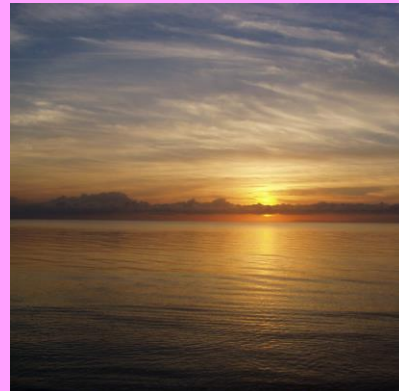


Belize

2004



[Photo Pages](#)

While I/we have posted some a couple of beginning notes on this log before – I will use this note as the official starting point.

It seems to us that we must have told “everyone” by now how this mission trip came to be but with the number of people that continue to ask it seems appropriate to tell the story one more time. Clarice and I are both Registered Nurses with considerable experience in caring for patients directly, teaching nursing students, and supervising other nurses. We both also have a deep seated belief in God. Clarice was raised in the Roman Catholic tradition and I was raised in the United Methodist which eventually led us to the Episcopal Church where we are currently members. These are the tools which we were given to work with.

The idea for going on a mission trip was spawned by several events over the past 5 years. One of the major events was my getting the opportunity to serve in Albania for several weeks working with refugees from the Kosovo crisis. I felt that this suggested a calling for which I was somewhat uniquely suited having a strong mechanical aptitude in addition to my nursing and teaching skills but I recognized that leaving Clarice home was like leaving a piece of myself behind. Clarice was suffering from a failing hip about the same time. After the hip was replaced we realized that our future, when we become elderly, is very likely to be limited by the failure of the prosthesis or her other hip. With these thoughts in mind we looked into doing more crisis work such as I had done in Albania. We eventually learned that it is difficult to get the opportunity to go with crisis volunteer organizations without a history of having worked in an emerging culture for some time. We needed to arrange our lives so we could leave home behind for a minimum of a year to meet this requirement.

We purchased a house on an acre of land in the area where we lived in September of 2001. After a major scrub down the house was declared livable and we moved in. After several false starts we obtained a building permit in May of 2002 and we started to add a second unit onto the house to make it into a duplex. I worked 6 days a week on the house (and one day at the hospital to keep my skills up and to keep sane), Clarice worked on the house every spare minute she had beyond working full time to keep up our living expenses, and many friends volunteered untold hours of labor to make the new unit a reality. Nine months later we were able to move in and start advertising for a renter for the original house. Currently we have a renter in the original unit/house and arrangements are in place for a fellow nurse to house sit our unit/house while we are gone.

We had discussed joining the Peace Corps as one option for our undertaking but realized that “mission” to us had significant religious overtones and didn’t seem to fit with a government agency. We set out on an internet search to find a group that had its basic understanding to include that doing God’s work was their primary purpose, did not expect missionaries to proselytize but rather to show their belief through their actions, could use our nursing and other skills, and would help with expenses. We finally ended up contacting Catholic Medical Missions Board (CMMB) and they agreed that they felt we were a good fit for their needs.

CMMB sent our resumes to Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) who agreed that we could be useful (hopefully) in the clinic that they staff which is owned by Jericho Road Foundation (JRF) in Punta Gorda Belize.

Today we were given our send off by our local congregation – it feels like we have stepped across the threshold.

Just news:

Our daughter’s wedding near Niagara Falls , Ontario was beautiful and we are excited to have Paul as part of the family.

I had an emergency appendectomy 2 weeks ago. I’m still limited to 15# lifting and will be for the first couple of weeks in Belize but otherwise am recovering well. (I have discovered that I am NOT cut out to be a patient!!)

Our daughter-in-law and grandson were able to spend a week with us and we fully enjoyed the time together. Clarice considers not being able to see our grandson to be the biggest hardship she foresees.

We have had wonderful support from our churches and employers (both of whom have made exceptions and given us leave of absence for the year).

Here are some notes I sent to Hillside Clinic this morning:

St. John's Episcopal Church, Snohomish, Washington (our home church) : \$1500 available from outreach (minus \$173 used to buy Zantac at below general wholesale with help from Providence Everett Medical Center); \$50 given to buy Vitamins (again at below wholesale with help from Providence); The father of a friend/parishioner has sent a check for \$1000; This money is available for use as needed to either support our home finances if something goes wrong so that we can continue on in Belize or for use by Hillside clinic. Brown's Point United Methodist Church, Tacoma, Washington (my parents church - church I "grew up in") - \$1210 to support the mission. Providence Medical system: Everett Hospital - \$300 towards our year's supply of antimalarials (and provided at cost); Corporate: we have asked that they cover the out of pocket costs of my recent surgery (no word back yet but initial indications were positive)

Solgar Company – years supply of children’s vitamins

We are both working through Christmas and then will take a few days off for final preparations. We will fly south on January 1, spend a couple of days with extended family in Belize city and then go to Punta Gorda on January 4.

Keep in touch and keep us in you prayers!

Norman and Clarice

January 4, 2004

Punta Gorda (PG) Day #1

We arrived in Belize City on January 1 and relaxed for a couple of days with my cousin and her family. We went out to Ambergris Caye and enjoyed some acclimation time on the beach. After leaving Seattle with a rare snow fall it will take us a bit of time to get used to the heat and humidity and the days we spent in the Belize City area seem like a better idea in retrospect than they did when we were planning them.

We have had very few problems with travel other than two “non-essential” duffle bags were not allowed on the plane in Seattle due to a holiday excess baggage restriction. We had been aware ahead of time that this might be the case and were prepared with a backup plan. The bags we left behind are full of books and empty medication bottles – we expect those bags to come down with friends in April. We were able to get all of the medications here without a problem. I had to laugh at all of the “we hand searched this bag” tags on our luggage when it arrived – I’m sure the x-ray scanners had a fit when they detected a framing hammer, dive gear, stethoscopes, and other various tools we had packed. (The hand inspectors were very tidy by the way).

We managed to get all of our luggage into the Geo Tracker that came to meet us and Clarice and Patricia (our RN housemate/workmate/etc) sat together in the very small front passenger seat while I drove (Patricia doing any shifting that required the lever be moved far to the right). Our house is a mile or two out of town and a block off the beach. It is built of concrete and has plenty of opening windows for cross circulation. There are three bedrooms and a kitchen/family room – I’d guess about 750 sq ft total. Patricia lives in one bedroom, Shekinah RN in the second and us in the third. (With three female housemates I think I will fix the bathroom door that doesn’t close SOON.) The tepid water shower was a bit nippy today as it rained yesterday and the weather has been “cool”. We have lots of screened windows, a fan, and a double bed. I’ve been scoping out possible sources of lumber and blocks to make some “dorm room” furniture. Clarice was pleased to find out that

Patricia has just started to try to landscape the yard (and Patricia was glad to find out that Clarice knows how to make gardens grow).

We went on a walking tour of town and looked like silly “Mad Dogs and Englishmen” by going out in the mid-day sun. We found out that there are several internet options. The clinic has dial up for “free” but it is needed by the med students and everyone else. There is a couple of places that have high speed satellite connections – don’t send photos yet but we may be able to receive them once I get things figured out. We met some of the other people in the area working to help improve the conditions of the local poor. Houses in town range from very nice concrete places that we would be proud to own in the States (few) to hovels that I honestly can’t figure out where you sleep (more than a few) with a full range of dwellings in between. The Southern Highway gets us to town and is paved and in good shape here. Most of the downtown streets we observed are recently paved. The airport runway is “paved” with about 20 percent of the paving missing (the local pilots are GOOD). We are told that the water at the beach is very warm for swimming. There are lots on mangroves in the area so the water tends to be muddy near the shore.

Enough for now – I’ll see If I can get a chance to upload this but I doubt it as it is Sunday and I expect things to be closed.

Day #2
January 5, 2004

We got to experience the clinic for the first time today. It was all a bit crazy as the two of us were trying to figure out what was going on as were seven medical students and one short term faculty member. All of the patients that came in today were Mayan.

We are trying to put together a plan as there are now more nurses than the clinic has ever had before. Currently we are thinking that Clarice will work in the clinic, Patricia and Shekinah will do home visits and I will go on mobile (vehicle) and walk abouts and try to get some community education materials together and play “head nurse”. All of this is still confusing to us and will change several times as we go along we are sure.

We visited the Punta Gorda hospital today. I suspect that our patients who complain about dirty floors and double rooms with cable that “only” works 95% of the time would get rather upset with the floor missing about 10% of its tiles, open wiring connections, and multibed wards with old iron beds. I was VERY impressed with the nurse who headed the public health department for the Toledo district. They have a very active program to get children immunized (we in the States can’t come close to the immunization rate she

claimed) and to evaluate the current mortality trends and work to address them.

So I'm off once more to try to find an open internet location to see if I can upload these notes.

January 6, 2004

I still haven't been able to get to an internet location before it closes. Tomorrow Clarice and I are planning to stay home for the morning and spend a few hours arranging our lives. We bought lumber from a neighbor with a mill last evening but still haven't found time to make our shelves and thus all of our belongings are still heaped on our bedroom floor. Our housemates were pleased to have Clarice move in with her love of cooking so she needs to spend a morning at the market and we now have more nurses than bicycles so we will spend some of the money from Brown's Point Church and buy a couple of the inexpensive fat tire models that are popular here. Clarice is having trouble sleeping without a fan and I have trouble sleeping with one so we will investigate a smaller unit for our room that we both can tolerate.

Today I went on my first mobile clinic to one of the Mayan villages – as the crow flies it is not far but as the road runs it took about 2 hours. The road through the jungle was beautiful. The jungle here does not have a canopy like the Amazon rain forest but it is impressive with its towering hardwood trees, Tarzan vines, banana trees, giant philodendrons, rapid running creeks, and colorful birds. The clinic was set up in a community building in the village with a Public Health Nurse doing an immunization clinic while we did see people for any complaint they brought forward. Either the village had had a cold virus go through the population a week ago or it was the answer they assumed we expected when we asked them about their complaint of a "cough". "Coughs" indeed are common but they are likely caused by homes filled with the smoke of a cooking fire. We would often understand that we were to see one child in a family only to find out that we were being asked to check on several children and their mother. Privacy and HIPPA (the new USA privacy law) be damned as everyone in the village (especially the children) crowded around to see what was going on. The school in the town teaches English but the main language of the village is Mayan-Ketchi and most people only spoke that language with poor or no English. We were very concerned about the quality of the translations we were getting but we did the best with what we had. We did see two boys and a man for machete cuts as this is the main tool of the jungle. The man's cut finger was from today so we sutured it using my key ring light for a "surgical lamp". By the end of the day we were exhausted after seeing 65 patients.

I was sure that the ride home would be long and tedious as our vehicle was loaded to the max with people – instead a wild toucan flying over and a huge rainbow improved my spirits considerably.

Norman

January 7, 2004

Rained off and on all day but temperature remains about 80 degrees. We were in a meeting for part of the day in the clinic Community Center building and when it rained with its full fury we had to cease conversation or yell as the noise from the metal roof was overwhelming. We walked around town in storm coats and shorts – the shorts would get soaked in each downpour then dry when the rain stopped for a while. We bought a pair of new bicycles but they only come without fenders so we were covered with mud from the fat tires by the time we got back home. (On the other hand I got an email from my boss telling me that it was a tad hectic at the hospital in Everett with the ice storm knocking out power and phones – I guess it puts 80 degree downpours in perspective.)

Clarice got groceries at the market so we will eat well. We gave up going to the bank when we saw that the line wound out of the door – we later found out that it was Social Security check day. I don't look forward to setting up our bank account as the bank is only open from 8 – 1 most days and we have already gotten a taste of the process to expect; we need to have a fax and a letter from our home bank saying that we are good people and then we still won't be able to cash a check from home in less than 6 weeks. We were told pieces of the process we will need to go thorough to get our work permits once our licenses come though and I could only roll my eyes.

I finally got a chance to try different internet connection options while we were out and about. It was nice to here from home and confirm that we can upload these notes.

Enough for now. NG

January 8, 2004

Went on another mobile clinic trip today. On Tuesday the village we went to was new to Jericho, today's was a usual once a month stop. I was surprised to see a woman who had had a cesarean section birth on Monday already home with her baby. We took time to check them both over carefully and made sure the mother had a supply of prenatal vitamins to tide her over until we return next month. We gave the usual advice to drink plenty of fluids, etc and added the suggestion that she and the baby should move their hammock away from the cooking fire pit as asthma is a common complaint.

The village has a tradition on cooking lunch for our team. We provided the chickens (from the supermarket), water and cool aid as we drove into the village in the morning. The lunch consisted of stewed chicken in a spicy red broth and a huge pile of fresh tortillas. I was fascinated by the house construction. From the outside the dwellings look dark and dingy with no windows or obvious ventilation. Inside it is cool with plenty of light as the sidewall boards have gaps between them. There is good ventilation through and over the walls. The cooking fire smoke drifts out through the ends of the palm thatched roof. Entertainment is provided by the kittens running around the dirt floor and the hen hatching her chicks behind the entry door. The cross polls at ceiling height (just tall enough for me – Mayans are much shorter) support a collection of hammocks that are tied up for the day. The family that cooks for us had a second house which was stripped to the framework. The man explained that it was time to replace the roof and during the process all of the vines that are used to lash the framework together are checked for deterioration. He said his roof had lasted 7 years.

Giggle moment today: Watching the med students in their sandals and scrubs crossing a stream on a foot log and then trudging through a mud flat.

Exotic animal moments: Saw another toucan – just missed getting my camera out in time to get a photo. Saw a BRIGHT red bird – not yet identified. Passed over a baby skunk – luckily it missed the Land Cruiser when it sprayed. Drove past then purposefully ran over a fer de lance (sp?) snake. Sorry for the environmental damage but it was quite near a village full of children and its bite kills within hours if not treated. (There is a local family known for their ability to treat the bites successfully with a passed down recipe of (assumed to be) local herbs.)

I hope to add a photo section to the web page before long but that will require a high speed internet connection or snail mailing a disk to home.

January 9, 2004

Last evening we were able to try access at the local café that has a high speed internet connection. It was really nice to be able to communicate in real time with my parents. We are hoping to have a family conversation this evening. Several of the clinic staff may show up as well as the café has the same set up that the clinic hopes to have by next month and we want to find out its capabilities.

Today I did computer work. We are trying to get the clinic's data collection automated and consistent with the system the Ministry of Health is setting up. We also received our nursing licenses – I told the Docs I was a little upset that they had turned me into a "she" while I wasn't looking. We also have a

little joke that I refuse to be called “matron” if I end up supervising the clinic. Now we need to go to the stationary store to buy the forms then get a letter from the clinic and \$20 BZ in postage stamps at the post office in order to show up at the employment office on one of the three days it is open (typically from 9-12 and 1-3) so we can apply for a work permit before our standard 30 tourist entry expires (whew!).

