This was my second trip with the Corpus Christi Mobile Dental Clinic to Patzun Guatemala. They go at least once a year. I wrote up my last trip for the newsletter in 2000. I wasn’t going to do an article this time, but I just can’t resist sharing the experiences.

Clowns on this trip were Shobi Dobi, Danny “Lanky” Kollaja, Joyce “IdaNo” Olson and Lois “LC” Clauson. Our esteemed dentist Dr. Haysam Dawod was accompanied by his nephew Jack Ghabley (who became Jacks the clown) and Keely Davin our translator (who ended up wearing IdaNo’s clown nurse outfit)! If you know Shobi, you know she can’t resist making everyone into a clown!)

In the photo left amongst the children and the clowns (not in face) are our wonderful hostesses - the Sisters that run the whole show! Mother Reyna is the one in the front with the big smile.

“Payasos, Payasitos” was the cry whenever the children would see us. There were 76 children at the center - most of them orphans - some even remembered us from previous trips. What a joy they were. We just couldn’t stop hugging them.

This trip was not about just clowning. We went to mountain villages (aldeas) outside Patzun in a 4-wheel drive truck with generator and dental equipment. We set up wherever we could find a place - usually next to a church. Everyone had to help out wherever they were needed. Danny became the manager (below on left), seeing that everything got done, LC took care of sterilizing the equipment (below on right), Jacks handled the novocaine needles and instruments (pictured on next page).

I spent much of the time with my finger in mouths as a dental assistant. I was tenacious about being in clown. Things just always go better in clown! I tried to put the protective mask over my clown nose, but it wouldn’t stay. So I painted my nose on and wore my glasses for protection. I would point at Haysam and say “doctore” and at me and say “Pasyasa” The child below actually has his head in Shobi’s lap!
As I am not a trained dental assistant, Haysam had to have a lot of patience with me. Below Jack, Dr. Haysam Darwod and Shobi work into the night. Shobi had to finally shed her red hat. I sure gained a lot of respect for the dental assistant profession, and after a week of looking into people’s mouths, I’ll never forget to brush my teeth again!

As Joyce (Idano) is not “good” around blood, she had the task of entertaining the children waiting with face painting. (See Below) She was constantly covered with eager children. Lanky and LC didn’t even get into clown until the last day at a school show.

Shobi did get to take off her dental disguise every now and then to play around. Shobi put her Huggy Bear puppet into the sling like the mothers who carry they babies. (See above) It was interesting that the children abused Huggy Bear and Shobi had to put him away. I wish I had been more aware of this before I went to visit my sponsored Children’s International child in Tecpan

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The “crew” loaded up into the main means of transportation in the Guatemalan mountains - a 4- wheel drive truck. Around the Sister in the middle clockwise are Shobi, Lanky, Jack, Haysam and Seely.
Vilma on the left watched me put on my makeup and even paint other children, but she still didn’t want her face painted. But at least she saw my transition into a clown.

When the child I sponsored in India grew up and left her home, I picked a child from Guatemala. So when I signed up to go with the Corpus Christi Clinic in Patzun in April, I contacted Children’s International and found out that I could visit her as she lives near Tecpan.

What a wonderful experience. Here was this sweet little four year old girl whose picture had been sitting on my desk for months. She is pictured at the left with her mother at the Children’s International Field subproject office in Tecpan. There are 4,500 children sponsored through Children’s International in the Tecpan and the surrounding aldeas (villages).

The people from the field office thought I would be coming in clown. I had thought about that, but decided it might be a little scary to a four year old with little experience of a clown. I brought my face paints, so when I got to the local field office, I put on my make up and then painted some of the children’s faces too. (See photo below left)

When we were in the field offices in Tecpan, Vilma seemed a little scared, so I instinctively gave her the very soft stuffed dog I had brought for her. That’s what we do for children in the hospital who are scared. She clutched it for the rest of the day, as you can see the photos. But later on reflection, I wondered what she thought it was.

As I am a dog lover, I had been observing the dogs in the Guatemala mountains. The dogs were just around, not abused, but just out there apparently free. I never saw a dog on a leash. They all seemed healthy, but when I tried to approach one he/she growled at me. It wasn’t until later after my Huggy Bear puppet had been abused by several children, that I realized that the children don’t have pets and possibly they don’t understand cuddling a pet or a soft stuffed animal. It is these observations that teaches one to be careful when clowning in other cultures. A friend said “Oh give her a Winnie the Pooh bear, everyone know Winnie the Pooh.” Do they? What if you are in the mountains without a TV?

I did get to visit the family in their home. (See below) What a difference that $18.00 a month makes for a child and for their families! There was a big difference between the village houses in the Patzun area and in the Tecpan area where the children are sponsored. The sponsored children’s houses had running water and latrines. And Vilman showed me her tooth brush. She also gets consistent medical care and soon she goes to kindergarten. It’s the basics, but what important basics.
2012 Update:

This is Vilma today. She is 10 years old and is becoming a beautiful young woman. She likes school (so she writes me) and loves to dance and sing. She still wears her Mayan traditional dress. The patterns are set by her village.

It now costs only $25 a month to sponsor a child.

Wouldn’t it be a wonderful world if everyone would sponsor a child.

www.children.org