted to quickly let everyone know that today was a huge success. We started the morning off with a trip to Veron to pick up Joel (One of the pastor's at the local church where sue has gone for years now) then we were off to La Romana to meet with Moises who is the head administrator of the Good Samariton Hospital.

La Romana is southwest of Punta Cana but no roads go directly there so we went through Higuey about an hour and half trip. La Romana is a large city with much fo the same poverty we have seen at Higuey in the past. It seems that everywhere on the islands you go away from the resorts there are children in need.

Upon arrival we found that the hospital was far from finished. It is being built in phases and hopes to someday be a 4 story teaching hospital. Already there was a team from Maine who were helping at the hospital as well as some doctors who had just returned from Haiti. At first it was difficult to explain why we were there but eventually they understood and were happy to see our supplies. When we asked them what was the greatest need they said food and antibiotics. They fully understood our desire to purchase the goods instead of just handing them money so they sent us to the local mega-store called "Jumbo." (like walmart)

At Jumbo we went directly to the store manager and the people from the hospital told them exactly what they needed, rice, beans, oil, tomato paste, sardines, etc. We gave them a spending limit of $600 and they provided around 600 lbs of food. The food will be individually packaged for families of 5 to go 5 days. That means that 75 families will eat for 5 days based on what we were able to buy.

Next was the challenge of how to buy anti-biotics. We decided the most cost effective way was to buy them from the hospital (they get a deep discount) so after some credit card challenges and some calls to the bank we were able to provide them an additional $800 for medicine.

It felt so good to deliver the provisions that were needed directly into the hands of the doctors who are going. Our food and medicine will arrive in Haiti on Thursday and be immediatly distributed at the clinics they have set-up in the "tent cities" (they don't like to call them that since they arn't really tents but actually sheets and open air).

they have promised constant updates and pictures both through email and on their website laromana.org. we will describe more about the organization in a future email. Traveling to this island a person cannot help but be drawn in by the poverty and also the friendliness. We feel very blessed to be doing god's work and seeing first hand the good that can come from generous hearts.

Dominican Republic Update

We arrived Saturday on time. Customs was interesting and just the handling of all 12 duffels was a logistical nightmare. All the bags had been opened and checked. We managed to find help to bring the bags through customs again on the Dominican side, One of the bags had a large bags of beads that we were going to use in an activity with the children. Sue had thought that kids in a strange area would have nothing to do so we were going to make small kits that they could put together and we had also brought all kinds of balls for games. Well it was all fine until one of the porters lifted a duffle and one of the large bags of beads hit the tile floor of the airport and thousands of beads bounced all over the place. Everyone helped us pick them up and the whole incident became a kind of ice breaker. By the time we left the airport we had gathered many prayers for our trip and for the people of Haiti.

The hotel is very nice and Roberto helped us with our duffels. We decided to leave them in a small room and then sort them tomorrow morning. We got in touch with Elizabeth from the church in Barone and she will meet us there tonight. We are going to go check out our rooms and then go to church.

We loved church, during the dry season the Saturday night service is held outside, They have a band set up outside on the stage. The music is loud, the kids are running all over and the message, even though it's in Spanish, seems to go right to our hearts. They are all so kind.

Tired and ready for bed. We are all very thankful to be in such a beautiful place doing God's work.

Today we got up early and sorted through our bags. Customs had made a real mess of things so a lot of the liquid supplies opened. We sorted about 300lbs for Haiti releif and the same amount for the schools and church's that this mission usually supports. We finally made contact with the local missionary, she was in haiti all last week and is going back on monday night. She works with "Good Samariton Hospital of La Romana" (laromana.org). I called the head administrator there and he told us to meet him tomorrow at 11am to deliver our supplies. He also mentioned that they were in desperate need of generators so I think that some of the donated funds will go towards that. I guess they need power to administer anesthesia and there is no grid to connect to. The weather is gorgeous so we are going to enjoy the rest of the day today because the rest of the week will be booked solid. After we meet with the team going to Haiti we are going to start visiting schools to deliver supplies for the rest of the week.

Last night we went to Elizabeth & Joel's house for dinner. We talked about a lot of things that are going on in the Dominican Republic & Haiti. Joel was preaching at church which made a great opportunity for us to show veggitales to the children. We were able to set up the projector in a small classroom. It was great to be able to sit next to the kids and watch the movie. For some of them it was the first time they had seen a projected movie. We just wish the volume could have been higher. The end of their service was filled with inspiring music that culminated in a congo line that wove through the church and out into the courtyard (maybe a thought for the future?). Everyone survived their first day in the hot sun without a burn except for Sue who doesn't listen to herself. Tomorrow we are off to the Good Samaritan Hospital in La Romana to deliver our supplies and learn more about the greatest need.

Ready... Set... Go!

We plan to leave on January 23...