It has been a pretty day and Clarice got the laundry caught up in the clinic’s “dirt redistribution machine” since she didn’t have many patients.

January 11, 2004 (Sunday)

Friday evening we were able to contact Norman’s parents and our children via instant messaging. The part that made our night was when we were able to watch our grandson open his birthday present via real time video feed. I sent a bunch of web page updates to Bryan over the high speed connection and hopefully he will be able to post them soon.

Saturday we were offered the opportunity to go on a snorkel outing with the medical students to a caye on the barrier reef. The reef is moderately far out here and it took us about an hour and a half in a 30 mph boat. The snorkeling was great. Our first stop was off an island that was just big enough for one building and there was one building for rent on it. The second island was about 300 yards in diameter and an attempt has been made to run a resort there but now the watchman protects a number of bungalows which are falling down in the weather. We spent time snorkeling and lying (sun burning) on the beach. One of the doctors rode out with the boat owner beyond the reef while most of us lounged around and much to his surprise landed a 3 ft barracuda which was quickly filleted and given to the med students. Our other wildlife encounter was with a bottle nose dolphin that lead the boat for a while – I’d never seen one in the wild before. (I keep hoping to have one join me when I get a chance to go diving.)

This morning we went to the local Anglican Mission here in Punta Gorda. Several times I have experienced the tension that builds up when one is away from home in very unfamiliar surroundings and trying to learn and understand an overwhelming amount of information and then found a symbol of home, belief and familiarity that becomes a safe place to let go of the emotion. In church this morning that happened to Clarice. I think the combination of familiar songs and a feeling of “home” that comes with familiar worship rituals in addition to visualizing the Pacific Northwest (Pacific Southwest, Canada) when the Deacon mentioned that she was from Vancouver, British Columbia pushed Clarice over the edge and the tears flowed. When the tears stopped she was able to express that they were simply an expression of many emotions including joy at having found a place of comfort.

The Mission had only 10 parishioners. The Deacon comes every other week as she also serves other missions in the area. She is here for a two year volunteer stint from a parish next to where the priest who welcomed Clarice and I into the Episcopal church and baptized Bryan serves. There is a brand new home and parish hall behind the church awaiting the arrival of an ordained priest in May.

Patricia asked last evening how it was that I (and Clarice) have such a variety of skills. I answered her at that point that I considered it to be “talent”. Then I thought more about her question and the deeper answer it deserved. Clarice and I are truly gifted with an unusual array of talents – but perhaps the better word would be “gifts”. I can’t tell you where my ability to listen to a motor and know what is wrong with it anymore than I can tell you where Clarice’s patience and wisdom came from. I consider them gifts from God and with that comes the real reason we are in Belize. We both believe that gifts from God are meant to be shared – my mind keeps going back to the church school song “This Little Light of Mine”. We were given a light and it would be wrong to hide it.

January 13, 2004 (Tuesday)

Thanks to everyone who has sent us emails – even if we don’t have time to respond to them they do get read. As this web page and log develops it would be nice to have feedback. Are there questions that people have? Would someone like to be removed from the mailing list? Have people enjoyed following along? As to the problems with the Belizian Post Office (which may be limited to Punta Gorda) – our housemate picked up 3 boxes the other day and with “storage” fees and duties the costs came to \$100 US for materials that likely weren’t worth even that much and this was on top of the postage paid in the USA. There seems to be considerable inconsistency in the system and so while it would be fun to get a “care package” it could be quite costly at this end. We are hoping to explore having Fed Ex carry packages and see if the higher cost of their “slow” freight rate is made up for in more appropriate duties being collected.

Monday I spent most of the day working on computer data entry stuff and designing a spread sheet to help with inventory control in the pharmacy (Clarice – THE ORGANIZER is taking over the pharmacy and wants CONTROL). I decided to ride to the end of the street that the clinic is on to see the time share resort at the end of the road. Lo and behold the owner is a retired Everett High School teacher. He and his wife are working with a Mayan coop that owns the land the resort is on and the active village surrounding it. It is a bit like Habitat for Humanity in that the coop provides the labor and the financing is provided on an interest free basis. On the first day that construction was to begin the owner asked the men of the village to

bring any tools they had; one person showed up with a hammer and everyone else showed up with machetes. Now they are able to lay concrete block, lay floor tile, build furniture, etc.. The housing in the village is typically Mayan except that the walls are concrete block (more likely to tolerate the next hurricane) and the floors are concrete. The resort owns a four story building with kitchenette rooms and a pool (\$75 US/night), a youth hostel (\$10 US/night) and two houses on the Rio Grande (\$650 US/month). It is an interesting concept – the question always at hand is how to support the independence of a culture while offering people the option to live at a higher standard if they want to. It is a question that relates to everything about the way the dominant culture works with the people in the village from the school system to the churches and finally to how medical care is “sold” and distributed by groups such as us.

Today I did my first “solo” as the mobile (“mobile” here means a clinic run out of a vehicle) nurse. Patricia is out on a 5 day walk-about with Fr. Ryan (who thinks having “Irish” Guinness beer brewed in the New World is a travesty). She was concerned about the potential for serious mud when it rained the night before she left and we are having a “typical Seattle day” of rain now (except I’m wearing a light long sleeve shirt in a house with no glass windows or heating system). Shekinah slept 12 hours last night and continues to feel ill today. I’m trying to get a chicken to bake in our goofy oven and tried to make flavored rice with the giblets (which includes the feet here) while Clarice finishes up the evening clinic day.

Our house feels much more like home to us now that we did the “Clarice and Norman thing” and attacked with hammer and saw. We made storage shelves and places to hang things and then Clarice organized. Luckily Patricia and Shekinah are appreciative rather than insulted (at least that’s what they tell us) as we stirred things up quite a bit.

January 17, 2004 (Saturday)

I didn’t realize that I had put off my journaling for quite so long.

The weather remained cool through Friday and then the sun came out with seriousness. Today the fans were put back in service and Clarice and I went swimming at the beach near us (2 blocks). It was the first time we swam there and were pleasantly surprised at the sand bottom and temperature of the water. I snorkeled next to a small breakwater and found that even it provided a variety of fish to observe.

On Thursday Shekinah and I went on the mobile clinic run to Barranco a Garifuna village south of us on the water. (Four of our group kayaked down the 13 mile run – little ripe when they arrived.) The Garifuna are an ethnic group unique to this area. Their skin shows the color of their black African

ancestors but what sets them apart are their distinctive customs which are a mixture of African and New World Native traditions. There is a major holiday in the Garifuna villages that we are eager to attend to see these customs displayed. The people themselves were friendly and appreciative of our time. This is the first village I have been in where the great majority of clinic visitors were elderly rather than pediatric. Their eyes twinkled as they laughed and spoke having the comfort of age without constant worry about “getting old”. The village itself has electricity and a well built clinic with inside plumbing (a well trained nurse usually runs it full time when she is not on a leave as she is now). The two main streets have so few cars traveling over them that they remain grass covered. The houses show the effects of constant rain and mildew as the chickens run around under them. The land itself sits on the edge of the Bay Honduras where all can look out and watch the rhythm of time and water.

News of babies:

First we all are very excited to announce the birth of the clinic’s driver/grounds keeper/maintenance man/ builder’s first baby – a boy born last evening. Mom and baby are reported to be doing well while Dad bounces off the walls with excitement. Shekinah and Patricia visited last evening and asked how the breast feeding was going only to be told that the hospital’s doctor had told the new mother that they shouldn’t breast feed before hour number two. This completely contradicts what we have been taught so it was frustrating to hear. Patricia returned from her week visiting outlying villages in vehicle and on foot with one of the local priest. One their way back to town they were transporting a woman in labor when the baby decided not to wait and Patricia explained to the priest that he had a newborn in the back seat.

We ran into Sister Marian Joseph at market on Saturday morning. She is a no-nonsense woman who runs a clinic in the town of Big Falls. She expressed her frustration that after a long preceding day (including helping with “Patricia’s” baby) she had tried to have other arrangements made to get a laboring woman to town only to find the woman waiting for her in the morning. Sr. was in town awaiting word from the hospital as to what their plans were for the woman so she would know if the woman needed a ride home or not.

News of our adaptation to the tropics:

I now wear long sleeves and long pants on days that would be considered as warm back home. Clarice is running around looking like “plague woman” with a rash that we currently believe is from the laundry soap used in the dirt redistribution machine. We both have a requisite number of bug bites and run enough malaria tests each day to be glad that we are taking preventative medication. We both are peeling from our sun burns (yes- we DID use SPF 50 sun screen!). The 5 mile bicycle ride to the clinic is starting to go from something we have to do to something we enjoy.

News of the crazy week starting today:

There is a 14 year old boy who is currently in Milwaukee where he has been receiving treatment for the better part of a year. He was tending his parents store here in PG when he was shot during a robbery attempt. He was left a paraplegic and developed infected ulcers and was near death when he was evacuated out. His parents have been working hard with their limited funds to prepare their house for his return and expected him to come back in February. Instead we received news on Friday that Patricia was to fly up and escort him down this coming Tuesday. We have had a flurry of emails going back and forth and our understanding is that his foster family needs relief so Patricia will leave us later this morning to stay with them for the next three weeks (We also wish her the best as she plans to interview for entry into a nurse practitioner program while she is in The States.)

The Ministry of Health has given us a computer statistical program that matches the one they use. Our clinic manager was planning to go the Belize City for training for the next five days but has become overwhelmed with pending end of year reports. She asked if Clarice or I would go instead as we are more familiar with computer software. The current plan is that I will try to contact my cousin's Belizean husband's brother's family today and ask if I may stay with them and if the person leading the training agrees by phone the first thing Monday morning that we can substitute trainees then I will catch the next flight north.

The clinic will be down to Shekinah and Clarice and then Nick (our long term physician) will fly to The States for some meetings Thursday.

Oh yeah; then there is the village that's been without a clean water source for 2 months that Shekinah will visit on Tuesday and wonders what kind of patient load will await her there.

After two weeks we can say that we increasingly enjoy the people in this area. People who know us wave enthusiastically as we pass while most everyone else wave a polite and friendly greeting. The sun goes down about 6 PM and the evenings are comfortable so the streets are full of people walking and riding bicycles. The owner of the "Toledo Frame Shop" (a 12 by 20 foot building that also serves as a residence) is usually out working on one of his signature picture frames when we pass. If not, then he is making the rounds with his basket of fresh cinnamon rolls that his wife has baked that morning. You could say he is poor if you look at his tiny house (some might call it a shack) but then you would have to notice that the land it sits on would be worth a million US dollars if it was in West Seattle. The Toledo Frame Maker and his family work in the yard of a house that sits about 40 feet from a beautiful Caribbean beach. There is always the music of the hundreds of birds that roost in the trees along the shore. When they are warm the water is cool and enjoyable for swimming. Whenever we see The Toledo Frame Maker in town, at his home or in church he carries himself with a dignity and pride that continues to deepen my belief that poverty is truly a state of mind and that he and his family are perhaps as wealthy as I've ever met.

January 24, 2004 (Saturday)

Time to catch up on my journal.

I did go to Belize City last Monday. I don't think I've written before about Tropic Air but they deserve a few words. Until recently when the Southern Highway was paved (thanks to money provided by Kuwait according to a monument near here) the roads throughout the country were reported to be "interesting". There are two airlines that fly within the country but we've only flown Tropic Air (and it seems to be the clear favorite among the locals). Tropic Air operates more like a bus company than an airline. You are welcome to walk up to the counter five minutes before a flight and buy a laminated boarding pass (they reuse them). The pilots are impressive as they take off and land up to 4 times on the flight from here to Belize City. The landings are to be lauded as they consistently are quite smooth despite strong cross winds and rough, short, partially paved runways. The planes are well maintained 14 passenger turboprop single engine Cessnas. Most importantly is the attitude of the staff; they load bicycles with only the request that the front tire be removed, they take excess baggage without comment, and when we looked a bit lost when we arrived with no one to meet us they called the clinic and made sure someone was coming without us even asking them to do so.

In Belize City I took a computer class learning to work with a software package from the CDC. I was able to work way ahead of the rest of the people in the class so the instructor was very understanding when I would sneak out to go shopping (much more selection and much lower prices than locally where MANY things are not available) and conduct business (e.g. submitting papers for our work permit (processing takes 4 weeks)). It was great to have my bicycle as I'd never had a chance to get the lay of the land there before. Since the city ranges from 2 to 5 feet of elevation above sea level (I may be exaggerating – I'm not sure it gets up to 5 feet) and has narrow roads that are a pain to drive on, a bicycle is ideal.

The city is divided by a canal which is crossed by two bridges. The much older of the bridges is known as the swinging bridge and is often used as a landmark. If you know me well then you are not surprised that I would be curious enough to see the ancient mechanical device operate that I would plan my dinner around its single afternoon scheduled opening. Even I had to admit that having grown up where I had to cross three opening bridges to get to school each day I should have seen enough open bridges for a lifetime and felt a bit silly. I bought some panadas from a street vendor and sat along the edge of the canal and enjoyed the cool air and checked out the conch boats moored in the middle of the canal while I waited for the appointed time. At 5:25 a bell sounded for about a minute and the large tour boats tied to the

bridge were untied and maneuvered away in the small area of unoccupied water. At 5:30 the bridge started to swing on its canal center piling but I still couldn't see a person operating the switch that would activate the motor. When the bridge turned to where I could see the road bed from my vantage point I had to laugh; the bridge has no electric motor. In the center of the bridge a "V" shaped hand crank had been installed and six men were pushing it as they walked in a circle to drive the gear mechanism that opened the bridge. After the single conch boat has passed through the opening (the traditional conch boats are sail driven) the process was reversed, a hand mechanism was used to lock the bridge closed and the ¼ inch diameter chain that was stretched across the road was removed and stored for the next opening at 5:30 AM the next day.

Belize City is an alive place with churches and cathedrals, thriving street markets, government buildings in colonial grandeur and occupied shacks threatening to fall into the canal at any minute. It is people who give bad directions rather than be impolite and admit they can't help and beggars that ask White "rich" looking guys for money every time we try to stop and look into a store. It is NOT the tourist district. When I was in town up to three cruise ships were anchored out at one time (there is not deep water port in Belize) with small boats ferrying the passengers in and out as fast as they could. The boats unload in front of the tourist village which is a mall much like one would see in the States. I could see that the prices (all in US dollars) would appeal to US residents but were TERRIBLY high by Belizian standards (and most often for items obviously NOT Belizian). I wondered how many people visit Belize and never walk three blacks so they may see what the country really looks like.

