

Children's Day Celebration: *Dia del Nino*

April 30, 2005

Report by Stacey Mayoral DeTray

Responding to the request of the Mayor of Jalapa de Diaz to assist with *Dia del Nino*, Mike Brown called Stacey Mayoral DeTray and asked her to obtain gifts to deliver to Jalapa de Diaz. It happened to be the week Edd and Kay DeTray were going to be in Mexico City, so they were happy to be included. The Hill Cumorah Expedition Team sent \$750.00 donation money to purchase gifts, along with dozens of toys (hand puppets, baby toys, musical clocks, etc.) that Teresa Stoner had received as a donation from one of her patients.

The first two days in Mexico City were spent with Stacey shopping for toys and school supplies to take to Jalapa de Diaz. We brought basketballs and soccer balls at Wal-Mart; notebooks, erasers, pens, pencils, pencil sharpeners at Sam's Club; colored balls with smiley faces and bright designs and tea-sets at Nautalpan market; dolls, puppets, cars at Ciudadela market; purses, kites, jump ropes at Sonora market; and about 50 solar-powered calculators from Waldo's (a Mexican equivalent to our dollar stores). Hugo's father contributed snack packages of chili chips and candies for about 2000 children.

Toys were sorted by appropriateness for girls and boys of various age groups. We attempted to inventory these items in a spreadsheet format. Two vans were loaded with cartops covered with balls. While traveling out of Mexico City toward Tuxtepec we noticed other cars were on the road with similar appearing cargoes. The Day of the Child

(*Dia del Nino*) is a much more celebrated event that we were aware of previously.

As we left Mexico City Friday morning, Stacey was stopped by policemen who said she did not turn on her blinker to turn, to which she responded, “No one here turns on their blinker.” They were told to pull forward, then the police said she had gone through a red light. Her response was, “You told me to.” The police finally waved her on. Several minutes later Hanz called on the walkie-talkie and Edd had been stopped. The police were demanding \$2,000 pesos for a permit to carry his load. Stacey told Edd to tell them that it was not illegal. Edd got out paper to write down the badge number of the policemen when they must have decided this gringo wasn’t going to be worth the effort for a *mordida* (bribe) and the police finally let him proceed. We encountered no other police problems.

Arriving at the hotel in Tuxtepec, we kept our eyes open for the Mayor of Jalapa and asked if anyone had called for us. The next morning we were given a note that said someone was coming to “find us.” Alfonso showed up about 9 AM in a red pick-up truck and led us to Jalapa de Diaz. He was friendly and stopped at one scenic spot for us to take photos. He led us to a gated courtyard with a stage and balloon-decorated building labeled DIF that Stacey said was the Department of Infants and Children. We were introduced to Dona Felipa, the woman in charge. Stacey later said that this office is usually headed by the Mayor’s

wife, but she was not introduced as such, and to our knowledge, the Mayor never appeared. About six well-dressed ladies in high heels and party-type clothing were preparing for the event they said was to occur at 1 PM. They showed us toys they had bought in Mexico City—balls like the colored ones we had brought, plastic trucks, etc.

Edd told Alfonso we did not want to be part of political gain. We were given a separate room and four or five women helped us assemble school supplies in bags; notebook, eraser, pen, pencil, sharpener, and snack in each. About 600 in total. The children were to be handed slips of paper as tickets at the gate that they could in turn exchange for bags of supplies and toys.

Dona Filipa, Alfonso and a little boy went with Edd and Kay to Las Lomas de San Juan, down a rough gravel and dirt road to a school in the hills. Over 200 well-behaved children gathered. They lined up and stayed back about 15 feet until Edd, counting every fifth in line, handed several boys the basketballs. When they gathered in, Edd wanted me to tell them we wouldn't give any toys unless they came from one direction and were "stamped" with a rubber stamp so we could know who had received a toy. They didn't speak Spanish, but Mazatec, one of thirty-four Native American languages spoken in Mexico. Dona Filipa and Alfonso didn't understand what Edd was saying in English. Kay tried to pantomime by beckoning and leading them to follow in a one-way line. After a while, Dona Filipa said some were coming through several times

and we needed to leave. It appeared that many had not yet received a toy, but we followed back to the school. Possibly it was because their event was scheduled to occur soon, and we hadn't left for the other school until 12:30 PM. Apparently, Las Lomas and San Juan had been informed of the toys on the way because they gathered in from the hills.

