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## May 2018 Newsletter

Dear Friends and Family,

Our latest visit to Merida was a first for my wife, Lois, and me in that we were the only two going on the trip from the US. For various reasons, none of the friends and family we asked could make the trip with us. Of course, Luis Franco would meet us at the airport, provide transportation, and be with us in the villages to help give out glasses and translate for us when our very limited Spanish called for it. There was comfort in that fact, for sure, but I was still somewhat anxious about how things would go with just the three of us there to give out eyeglasses. Dorothy, Rudy and Luis had done it many times before so I knew it was possible. I just hoped that with our limited experience we could pull it off, too.

We arrived in Merida at 2:30 on the afternoon of Thursday, April 26 with 1040 pairs of glasses in two large suitcases. We also carried a letter from the Festival of Sharing, where we get most of our glasses, and a letter from Bishop McKnight of the Diocese of Jefferson City. The letters were in Spanish and explained that the glasses were to be given away for free in the villages surrounding Merida and would not be sold for profit. We presented these to the customs officer at the airport and after some consultation we were allowed to bring the glasses in without having to pay any import fees. We were the last ones from our flight to make our way to the terminal and we were greeted with a friendly smile from Luis who was patiently waiting for us at the end of the long hallway. We were off to a good start.



*Genny, Luis and Sandro-our Merida family*

Many of you who are long-time supporters of the Foundation know Genny. Dorothy first gave out glasses in Genny's father's house in Cuzamá many years ago and Dorothy has been Genny's adopted *abuela* (grandmother), friend and benefactor ever since then. Genny is a clothing designer and seamstress for a shop in Merida and last year she moved to Merida from her home village of Cuzamá. The move saved her two hours of riding the bus back and forth to work every day.

I had e-mailed Genny and invited her to join us for breakfast at the hotel Friday morning. She showed up along with her younger brother, Sandro. Sandro lives with Genny and is studying to be a veterinarian at a local university. As we ate breakfast and discussed our plans for the day Sandro mentioned that he didn't have classes that particular Friday so I asked him if he would like to come with us to give out glasses and he said yes. The unexpected answer to my prayers for help came from our Merida family.



We had decided to go to the large village of Tecoh about 25 miles

southeast of Merida. Luis said that Dorothy and Rudy had given out glasses there about ten years ago. We drove to the main plaza in the central part of town, stopped at the municipal building and got permission to give out glasses. Voting for national and local officials in Mexico will take place in July and just across the street from us a large, noisy political rally was being held. Music was blaring, drums were being beaten and campaign promises were being made in loud voices the whole time we were there. It was a good thing we were testing vision and not hearing. We spent three long days in Tecoh.



Because our supply of glasses was reduced after our visits to Tecoh, we picked the tiny village of Aké about 25 miles east of Merida for our final day. Hacienda San Lorenzo de Aké is a still-functioning estate where fibers from yucca-like sisal plants are processed for making rope. The village is where the hacienda workers have lived for generations. Maybe 100 houses make up the town. The municipal building is a small, two-room concrete block structure sitting next to a huge tree. We set up outside under the tree.

In contrast to Tecoh it was so peaceful in Aké that we could hear the birds singing and the wind whispering in the branches above us. The people were very nice, too. They brought us bottled water and fruit juice. Plus, their public restrooms were the cleanest I have ever seen in any village. Several folks sat in the shade of the tree to visit with one another and watch us fit their neighbors with glasses. I hope to visit Aké again. In fact, Luis is going to find out about the possibility of adding their school to our nutrition program.



Sandro was with us three of the four days we spent in the villages and he was great help. His English is much better than our Spanish so he was able to translate for us when we needed it, and this left Luis free to fit people with glasses without our interrupting him all the time. Sandro was also very good at locating specific prescription glasses that we were searching for. He has a great attitude and was a pleasure to be around. With his assistance we were able to help 745 people in Tecoh and Aké have a clearer outlook on life. Muchas gracias, Sandro.



On our final morning in Merida Genny brought two beautiful blouses she had stitched for Dorothy as well as two handsome shirts she had made for Rudy for us to bring back to Jefferson City. She also included a letter to them she had written in English. When I delivered the clothing, Rudy pulled out the letter and read it out loud. I had to fight back tears as I listened to Genny's words of love, gratitude and admiration for "her grandparents".

Who says you can't pick your family? I think Dorothy has done an outstanding job picking hers in the Mexican state of Yucatan.



*One of the blouses Genny made for Dorothy. The wrinkles are from 12 hours in a suitcase (sorry Genny).*

Thank you, Merida Foundation family, for your continued support. We need it now more than ever as we hope to open at least one more nutrition site when the new school year begins in September!

Greg & Lois Mihalevich  
For the Merida Foundation

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