January 25, 2004 (Sunday)

We have a warm shower!!!! I got permission to install the "suicide" shower head that I bought in Belize City. After weeks of cold showers I was willing to crawl around in the very confined attic even though the temperature must have been 110 degrees up there. Suicide showers are very common here but I'm sure they are not "UL Approved" for use in the States. My understanding is that the water is heated as voltage is applied to it (literally to it – the water acts as the heating element). There is no accommodation made for wiring connections so we now have two wire nuts connecting our shower head to the wire which is protected with a 40 amp circuit breaker. We went swimming this afternoon and were able to rinse off in real tepid water! (If you run the water at a low flow rate it is even comfortable by my standards.) I'm afraid the clinic manager may be in for a shock when she gets our next water and electric bill.

We stayed home this weekend but did take a trip to a local fly fishing resort called El Pescador. The resort is not far out of town but the final hill up to the

buildings can only be negotiated with a four wheel drive vehicle. We parked the pickup truck at the bottom of the hill and walked up to an amazing view. There are small hills in the area that look like small cinder cones except that they are composed of limestone. El Pescador sits atop one of these hills and the view is across the top of the rain forest (I suspect we could see Guatemala). The is in incline tram for about 4 persons to ride down the other side of the hill to the river that was not operational; it will be worth making the trip again just to ride it as it goes down through the native forest.

Friday, Shekinah had been asked to have the monthly community Catholic mass at our house. It was obvious that it was very important to her to have it go well so we participated along with about 10 community members. As is typical in this culture the people arrived between 6:30 and 7 PM despite the announced 6:30 start time so we had a chance to sit and talk informally with Fr. Ryan. I really look forward to when I will have a chance to travel with him to the outlying villages as he is a very dedicated and kind hearted man.

One of the frequently requested songs in the Anglican mission says a lot about the face of Belize so I copy it from the song book here:

This is the Day

V1

This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord has made, that the Lord has made
Let us rejoice, let us rejoice
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.
That the Lord has made, that the Lord has made
Let us rejoice and be glad in it
This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord has made.

V2

Hoy es el día, Hoy es el día
Que lo hizo Dios, que lo hizo Dios
Yo gozaré, yo gozaré
Y alabaré, y alabaré.
Hoy es el día que lo hizo Dios
Yo gozaré y alabaré
Hoy es el día, hoy es el día
Que lo hizo Dios.

V3

Dis da di day, dis da di day
Weh Gad mi mek, weh Gad mi mek
Mek we rejice, mek we rejice

An be glad enna it, an be glad eena it
Di da di day weh Gad mi mek
Mek we rejice an be glad eena it
Dis da di day, dis da di day
Weh Gad me mek.

The song misses out on using the Mayan dialects and Chinese dialects that are often heard but does include the Creole that is the common local language (it's a bit crazy to hear people as they switch back and forth between the informal Creole "English" which we can't understand and the more formal English which is a challenge to understand).

My project this week is to try to get diagnoses and diagnoses ICDM -10 codes (international codes associated with diagnoses) loaded into the computer program I've set up so that we can collect patient data. Hopefully I can enter the codes AND a whole lot of patients in time to put out reports by February 1 required by the Ministry of Health (I'm glad to say we do have a backup plan as I doubt I can move that fast). This is part of the organizational work Clarice and I are trying to get done while we have 4 RN's (we will lose Shekinah next month and will need to pick up the slack). I'm also planning to go on 1 or 2 mobile visits and do some inservice training of the village health workers – nope computer data entry ain't going to happen in time for the report deadline.

Believe it or not after the last paragraph life is run at a much slower and more relaxed pace here. You simply can't hurry things when it takes three days to get a part that Lowe's would have a hundred of, or you need to contact a government official but they are on vacation and no one is covering their duties, or the internet café you planned to visit's owner decided it would be a nice weekend to go on a bicycle ride with his wife. The heat and humidity also require that one slows down. Riding a bicycle to work and home every day (fairly often in the rain) helps the mental health as well. Some days it gets frustrating but gradually we are/will adjust(ing).

Critter report:

Clarice found a nice place to visit the mosquitoes and had some pretty bumpy legs for a few days. I couldn't figure out what was biting me while I was out on our new hammock until I looked really close at the 1mm long bugs (Shekinah declared them to be sand fleas). A girl at the internet café had a strange, very itchy, rash on her neck – a nurse who has been here for a number of years was sure it was from being touched by a caterpillar (luckily not the really really painful kind or the really really really deadly kind). Shekinah is taking a bit of ribbing after having to be treated for lice this week (I'm sure all of us will have our chance to entertain a colony at some point). We've sworn off Mexican laundry soap after Clarice has a pretty nasty skin reaction to it. I've already noticed a significant decrease in my need for

allergy medication after Clarice attacked the mildew on the walls with bleach solution on Friday. There is a lovely yellow bird that is common and not particularly shy that I need to look up. Snow white egrets are very common – I must have scarred a flock of fifty out of a tree the other day. Speaking of startling flocks of birds, I set a large flock of small parrots of some kind to flying and squawking as I rode to work the other day. Geckos are everywhere and provide entertainment while waiting for food in the cafes. No scorpions yet but we try to remember to shake our shoes and cloths as a prevention to getting stung. The only critters that regularly inhabit the house are tiny ants about 2 mm long. Generally they are very benign and scurry back and forth here and there but let the tiniest speck of food be left ANYWHERE and they will form a major ant freeway by morning. Its interesting to watch them as they must follow the exact pheromone path put down by the initial finder of the food as they all go in the same crooked path that every other ant follows. I also find the leaf cutter ants fascinating. These tiny critters each carry a piece of a leaf about 5/8 inches on a side over there head from some distant place along the ant highway (which sometimes crosses the human roadway) to their underground nest. Why they bypass all of the local leaves I don't know. I have read that the fungus farm that they feed has antibacterial properties. Finally, the fireflies are becoming more and more common and on a dark night grassy areas look like they are decorated with tiny Christmas lights.

January 28, 2004 (Tuesday)

Mom and Dad came on and instant messaged (IMed) us while we were doing some online work at the clinic. Dad was fearful enough of the symptoms he had this weekend that he was willing to have 911 called. (If you don't know my dad – that's a big deal!) Apparently he felt the same as when he had a heart attach a few years back – so far all of the tests are negative but I'm sure they will put him on a treadmill soon to see what's going on.

Mom also asked about finances. We will get \$700 US per month as a living stipend and are pleased to say that even with some "startup costs" we are living well within our budget. We find that many prices in BZ \$ look the same as they would in US \$ but the exchange rate is set at 2:1 so they are really ½ price. On the other hand we have learned to avoid "luxury" items like snack foods which are very expensive. Local availability of goods is sporadic at best. Clarice is currently looking for some baby yarn to replace the yarn that I bought in Belize City then promptly (accidentally) threw in the garbage. We know that the only 4 skeins in Punta Gorda are orange from having looked before but are hoping that the store in Belize City has restocked from the couple of skeins I left them. We frequent the farmers market weekly and get our vegetables there. Meat is available at the local "super" markets in frozen form. I found the house of a local fisherman who sells us a "string" (a palm frond with about a half dozen fish on it) for \$5 BZ to \$10 BZ depending on size of the fish if we arrive at 2 PM on Sunday afternoon. Fresh citrus by the

gunny sack and stalks of bananas are often given to us by the local convent (or they are only slightly more than free at the market). Plantains are for the picking along the roads. We eat out once or twice a week which runs about \$10 BZ each (with tipping NOT common). Telephone service is very expensive so commonly people use a phone card at the pay phone. They have a monopoly phone/internet company that doesn't seem to have the ethics that seemed to guide Ma Bell in the old days. I was concerned when I found out that it will cost about \$120 US/mo for satellite internet service until I found out that we are paying about \$200 US/mo for dial up service now! (We hope to have the system up and running by the end of February). Gasoline is about \$8 BZ / gallon so we use the vehicles judiciously. Diesel is a bit less so diesel vehicles are much more common here.

I went on a mobile clinic yesterday to a Mayan village essentially on the Guatemalan border. The ride out through the Mayan Mountains was beautiful. I'm glad we had dry weather as the road takes a lot of steep ups and downs.

January 30, 2004

We hope to upload this information today so I'll get some final notes written.

Its hard to believe that we've been here a month already. Its been interesting to watch as the med students and short term MD's get ready to leave and are winding down in their thinking while we are just beginning to feel that we might have a plan in place within the next week or two.

Today we had to renew our tourist visas while we wait for our work permits to be processed. On the way back from town we stopped at a roadside park that we've passed many times to go wading. The park is situated in the shade of some mangrove trees and when we took the time to look up we saw a few orchids in bloom and many with flower stalks up to four feet tall that should bloom soon. The water was uncomfortably warm close to shore (until it was greater than about 10 inches deep). It is about 75 degrees in the shade today.

Looking back over the month: Clarice has taken the clinic and pharmacy operations over and is getting them more organized based on the solid foundation laid by the people that went before us. I have gotten comfortable with the role of mobile nurse as I've traded off and been trained by Shekinah. I have a computerized data collection system in place and Clarice and I have beta tested it in preparation for making a final decision if the clinic wants to dedicate the time needed to do the data entry. We have worked to make the house feel like our home. Most importantly we are beginning to have a better comprehension of how the clinic operations work.

This coming month we don't look forward to Shekinah leaving us but understand that she needs to go back to the "real world" for a while and move her life forward. She has become like another God-daughter to us and we will miss her smile and laughter. We do look forward to Patricia's return on Monday when she will accompany the young paraplegic man back from the States.

Its interesting that the idea of staying a year seems shorter and shorter as each week passes too quickly.

February 8, 2004

I just returned from attending the evening Catholic Mass at the local church with Shekinah and her friend as we all were out of town this morning (more about that later). The mass itself was a real treat with a group of three very young men and one young man playing drums and marimbas with all of the music. What really caught me off guard though was the reminder that Valentine's day is THIS WEEK – ALREADY!

Last Saturday we took our first trip to Guatemala. We went for a day trip just to get away and to get a feel for things. The boat ride to Puerto Barrio took about 2 hours and cost \$30 BZ. The boat was scheduled for 9 am so it left at 9:45 (perfectly "on-time" "Belizian Time"). It is best to go from US\$ to Quetzals rather than BZ\$. We only had US travelers checks so we had to stand in line at the bank for 1 hour (the clerk was very pleasant and helpful). The exchange rate was 8 Quetzals to \$1 US. The market was HUGE! The indoor and outdoor stalls covered a large city block with overflow onto the neighboring blocks. Market stalls held everything from consumer electronics to vegetables and meats. We ate lunch and then headed for the immigration office where we paid our exit fee and had our passports stamped for the third time that day. The boat ride back was as pleasant as one could hope for in a 20 ft open boat with about 23 persons on board across open water. Overall we felt that we now "know the ropes" for when we want to return and feel that between the two of us (and our electronic dictionary) we can put together enough Spanish to get by.

The clinic week was very busy as we were effectively down two nurses. Shekinah was out on a walkabout with Fr Ryan and Patricia spent most of here time with the young man she had transported back from the states (who is doing very well both mentally and physically as he readjusts to living in Punta Gorda in his wheelchair but with many new skills he learned in rehab in the States). We greeted a new group of medical students and residents on Monday. It is rather a change as we are now the "long term" staff orienting them to the clinic routines. We are now becoming familiar to repeat patients and Community Health Workers which makes our job somewhat easier as they are more willing to talk and work with us. I found that in the villages a lot

more of the Mayan people are willing to use English as I relax and learn to relate to them and they see me as a familiar face.

Our Anglican Deacon, Tess, came to dinner on Wednesday and we had a nice time reminiscing about boating in Puget Sound and the Gulf Islands. We also discussed work that needs to be done at the church. The building may need to be moved in order to open up the yard space so that a future preschool can function in the new parish center, an old addition to the building that is no longer needed needs to be demolished and a fence needs to be installed. Hmmm – sounds like old times except I still haven't figured out where to find tools to do the work. We are also hoping that a group from the States that has sent a work party in the past will send another group this year.

This weekend we went to Placentia. It is the only mainland village in Belize with "pretty" beach. It is built on a sand peninsula much like Ocean Shores, Washington. The sand is coarse white ground coral but goes on for miles. The town is still recovering from hurricane Iris a few years back but is doing well in general. Historically the town had one town dock from which goods and persons were moved (and probably no overland access). From this dock (now in some disrepair) "Main Street" led into town. Since there were no vehicles in town, Main Street was a path which eventually became "The Sidewalk". Currently there are two north-south streets in town – one of which is a vehicle size street and the other is The Sidewalk (which is literally a 2 or 3 foot wide concrete sidewalk). We pretty much blew our entertainment budget for the next month even though we took the bus up to Independence and the heavily loaded water taxi from there and then shared a bungalow with two of the med students. We went on a dive/snorkel trip on Saturday with the medical students which meant that we had enough people for the operator to have a private boat for our group. We went out to Laughing Bird Caye which is a Belizean national reserve area and international heritage site. We left Placentia in the blazing sun. After 20 minutes we could see that we were moving directly into a tropical rain squall. We stopped at the edge of the squall and put everything in dry storage that needed protection then sped to the Island's beach – jumped out and ran to a thatch roof covered picnic area (and were all soaked to the skin). Within a few minutes the rain let up and the two of us that dive headed back out for a 5 minute run to the edge of the reef and dove into the warm water leaving the rain above. The water was warm enough that I was very comfortable with a lycra dive skin and my cold water hood. The reef was beautiful and we took our time enjoying it. When we ran out of air we surfaced in bright sunshine and joined Clarice and the other people who had been snorkeling off the island for a lunch provided by the dive company. The Island itself only covers about 1 ½ acres. It looks like something right out of a travel brochure even though it took a beating from hurricane Iris. I decided the on island ranger had to have one of the best jobs on Earth. After lunch we dove and snorkeled some more and then headed

home to sooth our sunburns. Today we practiced being lazy in the sun and then headed home as the sky clouded up and it started to rain.

February 13, 2004 Friday

We swear that each week goes by faster and faster. While we still have four nurses I am trying to finalize the programming of our patient data base. I thought I had it up and running and then found several bugs as we started to load patient information. There is still one problem that I haven't got cleared up so I sent a second email to the helpful guy at the CDC website (they distribute the software).

Today my frustration got the best of me as I fought valiantly with one computer without success and reloaded the hard drive on another while the temperature hung around 90 degrees. This was on top of the frustration associated with bringing change to an established system. I know a fair amount about change theory and expected the resistance that is occurring. I am frustrated none the less especially since everyone states that they agree that the change is needed and had input into the process. Clarice finally made a very small comment that broke "the camel's back" and I left in a huff feeling unappreciated.

