

Arti Iyer, '09
San Pedro Sula, Honduras

This past summer, Taylor and I were fortunate enough to spend six weeks in San Pedro Sula, the industrial capital of Honduras. San Pedro Sula is home to about 900,000 people and is the second largest city in Honduras after the capital, Tegucigalpa. We worked at a government funded orphanage, Nueva Esperanza, run by an American organization, Orphan Helpers. Although the children were always clothed, fed three times a day, and had shelter, the orphanage could only provide the bare minimum for these children with the small amount of money that they were provided by the government. Dr. Larow generously donated five- hundred dollars to the orphanage, which after several weeks of working at the orphanage Taylor and I used to buy as many necessary items for the children as we could. These items included: diapers for the babies, powdered milk and school supplies.



The city of San Pedro Sula

We worked six of the seven days each week and arrived at Nueva Esperanza every morning at 8:30. The orphanage houses 100 children total, 30 babies and toddlers and 70 children ages five to 12. Most of the children were picked up off of the streets by policemen or removed from abusive households, while others were sent there by their parents who did not have enough money to support them and felt that the orphanage could better provide for them. The children are never allowed to leave the orphanage

unless they were taken on one of very few field trips, and were educated by teachers in one of the three small classrooms at the orphanage.



Playtime with the kids: Kevin and Evelyn (brother and sister), Me, and Nelsy

The orphanage consisted of an entrance room with two classrooms attached, and a two-sided courtyard. The entrance room was very small, with a limited number of chairs to seat all of the children. Many of the children would sit or lie on the floor and watch TV on the broken television with limited channels. The floors were extremely dirty and I remember when I first walked in seeing several groups of children playing the game, Jacks, on the floor with crumpled pieces of paper because the orphanage did not have enough money to provide the actual game for them. All of the toys and stuffed animals that the orphanage had were donated by travelers who either dropped them off in passing or visited the orphanage during a short period of time. The two-sided courtyard was large enough for the children to play soccer, tag, or hide under the large mango tree to protect themselves from the scorching sun.



Playing with the piñata brought by visiting volunteers in the courtyard of Nueva Esperanza

Between the two sides of the courtyard was a staircase that led to the nursery where the toddlers and babies stayed. The babies and toddlers were always a handful, stealing each others' food, grabbing each others' shoes, and taking toys from each other. Due to the fact that the nursery only had one bathroom and a broken rubber bathtub that was filled with same water that all 20 of the toddlers were dunked in, the nursery was always chaotic. Infections spread quickly because silverware was limited and the same medicines were often used for a variety of different infections. There were about 15 beds for the toddlers to sleep on and 10 cribs for the babies, which often needed to be doubled-up if more than 10 babies were admitted into the orphanage.



One of my favorite babies, Anderson, who loved being carried!



The toddlers loved when we took pictures of them!



Baby Anderson, Me, and Hanni (who is trying to braid my hair)

In my second week of being in Honduras, I decided that I wanted to do something more than clothing and feeding the babies and playing with the children. I was given the privilege to teach two classes everyday, one English class and one Mathematics class which was taught in Spanish. Most children were eager to learn English due to the fact that they wanted to be able to converse with visiting volunteers who speak little Spanish. The children in both classes ranged from ages five to 12, although in the Mathematics class some of the younger children understood a higher level of math than some of the older children. The first week of Mathematics class consisted of teaching the basics of how to write numbers properly and recognize the relationship between how the number sounds verbally and how it is written. Once the children understood their numbers, I then taught them addition of single-digit numbers and some double-digit numbers, and by the fifth week began teaching them simple subtraction. In order to keep the class interesting and fun, they often learned by using props in class, such as stuffed animals, fake flowers, and crayons to better understand addition and subtraction. Every week and a half, the children would have an exam consisting of about 30 problems on the material that they had previously learned.



The students diligently working on their math homework

In my English class, the children learned how to count numbers up to one-hundred in English, and how to pronounce and write the English words for all of the basic colors and animals. In order to keep the class fun and interesting, the work would often consist of using coloring-sheets of animals that they had to name in English, with parts of the animal color-coded in English. In both classes, the incentive to go to class and do well on these exams were prizes, or "premios," such as a small pizza, a large ice cream sundae, brand-new clothing, or candy and fruit, all luxuries that few of the children had ever experienced before.



Prizes for getting the highest grades on the math exam

The children, toddlers and babies all ate the same food, although the babies' food was often puréed. The food mostly consisted of rice and some sort of vegetable, often tomatoes or squash, in a sort of liquid stew. There were small meat pieces in the stew, although not enough to provide all of the necessary nutrients for the children. Sometimes the children had the opportunity to eat spaghetti, and periodically some dessert, such as cake or candy, when travelers or a local high school donated them.



The toddlers trying to be well-behaved while eating lunch

Although the children were never allowed to leave the orphanage, they sometimes took field trips. Some of the children were taken to the park on "Tree Day," where they were able to play on the slides and swings, as well as experience the world outside of the orphanage. They were surrounded by other children of similar ages and older high school children, who were also at the park sharing this well-known Honduran holiday with them.



Celebrating El Día de Árbol, or "Tree Day" by playing on the jungle gym

Taylor and I took the well-behaved children of the orphanage and my students to one of San Pedro Sula's best-known museums, Planetario Infantil, a planetarium and science museum for children. We took some time the day before the trip to prepare the children for the planetarium by reviewing information about the solar system with them, such as the names of the planets, their distances relative to one another, their appearances, etc.



The planetarium where the kids got to watch a show on stars, planets, and our solar system



The science museum where the children got to put together a puzzle of a skeleton

Our demonstration of the planets in the solar system. Taylor and I blew up balloons to represent each of the planets, and wrote the names of the planets on the balloons so the children could better remember them.



The children having their lesson about the solar system and planets. Some of the children helped in our visual display of the planets and their basic order in the solar system

Once a week Taylor and I would visit a home for teenage girls called, La Casita de Mujeres, where we would teach mathematics or just spend time talking to the girls. This orphanage is where most of the girls go once they are too old to stay at Nueva Esperanza. Although many of these girls were previously involved in prostitution and drugs, they had the opportunity to change their lives by being educated in mathematics, computer skills, and English at the orphanage and having their own tortilla-making business to maintain the orphanage.



All of the girls, Taylor and I at la Casita our last day there