



Bill Kaspar
Wilmette, Illinois

Back in the late 60's and early 70's I worked in the offices of the Walther League. At that time, it was the youth group of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Pat Krause also worked for Walther League at that time. During that era the Walther League sponsored Hikes for the Hungry to help raise money to support various charities and organizations. The Behrhorst Clinic was one of the organizations we supported. As a result of contributions we made, Dr. Behrhorst invited a group of Walther League representatives to come and see where our money was going. Eleven of us made the trip to Chimaltenango in the summer of 1971, and spent six weeks living among the Highland natives and working at and around the Clinic. Mostly our work was making repairs on the buildings and painting the façade of the Clinic.

The first thing that comes to mind is the friendships that have developed as a result of the experience. I felt a particular closeness to the entire group as we traveled together, and although we have lost touch with a few, nevertheless I still think of the trip as a group event.

I remember the poverty and simple expectations. The welcoming people who took us in and shared their home. The smiling children. The livestock on the streets on market day. I remember the Peace Corps workers who helped at the Clinic: Cedric Hermann, Page Burkholder, Mike Williams, Jenny Rothwell and Joe Narke, also Roland Bunch with World Neighbors.

A particular life changing moment came perhaps for me when a young child died at the hospital. That, in and of itself, was not unusual or life changing because death is something that is a real possibility in that rural setting. However, it gave me a very personal opportunity to see how this family dealt with the loss of a young child. I don't remember all of the details, but this family was very poor and had made a long trip into Chimaltenango on foot. After the death of the child, as I recall, Doc offered to get them back home. I was asked to drive the family along with Page, out to their home in the Clinic's Jeep which doubled as an ambulance. I remember an arduous trip, over back roads and what at times seemed to be no roads. All the time the parents were cradling this child and tending to the needs of several other young children. It was something I will always remember: the dignity and respect for both life and death.

The respect and trust that Doc had for the Mayan people, and, in turn, the respect and trust that they had for the gringo doctor was a lesson that was obvious when you saw all the people waiting their turn to be treated with respect.

I have learned that these are very proud people who are anxious to make a better life for themselves. I have been happy to be a small part of the program Mayaworks which grew out of Behrhorst, and certainly support the efforts to sell their artisan products in the U.S. market.

I am also very proud that my daughter, Tyler Kaspar, chose to become involved with Mayaworks and taught English in Comalapa several years ago as a part of Mayaworks' effort to educate the Mayan children. I know it had a very positive effect on Tyler's life experience.

Although I don't always attribute individual lessons or experiences to how I deal with my life, work or community, I know that who I am has been influenced by my Guatemalan experience. I am thankful every day to have had the opportunity to have had my Guatemalan experiences and am proud to show off many Guatemalan tapestries and artwork throughout our house. I must have told the Behrhorst story a thousand times.