

Visiting my friend Sibia's parents' farm and church in Guatemala

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Juan, one of many children making a living by shining shoes. School is expensive and he hoped to make enough to attend school.

This past weekend I went to visit with Sibia at her parents' farm about 90 kilometers from here. She lives in the city in order to go to school here. Since she had told me that she had nine younger sisters and a brother, that her father was the pastor of the local church, and that the family had many animals and lots of land, I had expected a relatively large house. I put on a nice dress and shoes for my visit.

We went by bus – a bus crowded with people and animals. The ride was long, but finally, just the two of us got off in a remote area. We started walking down a rough stone road. It was really difficult to walk on with my shoes and I ended up taking them off. After about a mile, we came to a little clearing with a few shops and a church around a plaza. Then we continued walking on a dirt road for about a mile and a half further.

Her family does indeed have much land, with some planted and some unplanted areas visible from the road we were on. They also did have a cow and horse, a goat, and chickens, and a dog.

Sibia is the oldest child of the family and the only one going to

high school.

The home had two bedrooms and a kitchen which was not enclosed and had a dirt floor, which was swept and watered down daily. There were home-made candles hanging from the ceiling to dry and home-made cheese in bags, also hanging from the ceiling. Although the cooking fuel was some gas or propane, they didn't have any gas lighting.... only candles.

Outside, there was a cistern to hold clean drinking water. Sibia's brother walked a long way several times a day with buckets of water to keep it filled. The water was scooped up to use for cooking, laundry, and cleaning.

A bit of a walk behind the house, was an old-fashioned outhouse.

Normally, the parents, brother, and two youngest sisters slept in one room. The other eight girls slept in the second bedroom with two in each of the four beds.

When I was there, three sisters slept in one bed so I could have a bed to myself. It was hot and the window was open. In the morning, I found that a hen had laid an egg in the bed I was in... so glad I didn't break it!

The weekend I was there they had a Bible Day at the church. Sibia prepared the program. She asked me if I would like to speak to the congregation. I said yes. After some singing and prayers, I basically taught the Fall of Man.

Teaching the Fall there, I felt like spiritually I was teaching it to all of Guatemala. I felt really good afterward. Although I didn't feel like the people in this little town were typical of the rest of Guatemala, in the city I kept meeting people who had lots of half brothers and sisters from different fathers... but they were all living with the mother.

I met a medical student named Norman who helped me put up signs on the University of San Carlos to say that I would be willing to teach English. After that I met some engineering students who wanted to learn, but they only came a few times and stopped coming.

An engineering professor came and I worked with him a bit on his English and talked a bit about Principle. A few days later, on the Day of the Dead (Dia de los Muertos is celebrated there as it is in Mexico), he and his beautiful very young wife came to visit and brought us some food traditionally eaten on that day. The next day, he came back alone and asked me to go drinking and dancing with him. I couldn't believe that a professor would ask such a thing. I said, you have such a beautiful young wife. Why would you even think to ask me? He replied that everyone would laugh if he came with his own

wife. Later I asked others if this is common, and all confirmed that it was normal and men never took their own wives barhopping.

I tried witnessing door to door. I found that many people who answered their doors (wealthy homes have an inner court yard and they didn't answer doors) could not read. Actually, they all answered, yes I can read, when asked. But they couldn't read when given words on paper. When questioned about it, they said it is more important to answer what you want to hear than to tell the truth. (I found this was the case on other occasions as well, as it happened more than once. I was buying ice cream and asked the person I was with, "What is your favorite flavor?" The person would then insist that I say my favorite first. If I said chocolate, they would say "that is my favorite too." If I said vanilla, they would say "that is my favorite too." To me it was frustrating. Why do they do this? The answer was consistently that it was more important to give me the answer I wanted and to say what they liked. It took me a bit of time to remember not to reveal what my favorite was!)



One place I went to, a husband and wife answered and both said they could not read. Nevertheless, I was invited in and I talked to them about Divine Principle. The husband had to get up for a moment and when he was gone, the wife said, "I can read but my husband doesn't know." I suggested she should tell him since there may be situations where that would be helpful to him. She said, "no, never, it would crush him if he knew I could and he couldn't." Such a different way of thinking than in America.

Most people were generous to a fault. On more than one occasion (this happened both in Guatemala and in El Salvador where we went to renew our passports), the family clearly had very little food and they gave me food even though the parents and children didn't have anything. When I initially said they should eat

too, then they said, "oh, do you think it is poisonous?" I said, "no, I just don't want to eat the food when you don't have some too." I ate brains, chicken feet, the tendon from the leg of a cow, and what is called tripe in the US.... All new to me. There was NO WAY I would refuse it when that was what they were eating.

I really love the people of Guatemala. People there work hard and are generous. Many are quite poor. Relatively speaking, Sibia's family was wealthy; although they didn't have amenities that we would take for granted. The high sales taxes on things like refrigerators are designed to only tax the rich (sometimes causing appliances to be three times the original price of the item), the only ones who would have such an appliance. In reality, such taxes prevent even the middle class from attaining such items. Yes, there are so many broken families, but people are very friendly and kind. It was really nice that Sibia invited me to her home, and also that she let me speak at the church. I pray for them and hope they are all healthy and doing well.