Later the day took a turn for the better and I heard what is really being said behind my back. Last week we saw "our boat" moored in the river as we rode to town. We were able to contact the owner the next morning who was pleased to talk to other MacGregor 26X owners. He had put the boat in the water a number of months ago in Miami and was slowly making his way around the Caribbean. We were impressed as even when we went up the Inside Passage to Alaska with our boat we had very little open ocean exposure. We were also amazed that someone had accessorized the boat to such a greater extent than ours with radar, water maker, solar panels, wind turbine, and autopilot. On the other hand many of the accessories had failed him along the way and he was unable to get them repaired. He did show us the emergency tiller that had been cobbled together in Cuba for him when his steering cable broke. It is a very clever and easily stored design that we are likely to copy as the steering is a weak point on the MacGregors. In the midst of our MacGregor conversation we found out that there were supposed to be four similar boats in Punta Gorda for rent. We thought we had hit the big time until I finally found the boats and spoke to the owner who has taken them out of the rental market. He hopes to offer them as an incentive to buy lots he is subdividing ("buy a lot – use of boat included"). Sadly as much as they are deteriorated already, I doubt that they will be usable by the time he has a taker on his offer.

Now back to my day getting better. Patricia had told us yesterday that in a conversation with a man in town he let her know that he had access to a

sailboat that needs some work and was interested in having us work on it in exchange for use. Today we stopped in at TIDE to meet him and he looked up and said something to the effect of, "I bet you guys want to go sailing". He took us to the restaurant next store and filled in the details. TIDE (Toledo Institute for ??? and Environment) is a local non-profit conservation group that is quite a going concern supported through donations/grants/etc. from around the globe. They are very proud that the staff is virtually all local people. They own about 40,000 acres of land for conservation, run a tour company, teach the local kids to swim, provide the rangers for a local national park and nature reserve, and do reef protection studies among other things. I have been trying to get my foot in the door at TIDE as they are the only group that dives in the Toledo district. I keep offering to help with their reef studies if they will give me some air and a boat ride. Instead TIDE came to us. He had heard that I am very organized and get things done from several of the people we work with (maybe they're good guys after all – Norman admits, a little embarrassed). TIDE came by the boat a year ago abandoned and has taken possession of it after the required waiting period. When they found the boat it was in sailing condition and the inboard diesel engine ran. Now it has sat for over a year and the engine is frozen (and was worked on a bit by someone who was sent away by immigration). If we can get the boat running/sailing and are willing to teach some of the local kids to maintain it and sail it then we may use it. Tomorrow we will be introduced to the boat and make our survey. He also commented that he really would like to get me involved with TIDE and so I may be helping count groupers next full moon.

Meeting the man from TIDE seems to be part of a trend that we are noticing. I think we have now passed out of the "short-timer category" to the "people we need to live and work with category" locally. It must be understood that Belize is often referred to as a small town – not the town of Punta Gorda but rather the whole country. So in a district like Toledo news travels quickly. We are frequently asked about our work at the clinic by people whom we have not met before. Our travelers checks don't require ID anymore. If I forget my wallet and want to eat at a restaurant I suddenly find that I have credit (a very rare commodity here). More importantly is that patients are starting to recognize that they will be working with us for some time so they are becoming more friendly and forthcoming with the information we need in order to provide good care. We will certainly need to keep our "noses clean" in this environment but there clearly will be payoffs if we do.

Nature report:

We've noticed that more and more flowers are blooming in peoples' yards and the forest. Its pleasant to smell the orange and plumeria blossoms as we ride to work. Usually howler monkeys make their racket late in the evening or at night (imagine lions with sore throats and asthma). This morning they were very loud as we headed out to work so we rode our bikes down and were able to pick out the trees they congregate in. We weren't able

to see the monkeys then or later this afternoon when we went back but I was able (and dressed) to get into the forest a bit as the road had recently been cleared. I can only describe it as a tropical Eden with the vines, hardwoods, palms, etc.. I did see a quash (local name I need to check) crossing the road yesterday – it looked like a raccoon with a really long tail. I've seen two small boa constrictors (the maintenance guy caught the second one and brought it to the clinic). When we were out on mobile last week we checked out the local iguana population. Finally – the Clarice and Norman beasts are responding favorably to their new habitat and exercise routine with improved clothing fit and decreased weight in addition to browning skin.

February 14, 2004 (Saturday AM – St. Valentine' Day)

Had a pleasant gift from Shekinah and Patricia last night – they went and dog sat at someone's house and left us alone from Valentine's Eve. We sat and watched a James Bond movie (with Clarice's dream boy – Pierce Brosnam) that Erin had given us for Christmas and then enjoyed the night together.

As I write this journal I try to include what feelings Clarice shares with me in it but clearly it is generally my thoughts and observations. The next section is an unedited copy of Clarice's journal. Do note that the date format changes part way through – as we have gotten used to the Belizean date format of day/month/year (rather than month/day/year) we are using it more and more. Many of the events she describes have already been included but these are her words:

January 7, 2004 After two days of very little sleep, we spent today, at least the morning, at home. Norman finished constructing the shelves (concrete blocks & raw lumber) in our room so I am a little organized. I slept so soundly last night and feel so good today! Yesterday was a very long day that was ended by a visit to the convent – I met the nuns & novitiates – they are so gentle. - /they're guard dogs are not however. I was bit on the arm by one & clawed all over my back by another. The nuns were very upset about it all. I'm recovering fine, but will not get out of the car again there unless the dogs are restrained!

Had the opportunity to explore town today & found a multitude of things – We bought two bikes so we now have transportation & can go further. We are establishing our goals and roles at the clinic – it will be nice when a little routine comes along.

January 11, 2004 We attended the Anglican Church in town this morning. It was wonderful to attend a service that was comfortable to me. The small congregation were so pleasant & welcoming. Tess, the deacon, is from Vancouver, B.C. I think Norman was amazed at my strong reaction to the service, but the sense of comfort was overwhelming to me.

I redesigned the kitchen shelves – but ran out of bricks and wood. It is exciting to see the fruits of my labor – plus now it's organized – I am in my element. I've made a list of the boards & bricks I need to complete the project. I'll line the dish shelves & violá – a fancy affair.

January 17, 2004

Sunny weather returned for the weekend! We tried out the swimming area near here, in the Bay of Honduras. It's Wonderful – I completed the kitchen shelves and some laundry today. Also managed to wake up with swollen eyes and hives! I think I reacted to the laundry soap. I noticed the agitator on the “washing machine” at the clinic wasn't working earlier in the week – my guess is I didn't get enough soap rinsed out! Norman is discovering all sorts of places and people – he's really enjoying exploring & experiencing all the new surroundings – places & people. I want to explore further afield. I want to see new places around the country.

January 20th, 2004 I rode home from clinic yesterday in a downpour – it was fun being in the rain – It was cool enough to be comfortable and yet warm enough to not be miserable – I was soaked through by the time I made it home. I'm beginning to come up with some information for the Pharmacy that I hope will allow for standardization. The first group of students leave in 10 days – hard to believe! Either I'm in better shape or ?? – The bike ride to the clinic is getting easier!

January 25, 2004 We weren't sure if the weather would hold yesterday or not so decided against a day trip to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala – well, the weather did hold – The boat trip would have been wonderful – maybe next weekend! We rode/walked up to “El Pescador” – a beautiful fly fishing resort – The panoramic view was amazing! You could see the mountains on the Guatemalan border to the west, the ocean to the east & look over the forest canopy. The sunset was a vibrant orange – As we rode home in the dark, the stars, millions of them, were clear and crisp. The new moon with a brilliant Venus was brilliant. We stopped at the clinic and saw hundreds of fire flies glimmering on the ground - all of it made for a quite surreal setting!

31/1/04 Took a day excursion to Puerto Barrios Guatemala – Exit tax Belize \$7.50/Person (\$3.25 US), Boat Trip ea way \$30.00 BZ (\$15.00 US), Exit fee Guatemala \$80 Quetzals (\$10 US) - all costs are per person. But, availability of goods and very low prices were such a treat! The boat ride is about an hour one way – and it was pretty to see the Coastline – Livingston area looked quite nice! Met a couple from Australia that are traveling via backpack. They said Costa Rica was VERY expensive. It felt so good to just get away from it all! It's been slowly getting dryer and warmer. We bought some watermelon slices at the Guatemala market & I saved the seeds to see they'll grow – that melon tasted wonderful!

8/2/04 Spent a wonderful weekend in Placencia – a quiet village that is not near as touristy as Ambergris Caye. Took a trip out to Laughingbird Caye – snorkeling was pretty good – lots of coral damaged by the last hurricane – Definitely a nice break from the routine of P.G.

10/2/04 Oh my the rain last night was amazing – It was like thunder it rained so hard. Another new night sound is the frogs – it sounds like someone gargling, except the pitch keeps changing. Enjoying the fire flies – looks like something from Disneyland!

End of Clarice's notes.

Notes on public journals:

On one hand writing this journal takes some care as I need to always beware that it is a public document on the internet which can be read by anyone. There are days where I would really like to vent through my writing. On the other hand this format forces me to look for the rainbow behind the cloud which can be a very healthy exercise at times.

Culture, Language, Data collection, and Statistics notes:

One of the interesting /frustrating parts of our job is collecting information about our patients. Some examples:

- Asking for a person's last name will always result in them giving their first name (unless they have already given their first name in which case they may give you their current last name or their maiden name or the name they used for a while for whatever reason). I think this has to do with the reality that each town/village only has a handful of last name so they simply have little use. Everyone is known by their first name and culturally don't pay attention to last names.
- Name spelling is a challenge. Many people are illiterate and unable to spell their own names. Previous volunteers (and us) are forced to use creative spelling as many names are unfamiliar to us or made up by the parent. If they can spell then if they are Mayan they are unable to make a very clear difference between an "a" or an "e" when they say the name of the letter. Many names sound very similar to our ears; for example Coc (phonetic Kok with very hard sounds to the k's) sounds very similar to Coch (final sound is made at the back of the throat instead of the front of the mouth). They make the "L" sound in Cal by putting their tongue forward over the lower teeth instead of to the roof of the mouth as we would.
- Mayans don't pay attention to birth dates. Often a parent will not be able to tell you when a child a couple of months old was born. This will result in an interesting situation in the future as the Country tries to combine their developing Social Security system with their medical record system – both systems are assigning random birth dates in

some cases and there is no way to tell if the same person has the same birth date in both systems!!

- This week we saw the statistics put out by the Ministry of Health for the country. We were surprised to find that they show a VERY low infant mortality rate for this district. We suspect that since the government has a very hard time getting people from outlying villages to name or register their babies in a timely manner that many infant deaths may go unreported.
- People may be very untrusting of government people and medical people from our traditions. As an example on her walkabout last week Shekinah came across a child with severe respiratory difficulty. She and the MD with her recommended trying to get the child to the hospital in P.G.. The family initially refused because of travel difficulties and cost (they would have to pay for the bus ride and pampers while they were in the State supported hospital). Our team offered to cover the costs but the family still refused. Finally the translator explained that the family simply didn't "believe in" the hospital. They did accept treatment from our team and followed the advice given them but it is expected that they will also have a village healer look at the child. Our hope is that they will combine the best of both healing traditions and the child will get better.

LATE NEWS FLASH!!!!

We went to see the boat and it is beautiful in our eyes!!!! WOW!! JOY!! EXCITEMENT!!

A driver from TIDE took us about 2 miles to a landing on the Rio Grande (Big River). We waited there for a motor boat with a couple of TIDE survey people and they talked about the crocodile they had seen on the river and the "tiger" (Jaguar) tracks they had seen while we watched a school of mullet swim near the shore. A jaguar sighting is a very rare thing here in a country that prides itself on having the Planets only jaguar sanctuary (they are nocturnal cats). I had figured that to even see a footprint would be a really big deal for me so I asked how far away the prints were (expecting they would be very far upriver in the pristine forest). Our guide walked to some mud about 6 feet away and pointed to a print about 3X4 inches that he had spotted the previous day – WOW!

We rode the motor launch about 1/8 mile down river to where the boat is moored next to a ranger station. When it came into view I kept thinking that I shouldn't get my hopes up as it couldn't really be THAT boat. Yes it was! It is a 34 foot Hunter (year as of yet unknown – estimate 1980's) in MUCH better condition than we expected. We did a quick survey of the boat and then took the mainsail off as it was exposed to the elements and re-rolled the roller furling so that the UV cover was doing its job. We returned to the landing via

the ranger's canoe and arranged to have a pair of kayaks made available at the landing for our use.

Once back to town we looked up the man reported to have worked with the boat before. He filled us in on its somewhat unclear but complicated history. In summation it was found abandoned and it is assumed that the owner went swimming never to return. TIDE has claimed reclamation rights after an investigation was done and title has now been cleared. A visiting Dane worked on the boat and surveyed its needs in 2002 (until he was not allowed back in the country for not renewing his visa). It has a Yanmar engine reported to have salt water damage to at least one cylinder so a rebuild may be required. Other than "confiscation" of equipment during the police investigation and sun/water/time damage there has been little human damage to the boat (it was protected by spreading rumors of "voices" heard on board). Our job now is to clean up the boat (it could be sailed in its current condition) and try to get the engine repaired (which may require trying to find some grant money).

February 18, 2004 (Wednesday – Norman's birthday)

Last Saturday was very hot (we both commented that it was subjectively the hottest day yet) Sunday we put \$50 gas in the truck (6 gallons) so that we could use it for personal touring/exploring. We went looking for places that we had heard about and wanted to check out – some we found and some we didn't but we enjoyed the day in all. We did get to a Mayan ruin very nearby. We had assumed that since it is a "minor" ruin that there wouldn't be much to see but were pleasantly surprised. We were guided by one of the caretakers who was one of the better spoken Mayans I have worked with. We asked about his education (expecting that he had been to high school and possibly some college) and found out that after 4th grade he was taken out of school as he was the oldest son and his father had died. We talked with him about our observation that few Mayans from the outlying villages go beyond primary school and when I even mention high school to the young girls they look as if I'd suggested a trip to Mars. He replied that he would love to send his children (daughters) on but that the costs are prohibitive.

