

Honduran Notes:



Early evening, late afternoon, the mud streets of La Esperanza are full of uniformed school kids, and office workers on their way home. Also an occasional passed-out drunk, or wandering street dog, or man pushing a wheelbarrow stacked high with crates. Or a horse drawn cart, or a woman wearing a pink Lenca Indian dress carrying a bowl of tortillas on her head.

The sidewalks are high off the road, and we all scramble up the big step to avoid a passing bus or truck, which leaves us choking on exhaust for moment or two.

The hospital was packed in the morning. Dark, dirty hallways full of people, sick people, injured people, babies, kids. It is tempting to walk through the crowd without looking at the people, but I try to look at everybody, and to greet them. Just to see them. To take it all in. A malnourished baby with her hair falling out and skin flaking away. A little retarded boy, skin caked with dirt, sitting on his mom's lap. And the many infirm and old and weak.

But I spent the afternoon driving dirt roads high in the cool surrounding mountains. We visited farms and farmers and volunteer health workers. The volunteers showed me their empty medicine boxes, and then told me all about the natural medicines they use. Plants used to heal cuts, to settle stomachs and nerves, to take away headaches.

The farmers showed me their neat and trim farmsteads. These places look like they could be in Indiana, 1850. In clearings carved out of the forest appear tiny, one- or two-room shacks. Lots of barefoot children and a dog or two. A pig in a pen. A few chickens in the yard. Corncribs made of sticks, and chicken houses made of sticks, but the people are doing interesting things with their land. Building natural soil barriers. Growing vegetables in mounds to avoid compaction from the rain. Seeding chinapopo beans between corn plants to fix nitrogen and save soil. Making natural fertilizer with manure and plant scraps.

Save the Children technical help has animated a lot of latent energy and creativity. Farmers are doing things differently and enjoying how the changes have improved their lives and their sense of themselves.

"We were like a sick person who didn't know he could go to the doctor", a sixty-year-old farmer in Las Aradas told me after showing me the recently-built ecological coffee processing plant, and a one-room school. The sun was out, the sky clear, and layers of blue-green mountains spread out as far as we could see.

"For my whole life," he said "the road stopped about ten kilometers from here. We washed and de-husked our coffee in the creek. Then we carried polluted water back up the hill to our house. We didn't go to school. We stored our corn on the ground. Now we have corncribs. Save the Children helped us build a well and now we have good water. My grandchildren come to this school. My daughter teaches here. And we organized and went to the municipality and got the road built all the way up."

--David Cates

If Missoula Medical Aid can raise 20 thousand dollars between now and Christmas, an anonymous donor has offered to match that amount. If we fall short of \$20,000, the donor will give just 50 cents for every dollar we raise.