

Kerry Barba, '06
Oaxaca , Mexico

"Some people come into our lives and quickly go...
Others come into our lives and leave footprints on our hearts
and we are never ever the same." - Flavia Weedn

For my summer of service, I spent six weeks in Oaxaca , Mexico , where those whom I worked with left footprints on my heart that will remain forever. Through a wonderful, kind-hearted lay missionary, Mary Lou Doran, whom we also stayed with, Joanny Paul and I came into contact with a young Mexican woman named Yolanda and her disabled four-year-old twin sons, Ángel and Cesar. Ángel is blind and deaf while Cesar suffers from cerebral palsy, although their broad smiles sometimes make you want to believe otherwise. Neither could walk (although Ángel was making great progress by the time we left) or talk and, unfortunately, Ángel often refused to eat.



Some of Cesar's Classic Smiles

Our days in Oaxaca consisted of waking up (sometimes at five in the morning when it was still dark) and walking over to “Yolanda and the twins,” breaking for lunch, and then heading back for the afternoon. Many times, we would take the twins by bus (two buses each way) to Teleton <http://www.teleton.org.mx/Teleton.htm>, a center for the rehabilitation and integration of disabled children, where they would receive various forms of therapy. Joanny and I were taught how to do the particular physical therapy for each child, and would work with them at home. Other times, when the children or Yolanda were sick, we would accompany them to the local clinic by stroller.



Ángel and me on our way to Teleton.



"Los chicos" at Teleton: Cesar (left) and Ángel (right).



Ángel receiving occupation therapy at Teleton.



Me doing physical therapy with Cesar at Yolanda's

At Yolanda's small community known as a "la vecinidad," other children would often come over to play. Yolanda opened her door to all of them. Our regulars consisted of Soledad, a beautiful, promising young girl whose family could not afford to send her to school until this year at age eight as the result of a donation from the United States, and her two younger brothers, Julio and Victor Manuel. With the children, Joanny and I ("las gringas" as they called us) would read, color, play various games (UNO was a favorite), and sing and dance to their favorite songs. We also taught them English, at which Soledad especially made great strides. Amy and her younger sister as well as Nubia were also among the visitors.



Me and from left to right: Victor Manuel, Soledad and Julio



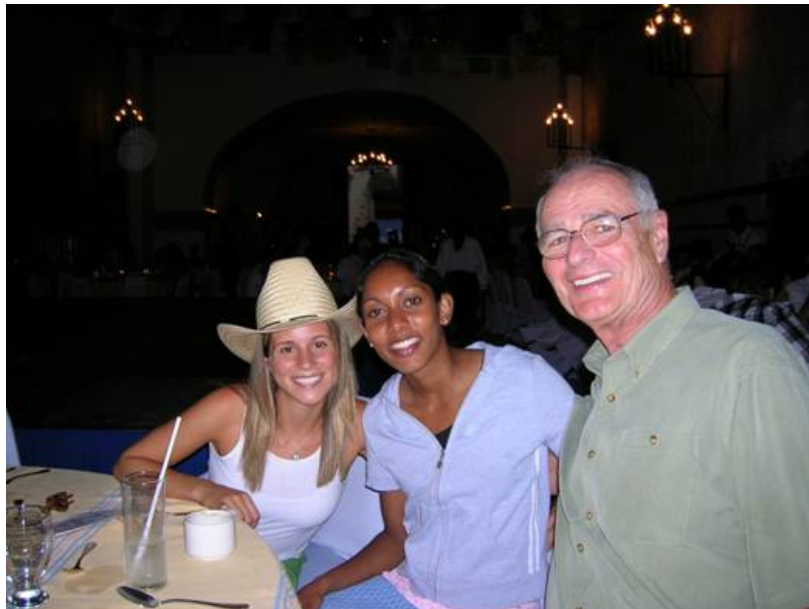
Amy and me.



Nubia and me.

We were extremely lucky to have Dr. Larow come visit.

Above: Dr. Larow reading with Soledad from an English textbook.
Below: Dr. Larow with Joanny and me at La Guelaguetza (dancing and dinner).



On Monday and Wednesday nights, Joanny and I worked at “La clínica de Monte Albán” where our mentor, Dr. Fernando G. Badillo, allowed us to stand-in on consultations, brought us in his VW bug to make house calls, and even permitted us to witness two births (and by witness I mean “right

there" in the delivery room). With Dr. Fernando, I was able to hear the rapid heartbeat of a one-week-old infant whom I had seen come into this world, visit a dying woman to administer an IV, hold a crying child to my chest in order to calm him, and come to understand the truly remarkable patient-doctor relationship through the eyes of a man who lives for his fellow people.



Joanny and me with Dr. Fernando and his nurse Herma



One of the babies we saw being born.

When it came time to say goodbye, I could not help but cry. Those that I had come to help enhanced my own life in ways I could not have imagined.

Yolanda's strength in caring for her disabled twin sons without the luxury and means that money and life in a first-world country provide is something I have never experienced before. Her happiness had not been diminished in any way; her and her sons' smiles gave evidence to that. Ángel and Cesar had become accustomed to Joanny and me by the time it was ready for us to go, and leaving them felt like we were leaving a part of ourselves behind.

Before we left, Yolanda thanked us over and over again, but the ultimate "thank you" belongs to her. Her and her sons left footprints on our hearts, which will never ever be the same.



Yolanda and me. Thanks Yolanda!



Me and Mary Lou.
Thanks Mary Lou!