It was extremely hot back in the DIF building—no fans—Edd's shirt was soaked with perspiration. Three children fanned Kay with pieces of cardboard. Stacey had taken a boom box for music, which they played on stage. Stacey announced from the stage that our group was from the Community of Christ, and put a sign outside our room stating the same. She picked some pictures of the group from this year's trip which were shown on the screensaver of her computer. They had a few clowns and some balloon animals—very few. Many mothers were in "Quitlan" dresses, brightly embroidered with ribbon and lace, worn over tunics.

Although tickets had been distributed, it did not appear that all the children had them—perhaps they had arrived after the tickets were given out. Some tried to get toys through the jail-type windows and everyone who had a ticket received a gift, but we were told that more children were coming later and not to give to anyone without tickets—that some children were taking things home and coming back for more. About 5 PM the number of children dwindled and we were told it was to be over. Policemen had kept the gate closed while we were there.

We asked if there were any blind children in the area that we could visit to take photographs in an effort to obtain medical help. Pepe (17 year-old nephew of Filipa) accompanied us to one home, back quite a ways from the road, where there was one fifty-year old man with a growth on one eye. He said it had occurred suddenly about twenty years ago after receiving an injection. His twenty-seven year old daughter was said to be blind from about a month old. She could see a tree about twenty feet away and she suffered from epilepsy.

We were told there were numerous blind children in the area and that she had written to World Vision for help, but never received a response. We saw only one child in the crowded market on Sunday who had an obvious eye disorder. It was a distinct glass eye filling a cavity, but very displaced.

Kay had called Paula Rummel of the Health Ministries Department at the Temple before leaving Independence to see what medical help or information could be obtained. Paula mentioned that ptermignons, a growth covering the cornea was frequently seen at La Buena Fe in Honduras. She stated that it was not a complicated procedure to correct it, but that it often recurs. Kay also called Sherri Kirkpatrick to inquire about river blindness that occurs in Africa due to a black fly laying eggs inside the eye, but was unable to obtain information before leaving. We hoped to find some children to photograph for further evaluation, but were unsuccessful in accomplishing this.

Next, we went to see Catalina who now appears to be in perfect health. Her family had just completed a new floor in their home—cement mixed with blue paint—very nice. We gave her an angel and talked with the family about our friends who had been there last month.

The house at the top of Catalina's hill was having a posole—a special soup—in honor of St. Berta (one woman's saint day). Fidelina, one of the women who helped at the DIF building, insisted we stay and eat with them as they dined outside on their porch. Stacey said they would be offended if we refused, although it had been a very long day for everyone. A sudden wind came up, causing everyone to move inside quickly. The house connected by hallway and steps to several adjoining family units. Dona Filipa was also there. Later, we went to the roof with a man who told us that the church seen from there was a Catholic Church that the Spanish had built over where their church used to be. I wondered if it was like Cholula where a church was built on top of a temple. He said it was rebuilt by one man who had taken care of it until his death.

As we stopped at the Pemex station on the way back to Tuxtepec, policemen approached and asked for toys for the children. They were friendly and Stacey gave them candy and a few of the remaining toys.

The next day, Sunday, we stopped to see the church on our way out of town. The area in front of the municipal building, which we had not seen the night before, was full of market booths. A teacher, Fedelina,

who had invited us for dinner, saw us and asked for toys for her nephews. As Stacey opened the car, other children appeared and were given toys.

We left to go to the people on the hill who have helped our group on previous trips. Several young girls with babies and small children were near the road. One man Edd recognized appeared with his *novia-mujer* and baby. We gave them many toys and candy and talked about our friends being there last month. The man asked for money for a machete. Edd had Stacey ask his wife if he would use the money for a machete, and if it was okay. She was amused and said, "Yes."

"How much," we asked.

"Seventy pesos."

We gave him one hundred pesos and he seemed to be happy.

We stopped at another house where the group goes through the land to get up the hill. Several young men and women with children were given toys and candy. They were very friendly and brought out one young woman with a one-week old baby.

We had hoped to drive home the other way, but the road became very rough. It was late in the day and raining so we turned the same road back though Tuxtepec. We wished that we had been able to give away every toy. The undistributed ones were left in Mexico City to be used as the Cumorah group desires, possibly given out when the clothes are delivered or during next year's trip.