After the Ruins we walked up to Blue Cave. A cavern that is currently filled wall with the waters of blue creek. As it is a major tourist attraction I had expected a developed path to the cave and understood that this time of year it could be entered on foot. The path turned out to involve much rock hopping in the river. The river and the cave are very scenic and worth the trouble although Clarice was forced to stop short of the actual entrance (she could see it easily). I followed another large group to the cave and stripped to my walking shorts and swam in after them for about 100 ft.. Not being a strong swimmer and finding my sandals and the current to be a challenge I decided that I had seen enough for the day and swam back out. When I got back to

the entrance the rain was pouring down and Clarice had already retreated down the path to the porch of a nearby lodge. The trip to the cave was her first outing into the back roads that I travel weekly going to Mobile Clinic and she fully enjoyed the owner we had met in town a number of times. Of the lodges in the area – I think this is the prettiest with the best price. He charges \$50/night for a room that is 2 years old. It would be an ideal setting for someone wanting to get away and read a book in a tropical forest setting. He still hasn't made any money but is getting know in bird watching circles as a great place to visit. He did talk about the army ants that visited earlier in the day – for about 20 minutes billions of them cover everything and eat everything (the villagers love them as they leave a house completely bug free). He says they crawl on the dogs but don't bother them but they will bite humans with a very nasty nip (as in visit the hospital for a couple of days). I need to go now as we are headed to the lodge for my birthday dinner and I'm holding up the crowd. [Just got back from dinner – WOW, what a nice evening. Had, not just the dining room, but the whole restaurant to ourselves (Clarice and I, and Patricia and Shekinah) with a private waiter, and a private chef who has worked with Disney resorts in the past. Got to give a plug here: Tranquility Lodge – MSPENNYL@YAHOO.COM.]

On being missionaries:

I wonder some times if it sounds like all we do is explore and have fun when we should be acting like Mother Theresa. First off – if people had heard the language that I cometh from my mouth this morning when I found that we need to pull 220 charts because the @\$% computer has screwed up the data in cyberspace – you would know its not all fun and games. (Then there was the emergency move of the pharmacy yesterday because of termite infestation.) Anyway here are some thoughts on being a missionary as we move through month #2. We tend to believe that balance helps us mentally – enjoying the good things of Belize helps us tolerate the frustrations. We work hard and we play hard (no surprise to those who know us, I'm sure). Also we are making connections and laying groundwork for the coming year – in what ways I'm not sure but in a society like this connections are everything. When we asked the caretaker at the ruins about his family we demonstrated an honest interest in him, his culture, and his children. I'm sure that if we see him in clinic or ?? he will remember us and some of the barriers will be broken down. When we need technical help in the future I expect that our new contacts at TIDE will be invaluable. Before we came we were given the advice by previous CMMB missionaries that we should expect the first 3 – 6 months to be used in laying the groundwork for our real mission which might not even become clear to us for several months. We were also told not to have any strong expectations of how we would be used. I came expecting to do much more direct patient care but currently we have great patient care people with very poor organizational and computer skills so I'm being a computer nerd for a while and we both are trying to get some operational systems in place.

Part of keeping busy with work and fun is also trying to stave off homesickness/culture shock. We knew it would come and we are now feeling it a bit. It is the feeling that ALL of the materials we have read and everyone we talked to said to expect. It is a feeling of “everything at home is better”, “I miss home”, and “everyone here is driving me crazy – why do they do things in such a crazy way anyway”. So far I’ve begun to manifest the symptoms by having dreams of trying to get home but knowing I’m not supposed to go there – I don’t belong or dream of being stuck in a foreign country and unable to leave (feeling very hollow and with grief when I awaken and find that I am indeed in a foreign country with “no way out” for 10 more months). Clarice admits to feeling homesick and shows it by being intolerant of people in ways that are very unlike her. We are exceptionally eager to hear from home right now (and even computer nerd me finds paper mail to feel like something magical to touch) but know that going home at this point would just make us have to go through the process again when we got back.

February 23, 2004 (Monday)

My data base finally works!!!! I have been working incredibly hard to try to get the data base up and running and some kind of analysis/output program ready for March 1st and its ready!! People kept asking (as they watched me pulling my hair out day after day in frustration) if they needed to keep up the old manual record system “just in case”. I took their comments as a statement of lack of faith in the “promise” I’d made which put me under more pressure to succeed. Anyway – it ain’t perfect (yet!) but with the touch of a button we have enough reports generated to keep the Ministry of Health buried in paper for some time. I did hear that the MD in charge of vital statistics for the entire country is interested in looking at what we have done after he met me while I was taking the classes for the data base. (OK – it’s a small country but it feels good anyway to be known at the national level.)

I spent last weekend working with the satellite internet vendor to get our campus on-line and a Local Area Network up and running. By Saturday afternoon we had the system running smoothly with high speed internet now available through Ethernet and WiFi (wireless) access. I spent the rest of the day Saturday and part of Sunday getting virus software updated and running (and found 3 viruses on the machine that I suspected was “ill”). Exorcising viruses took a couple of hours with LOTS of help from my wonderful son in law the Microsoft computer engineer. Then I updated the operating systems and other software on the Clinic computers so that they should be happy and healthy for a while. Finally I enjoyed some time catching up on seeing what our grandson looks like, looking at photos of Mars and listening to classical music on KING FM.

Our other Sunday project was to visit a village south of town with a major worm infestation. WARNING: The rest of this paragraph includes graphic descriptions that may nauseate non-medical folk! The kids in the village were coughing up and pooping out some major gut worms (identified by the hospital as roundworms) and the missionary minister in the town requested that we see what we could do. He invited us to the church service and I gave a “children’s sermon” (ever notice how the adults listen much better when someone is teaching their children) about how worms get from poop into people and how to prevent it (we medical people can talk about almost anything with a straight face) and then Clarice and Patricia did a more formal talk with posters provided by the Ministry of Health. I was rather pleased with myself that I was able to use a fair amount of Spanish in the presentation so that I think most people got the gist of what I was saying even before the translator repeated the information (this is one of the few Spanish speaking villages in the area). During the rest of the church service families came out one at a time and we gave them medication to take for three days for non-school attending family members (all of the children in school are to be treated by the teachers at the same time). With the help of the minister and the village health worker I think we have a fair chance of success with the program. Also – thanks to a donation through/from CMMB we have plenty of (very expensive) worm medication on hand and were therefore able to attack the problem the day after we were informed of it.

This morning Shekinah left. It took her a couple of days of procrastinating to get on the bus but she wanted to spend some time with her friends in the north of the country before she returns to Los Angeles. I keep walking past her empty room expecting her to be in there but she is not. It’s feels a bit as if another of our own children has left the nest. We expect that she may well return some day but in the mean time we wish her the very best as she moves on with her life. I wish someone had written down the comments she made at her going away party as they reminded us all of why we had gone into medicine and become missionaries in the first place. Her co-workers, employer, boy friend, and family are blessed to have her return to them.

I wanted to send a note of thanks to my boss back at Providence Everett Medical Center. I had sent her an email about the frustration of implementing the new medical records system knowing that she was involved in a similar process back home and would get a chuckle out of the similarities in our dilemmas. She sent back a note that included the line, “Remember you are in ‘manana’ country and not everyone is as engaged as you are.” It felt like I was getting permission to relax a bit and let go of the feeling that I need to always do more as a way of thanking those back home who supported our coming here. It was a right comment at the right moment – thanks Elli!

February 26, 2004

We received a card from a friend of Clarice's today. She had written many questions (some of which I thought had been answered) – but I'll assume that if she asked the questions that others are thinking them.

- 1) Do you have regular work hours and regular days off? Well yes, sort of, pretty much. The Clinic is open on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in the morning and Tuesday evening. Mobiles are scheduled on Tuesday and Thursday. Patricia is in charge of Home Visits and does them 5 to 7 days a week (but that is Patricia's way). So that is the schedule of "must dos" then we add in community education, fixing up the pharmacy, computer work, etc, etc. and we work at least 40 hours a week. With the Internet and data base implementation we have not had a "day off" since the 16th so it all depends. There is no medical records dept, pharmacist, information technology dept, etc. etc. so we have to all pitch in and get done what there is to do.
- 2) What does managing the clinic entail (Clarice)? Clarice does patient intake during clinic hours (in a VERY HOT office). She provides the continuity for the clinic as far as having rotating students and physicians is concerned in that she tells them how we do things, where things are, and answers a myriad of questions. She makes sure that charts are kept up and put away and that computer entries are made. She organizes supplies so that they can be found and are kept from damage (mold, termites, dirt, etc.). As head of pharmacy she keeps the medications organized so they can be found, keeps track of stock, and (tries) to keep them stocked (it is not uncommon to contact 3 suppliers and still not find common drugs in stock).
- 3) What does Norman do? Does he like mobile clinics? I go on mobile clinics twice a week and yes I do enjoy them. I get to enjoy the rain forest scenery and get to work closely with the people in the outlying villages. On the other hand a two hour ride to and from some clinics over bouncy roads and working at a feverish pace when its so hot that my sweat drips on my paperwork and messes it up while 10 people are crowding around my elbow can try my patience. I am now officially declared to be the technical person for the clinic. I am also working with the community educator at the hospital to develop an ongoing education program for the Community Nurses Aids. It doesn't sound like much in print but it sure seems to keep me busy. I have not yet gone on a walkabout but plan to start going with Patricia so I can learn the ropes for when she leaves.
- 4) Not asked but I'll answer anyway – What does Patricia do? Patricia sees about 50 home visit patients. Some of them she sees several times a week and others once a month. This is a program that is well supported by the Punta Gorda Hospital who now refers patients on a regular basis. Patricia also spends a the first week of each month on the trail walking to outlying villages with the local priest. She will see

over 150 patients during that week and works in much the role of a nurse practitioner. She does some community education work and is our main contact with the Catholic Church and its ministries. She is also beginning (via an internet course) to work towards getting her nurse practitioner certification and Masters Degree.

- 5) Is there a physician on staff? Currently yes (and we pray fervently that it stays that way). Historically the clinic operated with MD faculty rotating through the clinic every two weeks with students staying a month. Currently Dr. Nick is the rock that holds the medical staff together. He has been here six months and his current term is up in May (?) – we REEEEEAAAALLLY hope and pray that his term is extended. I can't imagine how we had any continuity prior to his coming. He acts as Medical Director, Liaison with Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW), Liaison with Ministry of Health, Associate Faculty for MCW (supporting the “residents” – MD's but still in training, and checking all of the work and signing for the “med students”), and physician for our patients. We also have faculty members rotate through usually on a 2 week rotation. During February we had an MD placed here as a volunteer by CMMB who was OUTSTANDING and will sorely be missed.
- 6) To Clarice – Is it what you expected? [I'll ask for Clarice to answer]Sort of...I had expected to use more of my nursing skills, but with the students, they don't want the nurse to do much assessment, they need/want to do the whole thing. They want to do all the teaching as well. I now have some people who come just to see the nurse...so then I go full swing and do what I'm good at.
- 7) With nurses leaving are replacements coming? We don't expect a replacement for Shekinah (we are it). We (the clinic staff) feel that a staff of three RN's would be able to maintain the current level of service. We have asked CMMB to start looking for a replacement for Patricia when she leaves the beginning of May – *anyone who is interested should contact CMMB ASAP!*
- 8) Do you have time to really relax and enjoy your new experience? Yes – we make time.
- 9) Are you sharing a home? What's it like? We live in “Mission House” which is a three bedroom concrete block house about 5 miles from the clinic in a subdivision known as Hopeville. The house is rented by the clinic, nurses and physicians are assigned to live here as space is available. We treat community items (food, kitchen duties, etc.) “family fashion” which has worked amazingly well. Our bedroom is pretty much our personal space. Photos of the house are in the photo album posted earlier this week.
- 10) Are you able to communicate well with the people? A very difficult question. Even the people who speak English usually do so as a second language so their accents take some getting used to (we can't put Creole on the admit forms as a primary language because the

government doesn't recognize it as a separate language – but we can't understand it at all and they sure speak it with ease). Mayan people speak two local dialects, Mopan and Ketchi (Q' Echi), and most people who speak one dialect cannot speak with people using the other one (even in the same village). We sort of get by with Spanish as we have had a bit and usually someone in our group will have some Spanish background. Overall, even when translators are available the language barrier can be a real problem and that's without even discussing the cultural barrier.

- 11) What about frustrations like the oven (that doesn't brown things) and the wash machine which is a glorified ringer machine (it has a wash tub with an agitator and a second spin tub)? We came not even knowing if we had electricity or not or if we would have a bed or a shack to live in. We are happy as clams that we have the resources and comforts that we do have. When you live in an environment where our standard of living is upper middle class with our concrete block house and not having to wash cloths in a bucket in the back yard it just seems pretty normal. It does require a change in time sense – things that used to take an hour take a day, half day jobs take three days and a week equals a month. If we need to take an hour at clinic to do laundry then that's just the way it is.
- 12) The shower sounds like fun.....? Do you really need warm water? When we got here the municipal water was pretty cool and the weather was "cool". I hated the cold showers and even Clarice had to admit they were not something to look forward to. On the other hand it was about 95 degrees today and a cooler shower felt good after a swim in the bay (Clarice usually turns the heater off now).
- 13) We keep being warned that the "dry season is coming" when it will "get really hot". It is not dry and hot like the Arizona desert but it has not been real humid either. We do look forward to cold fronts and rain as they help keep things cool. We'll see how things develop as time goes on.

February 29, 2004 (Sunday, Leap-day)

We watched the last group of medical students and our CMMB MD leave last Friday, just as they were getting the lay of the land and gaining comfort in the environment. They were a really good group and we were sorry to see them go. Today I met two of March's crew when they flew in. It will be a bit hectic for the next few days as Patricia and one of the residents will be on a walkabout for the week, we start the week with a new MD and medical student and our clinic director is gone to Belize City for a couple of days. Then when things usually get sort of in place on Wednesday we'll have another couple of students arrive.

A cold front came in on Friday and it has rained on and off since then (there seems to be a pattern developing of a couple of torrid days just before the “cold” arrives). We had an American MD and his RN wife and a German RN and her son visit us and stay in Mission House for Friday night. They were really nice people and we enjoyed the company and having a 2 year old around. The MD expressed some frustration that as a general surgeon specializing in burn victims he had come planning to do some skin graft work. Sadly his dermatome (device for removing the donor skin) was never cleared out of customs so after giving up 3 months of his time he felt he was able to do very little. He had met another surgeon that finally packed up and left in similar circumstances. It is common (and somewhat expected) that in third world countries the “establishment” may not appreciate (or in fact disdain) the fact that “those fancy Americans are showing off again”. It can be a VERY frustrating part of the work and serves to deny health care to the “voiceless” poor who need it most.

On Saturday we were finally able to get back out to the sailboat. TIDE leaves a kayak chained to a tree for us to paddle down to the boat. The ride to the landing where the kayak rests is about 2 miles or more away mostly down a dirt road. We rode our bikes back after we had gotten a lift down and were covered with mud by the time we got home (Clarice had about ¼ in thick mud on her fanny). I determined that indeed the motor is frozen solid and set about preparing to move it. I had borrowed the best tools I could get my hands on but even then the final 3 bolts refused to turn when the open end wrench sprung open over the flats. Clarice washed up some of the woodwork and it looked a lot better inside by the time we left.

Along with our internet satellite package we were sold a “phone” to use with the computer. It got delivered and we got it up and running and lo and behold we can now call the States for 5 cents a minute. We called my parents and our kids (it was great to hear their voices) along with our friends John and Grant. The voice quality is good but you have to get used to waiting about 3 seconds for the response to come back. The difference in price makes it possible to call home for more than special occasions and emergencies. Sadly – most phone cards don’t work through the BTL phone monopoly.

After writing the questions and answers that open this section I wanted to go more in depth about some of my (our) impressions at this point in our stay.

- We are very comfortable with our standard of living primarily because it meets our needs and we would feel “out of place” if we lived as we do in the States. It is rather eye opening to realize how

many of our “needs” have much more to do with “keeping up with the Joneses” than they do with comfort.

- I have an interesting gut reaction when I walk in many of the homes we visit or the Mayan houses. When I see the houses from the outside I know intellectually that they are homes and accept them as such but when I walk into them I feel like I am walking into a barn or a camp or a child’s “fort” or something – anything but not a house where people live day after day and year after year. It is very hard for us to accept that 16 people can/do live in a single room about 20 feet by 30 feet with an open fire and a dirt floor and gaps every 6 inches in the wall with chickens and pigs and sit on five gallon buckets. And yet it seems so normal to them that they go about their daily lives with few complaints. (We warn the “newbies” ahead of time to keep a straight face and not stare or comment on the “shabbiness” lest they offend our hosts who are showing us their very best.)
- We live among tremendous poverty but since we have gotten to know the people it doesn’t seem like how we imagined poverty to be. I sometimes feel like when I hear talk of the poverty of the third world people are talking about another place, after all we have electricity (until there is a lightning storm) and drive around in a car (until we can’t find a spare part or we can’t afford the gasoline or the station runs out of gas), on paved roads (except for the unpaved ones with lots of potholes or the paved ones that are being worked on for months on end), have access to a cash machine (if it has cash) and can speak the official language (which is seldom spoken except when talking formally. It’s embarrassing to be missionaries here – missionaries go to impoverished places where they never see other Pale (White) folk (there are lots of volunteers here with various agencies as well as people who have moved here from the States).
- I still feel strange referring to myself as a missionary. I think I still have visions of Mother Theresa having to beg to keep herself fed. I have to remind myself that Clarice and I are “giving up” a \$100,000 combined salary and a year of “the comforts of home” and most significantly a year of watching our grandson grow. On the other hand we are getting the opportunity to live in the Caribbean with palm trees and orange blossoms and warm ocean water and parrots and magical underwater scenery and real Mayan villages, and, and, and. I expect missionaries to spend all of their time teaching, instead I spend it all learning. I expect missionaries to be “perfect” people and I am well aware of my many faults. Finally, I still hold the image of missionaries trying to change the beliefs of everyone to the beliefs they hold (and there are a lot like that here) - an image I can’t put myself into. So today when I told the

incoming students that I was a missionary I still wondered who I was talking about.

- I wondered when we came what we would miss. Here is my list at this point: Visits with my children and grandson (and friends), Chocolate (they grow lots of Cocoa here and ship it all to Britain – we get the stuff that had been soft so many times that it has crystallized), a movie theater with current movies, a Jumbo Jack burger, COLD water (it feels like summer and my mind keeps telling me its time to go to the Cascade mountains and drink the fresh snow melt), quality tools when you need them, and finally a really good Starbucks chocolate mocha.
- The thing I'm really enjoying being away from is the stress of my job at the hospital – I'm sure Clarice would agree about her job. It will be very strange to go back to but I do miss my co-workers.

March 9, 2004 (Tuesday)

We spent last weekend at Placentia as we found out on Thursday that Baron Bliss Day which is on the calendar as today (Tuesday) is celebrated on Monday so we had a three day weekend. (Belize trivia: Baron Bliss – Portuguese nobleman who left his fortune to Belize – the Belize City lighthouse is also named for him.) We took the bus up on Saturday and played in the water, read in the hammock and generally enjoyed the rest of the day. On Sunday I went SCUBA diving and Clarice went on a tour up the Monkey River. Monday we awoke to a cloudless sky then went for breakfast and the sky darkened and it poured then it was clear again in time for our 10 AM ride in the open water taxi – typical Belize. I did remember to look at my thermometer this time when I was under 85 feet of water – it read 75 degrees (80 on the surface). I dive here in my Lycra dive skin and neoprene hood and I am quite comfortable. It is so neat to be free of 35# weight belts (I wear 12# here) and bulky suits.

The students did trickle in during the week but it all worked out. Monday was a slow day at the clinic then Tuesday which I was most worried about facing with a limited staff we were grounded by a fuel tanker strike and no diesel in our vehicle. One girl came down by bus with her father from her brother's wedding in Cancun. He stayed with us for one night while he recovered from a cold and was a very pleasant house guest. Another student's brother and fiancé arrived yesterday but I haven't met them yet and the MD's wife and kids were to arrive this evening. Seems to be family week at the clinic.

When I presented the output of my labors for the data base program for the month of February I was told it wasn't enough. The problem was that I didn't know how to make the program work essentially beyond its design capabilities until the CDC help desk sent me a suggestion. I worked on

programming until my computer battery gave up while swinging in the hammock on Saturday then again last evening. It felt good to see the solution to the puzzle suddenly appear. Today we tried the programs with last month's actual data and everything worked with a minimum of tweaking – I think I can FINALLY move beyond this project!

Today 6 people were seen at the clinic while it was closed then Clarice had to turn away 6 more as the doctors were out on home visits. This evening when they were open they saw 17 patients compared to the usual 4 they see on Tuesday. We had a full day in our mobile clinic in a Pueblo Viejo; a village where I had only passed through before. It is one of the villages in the Maya Mountains and the scenery is fantastic. The village CNA (Community Nurses Aide) was very bright and helpful and had a high school education as did a couple of the patients. I mentioned later to the village police officer that the town seemed to value education more than some I had visited. He said that about 10 or so kids were attending high school but the limiting factor was the availability of funding as it is fairly expensive by local standards to pay tuition, uniform and book fees.

March 12, 2004 (Friday)

I've spent the morning at home preparing my questions and thoughts for our staff meeting this afternoon. We have been given notice that MCW will continue to send us funding (for now) but that they are not going to send us students after June. It is clear that a major transition of the clinic is now forced upon us. I hope that we can make this an opportunity and will be able to build on the mission of the clinic. I honestly believe that based on what I know of the history of Jericho Foundation and how we feel about our being here that God "wants" the clinic to succeed and that is a pretty significant source of backing. On the other hand I'm not sure that God will make it "easy" for us and expect that the next few months will be physically and emotionally trying. (If you've been looking for a specific place to aim your prayers – how about asking for some guidance for everyone involved in the Clinic and its mission.)

Sadly for Clarice and I this comes at a time when I think we were both starting to feel like we had a "plan" for the staffing changes we could foresee. Oh well – rule #1 in mission work: Always expect things to go afoul of what you plan. (Rule #2: When things are gexpect things to go afoul of what you plan. (Rule #2: When things are going well – refer to Rule #1.)

LATE BREAKING NEWS BEFORE POSTING!!!!

Clarice rode her bike in this morning while I got some work done at home. She just told me that a jaguar crossed the highway about 20 feet in front of her!! Not sure how she felt at the time but she's pretty excited now.

March 20, 2004 (Saturday)

Today we stayed home most of the day – I had been “trying” to get a sinus infection for about a week and Clarice demanded that I “lay low” for a couple of days. I find this a bit hard as even at home I get bored easily and here boredom can be a real problem. The good news is that we received several packages late last week and a couple of them contained recreational reading materials (I’ve already finished the novel by Jimmy Carter I had my mom send and am working through *Ladies Home Journal* (OK – I’m desperate!)).

Last week we were able to finish our Tuesday mobile clinic fairly early and so the students asked to stop at a local waterfalls/swimming hole. We all jumped off the 10 ft falls into the pool below and thoroughly enjoyed the chance to refresh ourselves. The Thursday mobile was a disappointment. We normally go to a pair of smaller villages on the third Thursday and are expected as the Clinic tries to establish a regular pattern that the villagers can depend upon. On arrival at the first village the village health worker informed us that a clinic had been held two days before by another group (and in fact no one showed up after we had driven an hour to get there). We try to work closely with the Ministry of Health and with other volunteer groups to maximize the use of the scarce health care resources here and it is frustrating when others play by a different set of rules. I suspect that another religious group brought down a group of medical people to hold clinics in the remote villages and didn’t check to see if they could coordinate with established groups such as ourselves. I expect they returned home feeling they had done great things but they could have done a much better job if we had worked together (we now have no idea if they saw people who need follow up or gave out medications that require monitoring or might not be available commonly in Belize). We do often hear of groups bringing specialists or surgical teams down and then look at our list of patients that need those skills and refer patients to them. Clarice is currently working with an ophthalmologist who will be bringing down a laser as an example.

Last evening was the Feast of Saint Joseph and so Bishop Romero came down and held mass in our little mission (St. Joseph’s). He is a very personable and humorous person and we enjoyed getting to meet him. We had another “small world” moment at the service when we met a priest who had served at the mission in the past and had flown down for the occasion from his home parish of St. Catherine’s Ontario just a skip away from where Erin got married before we left.

Speaking of small world moments; I have been trying to get a chance to meet one of the health care workers who, I am told, is very influential in his Mayan community. When we stopped by his house a young Caucasian woman was there. She introduced herself as from Washington State and was surprised

when I pushed to find out exactly where – turns out she is from Kenmore. She is here as part of a 3 month program where she spent 1 month studying marine ecology, 1 month studying forest ecology, and was in her final month studying cultural ecology and living with the Mayan family was part of that experience. It sounded like a really neat program – and if her parents read this know that she looks and sounds like she is doing very well.

March 23, 2004 (Tuesday)

Yesterday at the Monday clinic Clarice and crew saw 37 people – clinic ended up running 2 hours over. I went with two of the students to a village event designed to highlight aspects of good nutrition using locally grown foods. The event was started by PLENTY a group that works with local schools and people to teach them how to garden effectively (a 20 acre slash and burn site can be replaced by 6 acres of ground if materials are allowed to rot/compost). Our students did a presentation on general nutrition concepts to a very receptive audience while I wandered around and learned about locally grown cocoa and fast composting (trick – add molasses and bread yeast). The day ended with a HUGE village feast cooked up by the demonstration cooks during the day.

Today we went to one of the outlying villages for our mobile clinic. It rained all last night and was raining some when we left. I noticed that several stream beds were dry, or nearly dry, that had always had water in them before when we were on our way in. It poured all day so that by the time we left the water in the same stream beds that had been nearly dry was moving 6 inches OVER the road with a fast flow.

I kept thinking I would crow if I ever reached 200 pounds again (I can't recall the last time I weighted that much – I'm usually 215 – 220 #). On Monday the scale said I was there. Clarice continues to lose weight as well and needs/gets to go off her blood pressure medication (she decided to check her pressure when she was getting dizzy standing up). I was checking a blood pressure gauge on myself today and when the pressure read the same as it had when I was in junior high we decided to check with a second gauge – they both agreed. I guess there is something to be said for forced bicycle riding daily, forced low fat diets, too hot to eat, and decreased stress.

March 24, 2004 (Wednesday)

I didn't know if I dared insert the hot PG news before our friends John and Laurie came or not but here goes (John and Laurie: skip this part!). On Saturday when a group of the medical students were out on a boat ride they were the first ones on the scene on a Tropic air crash in the bay. The pilot was alone and had swam to shore by the time they arrived. This evening they had towed the plane near shore and were getting ready to salvage it.

I was riding my bike back from watching the plane get towed in and stopped by a neighbors yard who has several acres of grass (he owned one of the local bus companies). There were hundreds of fireflies out making quite a scene (they seem to come out after the rain).

Today I took some photos of the clinics maintenance man's new baby. Dad was pretty excited both to be able to share them with his sister in the States and to print them out – I think they are the first photos he has. (Hopefully Dad will let me post them on the web page in the future as he's a pretty cute baby.)

(10:00 PM)

Clarice and I just finished having one of our "movie nights" having watched Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon on the computer screen. I wanted to take a minute and TRY to describe the night sounds coming through our window screens. While some nights are fairly quiet, and others primarily filled with human sounds (music from scratchy speakers, crying babies, diesel trucks, honking horns, unhappy dogs and fighting cats) tonight is a night of the jungle. I think that the recent rain has brought out every kind of night noise there is. The volume is so loud that at times while watching the strange, haunting film that is Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon with Yo Yo Ma's violin in the background I thought that the sounds coming through the windows (and at times overwhelming our amplified speakers) was part of the movie. There is the foreground sound of at least a million fairly high pitched frogs that pulses louder and softer several times a minute accompanied by the background rhythm of some other creatures making throbbing throat sounds. Occasionally a barking gecko will start chirping to add to the symphony and of course there are always a few calls from the pigeons on the roof next door. A rooster has now decided to practice for tomorrow morning since he couldn't sleep anyway. The two sounds that I haven't heard yet tonight are that of the howler monkeys (but they would have to be quite close to be heard at all over all the racket that is here now) and the sound of a rainstorm beating down on the tin roof over our heads. I've heard of someone recording the sounds of Belize and amazing friends back home at how loud it can be – curiously we have already adapted so well to it that we should both sleep well tonight with our jungle lullaby.

March 25, 2004 (Thursday)

I thought it might be interesting to try to relate a random "typical" day so today I tried to make mental notes as I went along. So here goes "A Day In Our Life in Punta Gorda":

I listen and vaguely hear the morning sounds outside of our screens. The pigeons are cooing, and the rooster is crowing so that makes it after 5:30. The dogs haven't really started yet and only a few of the neighbors cars have started so its not yet 6:00. I drop back into semi sleep. Clarice climbs out of bed and there is light through the shutters so it must be about 6:15 – I'll sneak a few more winks while she uses the bathroom. When I get up at 6:30 Patricia is long gone on her way to morning mass at the convent and Clarice is already eager to get on the road. (Darn "morning people" anyway!)

At 7:00 we climb on our bikes and head out. I take a quick run down to take a photo of the airplane and am surprised to find that it is already up off the beach – the watchman asks that I not photograph it. I try to take note of the different birds on the way to work – I'm sure I see more than 20 varieties on a single trip but I'm not enough of a bird watcher to ever know if the yellow one with the black around his head is different than the other little yellow one or not and they move so fast I have to pretty much guess at the number. I can't even begin to count the different bird calls I hear as they all run together in a calliope of sound. I try to watch each day to see if more flowers are in bloom – today I see lots of orange bird of paradise type flowers, red bouganvilla (sp?), lavender colored flower covered trees, and plumeria but few orange blossoms. Clarice and I ride pretty much evenly – talking at times and then moving apart as I go up hills faster and she goes down hill faster. I have grown to enjoy these morning rides together. We pass a number of kids and adults on their way to school and town on foot and bicycle or waiting for the bus and we all nod and wave as we pass. Clarice rides in more often than I do and she has a regular fan club of workers and children along the way. She looks forward to the two little boys about 4 years old that wave their little arms off as she passes – sometimes they are dressed or sometimes they are still taking their outdoor bath - today we don't see them at all. The man on the motor bike is already riding in rather than brushing his teeth on the front porch so we must be a little later than usual. Finally we get to the clinic (which is named "Hillside" for a reason) and walk the last hill to cool off.

Today is a mobile clinic day. I will go on the mobile while Clarice stays at the clinic and organizes the pharmacy, makes phone calls, and gets paperwork caught up. Normally we would go to a small village on the Southern Highway on the last Thursday of the month but I found out on Tuesday that they had a medical team two days ago – it hardly seems worth the drive. Martha, the clinic manager suggested yesterday that we divert to a village south of town that has been asking for us to add them to our schedule. She was to try calling into the village on the one village cell phone and then we would decide this morning what course to take. I call her at home and we decide that even though she can't get a call through we will go there anyway. I make some quick changes to my box of supplies to accommodate the change in plans and we load the Toyota Land Cruiser and head out.

The village is about ½ hour south of town and it is a pleasant drive on a dirt road in good condition. The village itself is situated along a river and is a very pretty setting. On arrival we do our usual and “honk the village” (go through the village honking the horn) to let people know we are there. I talk to the mission pastor’s wife and she agrees that the best place to set up is in the village’s church. While part of the group of students sets up the clinic I take another part of them to the village school – the principle is very pleased at their offer to teach a health topic and they start an impromptu teaching session about nutrition. Back at the church villagers have started to show up but the group of students have grown very independent as the month has progressed (sadly they leave tomorrow) and very willingly run the clinic with very little help from me. At about noon we decide to close up the clinic after seeing about 19 patients but we have a problem – a young woman needs a medication that we don’t have for a leg rash so we decide to take her out to the Punta Gorda hospital and try to get it there (her dad is in town and we will try to get her a ride back with him).

In town we stop at the hospital and find that the medication is not available – I am able to phone Clarice but she doesn’t have the medication either. I’m frustrated that we didn’t cross paths with the girl’s father yet either as I would hate for him to drive clear out to the village and then have to come back to town for her. She and I walk to the ice cream parlor while the rest of the group goes to see Martha’s house for a minute. We figure that her dad has a pretty good chance of passing the ice cream parlor as there are only a couple of roads in town. The group takes “forever” to get back to us – it turns out they had a flat tire. Everyone takes time for lunch and we get some photos of the rash to email to a doctor in the States to confirm our diagnosis. The girl then goes on her way to where she had arranged with her mother if we didn’t find her dad. We do cross paths with Patricia doing a home visit and ask her to watch out for the girl’s dad as well.

On the way back to the clinic we try to make a home visit only the caregiver for the patient doesn’t speak English and hasn’t been warned that the doctor might stop. The doctor decided it wasn’t worth trying to explain so we moved on.

At the clinic I wrote an email to a doctor in the states and sent the photos of the rash to see if we can get a confirmation of the diagnosis – this is a potential major use of the satellite internet connection and I’m excited to see if this will work. Clarice and I then started to ride home and ran into the girl’s father on the highway – we discussed our plan with him and made sure he knew where to pick up his daughter. The ride home was into a stiff head wind but at least it wasn’t terribly hot. We took a side trip to see what was up with the airplane – they were starting to tear it down for transport and the insurance adjuster was there. It was interesting seeing the plane through his

eyes as we walked around it. I'm still impressed at how intact the airframe was after the water landing.

It was a muggy afternoon and we stayed home and read and did some computer work. Clarice made a nice dinner of chili and corn bread after I ran to the little store in our neighbors' back room a block away to get some eggs. After dinner I walked down to the dock at the bay and enjoyed the cool sea breeze. When I got home Patricia was driving in having spent the afternoon doing homework on the internet at the clinic. Clarice is now asleep and I will be soon.

Such is a day in the Caribbean.

March 29, 2004 (Monday)

Friday the last of the March students and doctors left and the first one of the April students arrived. Since he will be the only one here for a week we offered that he stay in the extra room at Mission House (even when there is a group of students they often feel isolated in the dorms at the clinic).

Saturday we had a work party at the Anglican Mission as we prepare for the arrival of our "permanent" priest and his wife. The student that is staying with us offered to help and we got a fair amount done by noon.

Gibnut Hunt: Early Sunday morning I awoke to REALLY loud howler monkey noise. I decided that if I was ever going to get a good fix on which trees they hang out in it was going to have to be in the early morning when they are most active/noisy. We get a fair amount of light in our room from the streetlights so I didn't realize that it was only 3:30 AM until I was fully awake and dressed. I headed out with my very bright dive flashlight and a headlamp and was pleased at how comfortable the outside temperature was. I'm not sure if the monkeys were moving or if it was that the sound carries so far but they turned out to be down a forest road across the highway. I think there must have been two troops arguing over territory. The night was beautiful with zillions of stars. I walked down the road a ways being VERY careful to shine my light ahead and watch for snakes and I really didn't want to meet Clarice's jaguar when he/she was out hunting. I was shining my bright light ahead and saw a reflection – something was staring back at me – and it was REALLY big. I've heard that you shouldn't run from a jaguar so I started to back down the road – only I wasn't sure a snake hadn't come onto the road while I was walking forward so I turned and checked. I looked back and what ever it was still was watching me. Sensing that something was amiss the other thing turned on his headlamp that had been reflecting my light. I walked up to the guy and he explained that he thought I was his buddy that he was waiting for and told me they were hunting gibnut. Now I know what gibnut is – it's a large rodent considered to be a delicacy here (although the queen of

England was not quite as enamored with it when it was served to her) but I've yet to see one in the wild. Initially I declined the offer but after a minute I decided that I would probably never be asked again to go on a gibnut hunt at 4 in the morning so I tagged along. By then the monkeys and quieted down and it was very quiet walking in the warm starlit night. We never did find a gibnut nor did I hear their shotgun go off after I left them but it was an interesting night. At 4:30 I climbed back in bed and Clarice was pretty surprised when I told her the story the next morning.

Sunday afternoon the student and I rode the 3 miles or so to where our sailboat access kayak is locked up then paddled down the river to the ranger station. At the ranger station a couple of young boys offered to be our guide and lead us down the trail to the bay. It was a pretty neat walk through the jungle on a good trail for about 1.5 miles to a very secluded beach area. I think Clarice and I will try to get down there with our tent in the future. Needless to say I slept like a rock last night.

Today Dr Nick came back from the States where he had been meeting with the folks at Jericho Road and MCW. The good news is that private donations have been lined up which will help keep the clinic running well for the foreseeable future especially when combined with the income from our teaching activities. We are also looking forward to working much more directly with the student selection process and expect to take it over in the near future. On the down side this does mean that we need to work very hard over the next weeks/months getting the systems in place to be able to make the application process work well over the internet.

March 30, 2004 (Tuesday)

I hope to post this today so I wanted to get a small blurb in before we went to clinic (this will be Clarice's first day on mobile due to our short staff – I think she is fairly excited to get out and see the countryside. Previously we have been concerned that the mobile van is so crowded that she would end up with her artificial hip aching from being stuck in one position for up to a couple hours at a time.

I was lent a book yesterday by a neighboring missionary. He and his wife (and 8 of their 11 children) are part of a missionary training program. The book is "Serving as Senders" by Neal Pirolo. The book is designed to be a guide for the crew behind the missionaries before they leave, while they are on mission and after they return. It suggests that as part of a mission project there should be a designated crew of about 8 support people for each missionary. I wish I had read it before coming down but luckily we did arrange an informal group with many of the suggested functions. I wanted to take a minute and formally thank some of those people:

- Erin Lyttle CPA (our daughter) for seeing to it that our bills get paid and taxes filed.
- Paul Lyttle for being my Microsoft rep over the net when I have software problems
- Bryan and Elise Gregory for keeping us in touch with our grandson – this keeps Clarice functioning!
- John and Laurie Gray for making sure things we need get here, for taking care of the car that was at the repair shop for three months, for sending caring/thoughtful notes when we need words of encouragement, and for being willing to change their long held 25th anniversary plans from Hawaii to Belize.
- To our parents for keeping us in their prayers and sending letters and updates on our families and neighborhoods. A special thanks to Kelly for being willing to work on our rental house to keep it functioning.
- To Clarice's brothers and sisters who are always available to trouble shoot problems for us and who keep us tied in with family events as best they can.
- To St. John's church family for keeping us in their prayers and sending us letters and notes of encouragement.
- To Brown's Point United Methodist Church for keeping us in their prayers and letting us know we are not forgotten by putting us in their news letter.
- To my mentors Ellie and Patricia Bentz who keep giving me permission to slow down and smell the roses and give suggestions on how to cope along the way.
- To Clarice's friends who email regularly with "girl talk" stuff and just enough about what is going on at her employer at home so she doesn't start thinking its always better there.
- To the people who send us books and magazines so we have evening entertainment.
- Finally to everyone else I forgot to mention

Final thoughts about things we miss. Friends to just talk to (I would love to wander by Ray Pynski's shop and see how things are going just for the friendship). Spring in the Northwest (I keep wondering how our rhododendrons are doing that we planted last year and have the daffodils in Mt. Vernon started to bloom yet).

Final thoughts about how we are doing emotionally. I think I am coming out of the expected (but not enjoyed) emotional drop that is common to missionaries at about this point in their travels. I think Clarice is still "gutting it out" but I expect that she will do better before long. We will take the week after Easter as a vacation and then the last week of the month off with the Grays which will give her/us a much needed respite.

April 18, 2004 (Sunday)

We just returned from a week of vacation so I have some catching up to do on my log.

Just before we left we met our relief nurses at the airport and I got a glimpse of how our perceptions are slowly but clearly evolving. When the incoming staff got off of the 14 passenger prop plane they immediately wanted to have their pictures taken in front of the quaint little plane. Again when we loaded them and their luggage in the back of the clinic pickup they wanted a photo to show the way they had to travel here. I thought back to when we came and, yes, we also have photos of the quaint little plane but now this all seems so normal and everyday that it seems funny that they would see it as unusual at all. It struck me then that we had not seen a jet aircraft since January 1st when we came to the country – none on the ground (during our vacation we did see some parked), none flying over at low level approaching a nearby airport, and not even contrails at 35000 ft.. The real shocker was when I took Clarice to see the tourist village in Belize City. The tourist village with two 3000 person cruise ships in is somewhat akin to Alderwood mall two weeks before Christmas. Clarice, who has not been out of Punta Gorda since January 3rd was stunned just watching the “American” people. It makes us realize that getting back to the States in December will certainly make us feel a bit out of place.

We left for Belize City on Good Friday morning to begin our vacation. I had checked with the bus company the evening before and was assured that while there would be a very limited schedule the next day that there would be a 6 AM bus. At 7:30 AM we gave up waiting and walked into town from our bus stop to the main station only to find it locked up. We ended up walking to the airport and hopping on an airplane to get the trip started.

One of the really nice things that occurred during our vacation happened partially due to some obnoxious mosquitoes on Good Friday evening. We had found the beginning of a procession that was to lead to an outdoor ecumenical service sponsored by a number of Christian churches in town. The beginning of the procession was in a small park and the mosquitoes were thick. We haven't had any real mosquito problems since we've been here and the day had been very hot so we left our long sleeve and long pants and repellent in the hotel room. Out of necessity I asked the first person I saw with repellent if we could borrow some. It turned out that the foreigner (interesting how we are starting to perceive of ourselves and others) with the repellent was with a college group that had come down for their Easter break to do a mission project. We discussed the problem that we were facing of everything being closed for the holiday weekend including restaurants. They suggested that we join them at the Radisson which was having a seafood buffet and so we did. We ended up really enjoying their company and they

seemed to appreciate that they had some long term missionaries as guests to answer their many questions. We also were taken aback at the variety of foods available to eat (it made us realize how limited our culinary choices are here in Punta Gorda) and REALLY enjoyed the meal. We appreciated that they invited us to their end of the day reflections and were very surprised when they picked up the bill for our dinner. This was the closest thing we were to have to a “family” Easter dinner and I will always feel gratitude to the group for including us.

Saturday we took the inexpensive water taxi to Caye Caulker since we hadn't been there before and wanted see it before we brought our friends out in two weeks. I found it nice and much more laid back than the more touristy Ambergris Caye and Clarice fell in love with the place.

Sunday we walked to early Mass at the historic Anglican cathedral in Belize City. On the way we were stopped by one of the many many beggars we were to encounter in Belize City. What stuck me about this man was that his story was that he had acquired HIV/AIDS through a blood transfusion and had found himself then to be an outcast on the streets. The sad thing is that I have good reason to believe his story is true as people with HIV/AIDS are often ostracized here. We usually don't give to the beggars for fear of appearing as an “easy mark” and will often use my “mock pidgin English” to convince them that we really do live here but in this case I gave him the coins in my pocket. He later met us on the street and acted appreciative of what little we had given. It is I who felt bad that I hadn't given more especially on Easter. I never did see any evidence of a kitchen being opened for the poor or any other accommodation being made for them on the holiest of Christian holidays. Perhaps I didn't look in the right places but it saddened me and left me with some feelings of guilt that we with resources were not doing more.

The service at the cathedral was lovely. I had hoped that we might have someone offer to take us home to Easter dinner but as we often do on such as holiday – I'm sure they all assumed that everyone *must* have plans. I mention this as a reminder and a bit of a promise to try to remember in the future at my church that such an assumption may be wrong and there may be travelers visiting us without any place to go for the holiday.

On Monday we caught a bus to St Ignacio near the Guatemalan border. The town is set along a running river on a hillside. The town is very picturesque and we enjoyed our time there.

Tuesday we crossed into Guatemala and after arranging a hotel in the town of Flores set off to the Tikal National Park. I'm not sure which was best the Maya ruins rising far above the jungle floor or all or the plants and wildlife in the preserve. We saw two kinds of monkeys and a number of birds including flocks of parrots and toucans. We had heard that this was a “don't miss it”

place to go and were not disappointed. We got back to Flores early enough to go to the shops and pick up some weavings for much less than we would get them here in Belize and Clarice was especially pleased with the quality.

The other highlight of our trip was a resort on the Hummingbird Highway in an area with lots of caverns. Luckily they gave us the Belizian residents discount otherwise I'm not sure we could have enjoyed it as much. Our "house" was a screened in bungalow in a jungle garden. Evening and night lighting was provided by tiki torches and kerosene lamps as the generator went off at 6 PM. We had a queen size bed with no springs pushing through the mattress. It was incredibly comfortable and romantic.

We spent the final two nights in Placentia and realized how many people we have gotten to know as we kept running into people from Punta Gorda who would stop us to say "hi".

We are now back in Punta Gorda and will spend the next four days with the clinic before meeting our friends from Everett and taking the final week of our vacation.

My big project this week will be to try to get significant progress made on getting a new web page up for the clinic. We are moving from having our students placed by the staff at the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) to accepting applications and doing placements from here via the internet. This change needs to occur fairly quickly and we need to have a web presence in order to effect the change and I have gotten the task of making the web presence happen. We expect that this arrangement will work much better for the clinic in the long run. While we keep our association with MCW, which is very important to us, we also gain a lot of independence in choosing our own path.

May 1, 2004 (Saturday)

We had a tearful goodbye yesterday as we sent our very close friends, John and Laurie, on their way back to Belize City to catch a plane back to Everett. We had a wonderful week visiting many of the places with them that we had "scoped out" when we toured a couple of weeks ago. They had toted down 3 duffle bags of supplies for us and the clinic including some high quality tools. We presented the tools to the two maintenance guys (brothers) at the clinic and it was like they were stunned. They touched the metal sockets and ran their fingers over the smooth, unruined, quality finishes and then plugged in and ran the drill motor to feel its power. I don't think either of them had ever had the chance to use new, quality tools before. I've looked forward to getting the tools to them as they work extremely hard and often have to make

do with a very poor assortment of implements to work with. For my part, I indulged in the chocolate people from our church had sent down (most chocolate here has been melted and cooled several times so it is crystallized). We also splurged and bought a new refrigerator while we were in Belize City as the one here could not handle the heat and humidity and would never freeze or hold vegetables and milk for more than two days. When we did say goodbye I suddenly felt the weight of 8 more months of not being able to go home – for a short while I was as homesick as I've ever been since we arrived.

Among the items John and Laurie brought for us were DVD's. We had requested "The Mosquito Coast" with Harrison Ford and watched it last night. The story line is a bit strange but if you want to see good photos of the countryside here then rent it as it was filmed in this part of Belize. (Harrison Ford became a major contributor to the Belize Zoo after making the movie and the Zoo has become a source of pride (with good reason) of Belizeans).

May 8, 2004

Whew, what a week. I got back yesterday from my first "walkabout" with Fr. Ryan of the local Roman Catholic parish. I will try to relate the week in detail.

Monday:

We were picked up at 11:30 AM at the clinic. The troupe for the week consisted of Fr. Ryan, four visitors for Fr. Ryan's native Ireland (two young men in college and two young women teachers), and one of the medical students from the clinic who had extended his visit to Belize for a week. We settled in to the extended cab pickup truck with all of our gear and two of our group in back. (As you read this, remember that most of the schools are sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church.)

Our first stop was in the Garifuna village of Barranco as Fr. Ryan wanted the Irish kids to see the cultural group. We arrived in a rain squall which wasn't appreciated by the guys in the back of the truck. Since Hillside regularly does clinic there we didn't do a medical clinic. What was very special was the program that the school kids put on for us. There was a presentation of the history of the village (everyone is descended from two brothers, and currently there is almost no one in the village from 18 – 30 years old, all but one of the school age children remain in the village not by choice but out of economic necessity). The school kids sang Garifuna songs, recited Garifuna poems, and drummed and danced the traditional rhythms (I hope to include a QT video of the dancing in a new photo album – look there to see it). The Irish teachers were asked to do a quick presentation so they presented some Gaelic words for the children. We (Dan, the med student and I) were asked to do a health presentation so I did a quick bit on disease prevention and

hand washing. Fr. then said mass for the school children and then we moved on.

Our next stop was in Crique Sarco. Crique Sarco has only recently been served by a drivable road (I believe within the past year or two) – that is, it is ALMOST served by a road. The road stops across and 100 yards up stream from the village. We were met by some of the village people who loaded us and our supplies into “large” dugout canoes (which by their design are very tipsy) and paddled us to the village (Fr. Ryan held on and I think said a quick prayer as he had watched a canoe go over with a friend on board on a previous crossing). On arrival we were taken to a villagers home for a dinner of scrambled eggs and peppers with corn tortillas and very (too) sweet lime juice. After dinner Fr said mass in Ketchi at the village church and did several baptisms then introduced us and announced that we would have clinic after morning mass until 10 AM the next day. Light for the mass was provided by means of a small generator – the village has street lights and a 20 KW generator but no diesel to operate it. The village clinic where the medical student and I slept was very impressive. The upstairs living quarters had two bedrooms with beds with mattresses and a bathroom with a shower (that worked after you pumped water from the rain barrel to the roof with a hand pump) and a kitchen with a cupboard that served as a home for the resident scorpion. The downstairs had several exam rooms including one with a dental setup including x-ray. The clinic also had a large supply of drugs on hand. As best I could discern the clinic was manned until two weeks ago by one of the Ministry of Health Cuban doctors (the sign on the door said they would be back in one week). Apparently it had been build and operated up until about five years ago by a Mennonite group (I suspect that this explains the advanced nature of the clinic and the generator system as the Mennonites are the machinery experts in Belize (not to be confused with the OTHER Belizean Mennonite group that sticks to horse and buggy).

This was my first day to experience the entering the church ritual. On arrival at a village church we would kneel outside of the church until a church elder had incensed the church. Then Father would say a prayer and we would move to the altar and the “Incense Man” would incense the altar and Father would say another prayer and then we could remove our bags and start our work. I’m sure a good Catholic would have a better term than Incense Man but that’s how I came to know them. It seemed that every one had the flattened forehead and protruding lower lip that Rosita Arvigo describes in her book “Sastun” as reminding her of the classic Mayans of the stone carvings of the ancient Maya cities (a good book if you want to get a glimpse at Mayan health beliefs). They wore the loose fitting work pants with a handkerchief hanging from the back pocket and black rubber barn boots that are the uniform of the village Mayan man working in the “plantation” (def: farm plot). I felt like I was glimpsing that unique combination of ancient Mayan beliefs mixed with Catholicism as I watched them work. They would carefully swish

their incense burners over and around the altar and each religious artifact and then reverently kneel in their barn boots before the altar carefully watching for any indication that the incense was not strong enough in any particular corner of the ritualistic area. Each time the Bible was moved its new location needed careful attention with the incense. While we Episcopalians use incense as do many other traditions – it was the attention to the job that made these men different and special in my eyes.

Tuesday:

Tuesday morning after mass (in English) with a number of first communions we had breakfast of scrambled eggs mixed with peppers and fruit of some kind and tortillas with Maya coffee (coffee served in a bowl that is too too sweet for my taste). The medical student and I saw about a dozen patients (many with chicken pox) while the Irish teachers learned to help us keep our log book up.

I borrowed a woven shoulder bag from one of the villagers to carry my water in while one of our Maya guides carried our medical supplies as we headed out for the Village of Graham Creek about 4 miles away through the jungle. The trail was easily followed and included many parallel side trails as people had tried to get around the mud holes (it reminded me of the trail up the Ho River Valley in the Olympic rain forest). The guides usually led on the trails as they were much more used to looking for snakes (during the week we only saw one – it was identified as poisonous). After MUCH sweating, squishing through mud and balancing on foot logs we reached the village.

After lunch of Caldo (thin soup made of a few small pieces of chicken or pork, spices and a red paste) and tortillas Father met with the school kids and we did a quick health presentation. Father went to a local house to say mass while we saw 28 patients (most with “cough, cold, fever” or “backache, headache” (Maya English does not include the word “and”) and several cases of worms). After mass he asked us to see a couple of people who had been at mass and noted that we needed to exit the village by 2 PM as we needed to be back in Crique Sarco by 4 PM at the latest (most of the group did get out by 2 PM). At 3:30 the medical student and I managed to extricate ourselves and headed out at a Maya (def: fast, without breaks) walk and got to Crique Sarco at 5 PM. I quickly jumped in the river and rinsed off as everyone gathered their gear to re-cross the river to where our truck was parked.

Fr. Ryan put the pedal to the metal and we sped off on the bumpy dirt road to our next stop at the village of Dolores (after stopping once to pick up a coat that had bounced out – the people in the back of the truck managed to stay aboard – barely).

We arrived in Dolores at about dusk. The village people had not gotten the word that Fr. Ryan's troupe would be late this month because of the extra stop in Barranco so they had been waiting since about 3 PM for our arrival. Normally everyone sleeps on the benches in the church but since we had an unusually large group the family that provides dinner offered two hammock spaces in their house. Fr. suggested that the medical student and I grab some personal items and bring them along and then stay at the house to get some extra rest as he expected mass to last until about 10 PM. The house where we ate and slept was far up a hill above the village. The man of the house led the way in the waning light only occasionally using a flashlight (I was very glad to have my headlamp with me) up the wet clay trail that became steeper and steeper as we climbed. Dinner that night was rice, black bean paste, tortillas, and the homeowners home grown Maya coffee. We ate by candle light. As soon as he could get dinner down, Fr. Ryan headed down the hill to say mass. After rinsing the dishes the woman of the house put her one year old daughter on her back (carried with a cloth across the forehead) and took her 4 year old son by the hand and headed barefoot down the trail to mass. The med student and I were left alone to settle ourselves into the 1800's and prepare for bed. The house was traditional Mayan. It had a dirt floor with a number of hens quietly setting on their clutches of eggs around the perimeter (inside), a wooden fence about 5 foot square and 18 inches tall at one end was filled with dirt and stones (to hold the cooking pots) served as the cooking hearth with the dying embers still glowing. A sow and her two piglets and two adopted puppies slept outside against one wall which shuddered when she moved. The roof was made of palm fronds and the walls of vertical split boards (with about ½ inch average gaps) lashed on with vines. Four hammocks hung from the rafters and a bed was made for the children with a "mattress" of rope strung tight to make 3 inch squares. Entertainment was provided by a lightening bug up in the rafters and a bug about ¾ inch long with phosphorescent eyes that look like a pair of headlamps (they also provide great entertainment for the little kids during mass – much like we might use a coloring book). A rooster outside the wall determined that the full moon must mean the sun was about to rise and crowed with vigor about every two hours. I was exhausted and slept relatively well despite being very warm in my long sleeve, bug repellent impregnated shirt and long pants.

Wednesday :

After a breakfast of, yup, black bean paste, rice, tortillas, and that awful sweet maya coffee we headed down the hill to mass. After mass we went to the school. The kids were as usual fascinated by the gringos but nothing seemed to be happening so I decided to teach them some songs. We started with "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and then progressed to "I Know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly". We mutually discovered that the Irish teachers and I love to sing and to work with children. In each village we increased our

involvement with the kids as we went along. Fr. Ryan made sure that kids in each village received a “football” (soccer ball to us USA folk), pencils and writing pads, rosary beads, and some holy cards (def: trading cards with pictures of saints). We held clinic in the town and then loaded our packs on our backs and headed the four miles to Hicatee via the old jungle trail (almost over grown in spots, through a pasture with brahma cattle in others).

On arrival to Hicatee Creek we had to yell across and eventually a little boy of about 7 paddled over in a small dugout canoe and took us across the creek one at a time. The local kids often paddle the dugouts from a standing position. We held on tight and had a couple near dunkings while climbing down the bank to board the boat. After washing the sweat off in the muddy creek we had a dinner of caldo soup, Father said mass, and then went to bed on the church benches (and slept very well). While in Hicatee it became apparent to me that my habit of taking “brain breaks” for myself by sitting down with a novel to read was of great fascination to the children. I have come to believe that they have never before had role modeling of an adult reading for the pure joy of reading. On the other hand the assistant teacher in the village was so desperate for reading material that he hid in the back of the church and read three chapters of my book during mass when he discovered it sitting unattended with my pack (I promised to bring it back next month for him to enjoy).

Thursday:

After breakfast and mass for the children we held clinic for the village in the back of the church. Primarily we had the usual headaches and back aches (I am playing with the idea of using the opportunity of having the whole village together to do some group health teaching in the future as much of what we do is try to teach body mechanics, stretching, etc. to help them live with their very heavy work life). We also saw one of the three cases of mumps.

We left the village in the afternoon and walked out to the new road that is being cut in to the village. The bull dozer was to within about 1/8 mile of the village boundary. The road provided much easier walking but kept us very exposed to the hot sun. We continued to drink frequently from the “safe” water supply we had hauled in from Dolores. Part way out we were offered a ride in the road crews truck – I took them up on it while the others decided to walk on (they were pleased when they got to town and I’d found a supply of cola to drink at a tiny store in town).

We loaded the truck and headed back out to the village of Otaxha where Father was to serve mass. Since Hillside Clinic holds regular clinic in the village (in fact Clarice had been there earlier that day with the mobile clinic) I drove further down the road with the medical student and one of the Irish teachers to hold clinic in Corazon Creek. By the time we arrived it was clear

that the medical student was pretty much incapacitated with stomach cramps. We had him start taking oral rehydration salts (even the youngest children here know it as “ORS”). The teacher and I held clinic for a small number of patients. Primarily it turned out to be a well child clinic and the pace was relaxed enough to allow plenty of time for teaching the mothers about their health care questions.

On arrival back at Otaxha I was greeted with the news that one of the Irish boys had a severe headache. Since we were now looking at two people with symptoms that could be caused by either lack of adequate water and/or salt intake we tried pushing ORS. By the time dusk was falling the Irish lad had developed chills as well – Father agreed to my request to use the truck to evacuate the two sick young men to the comfort of a house with real beds and indoor plumbing. I drove them to our house 1 ¾ hours away and promptly on arrival the vomiting and diarrhea started. We still don’t know if both were affected with the same thing but at least the Irish boy got a nice case of “travelers diarrhea”. (Thanks to having the ORS and antibiotics on hand for rapid treatment he is well recovered now – 48 hours later.) The nice thing was that I got to be home with Clarice for the night and have fresh cloths and a shower.

Friday:

I headed back out to Otaxha after informing one of the other priests in town that our house was functioning as a minor hospital so he would check in during the day. In Otaxha the Irish teachers and I took all we had developed during the week and had fun teaching songs to the children. We taught them songs, they heard a lovely Gaelic duet and American spiritual from us and they gave us back a Ketchi song. I then took the opportunity to really do some healthcare teaching with them (this group and their teacher have seen me before so they are much less “giddy” about the “new” gringo). Afterwards the Irish crowd demonstrated an Irish bat and ball game and then got us all into the act.

We headed out stopping to say mass at one more school and give Father and the Irish folk the mandatory chance to play soccer with the local kids for a few minutes. Father asked me to stop in and check on an older man near death. I was able to offer a few suggestions to the family on how to keep him comfortable and I think Father appreciated that I was there as the “Protestant Representative” as the man’s brother was a Baptist Minister. After a stop to swim in Blue Creek we were on our way out and back to home. While at Blue Creek we met a bus full of Inuits from the Canadian far north. We traded them a Gaelic song and an American spiritual for an Inuit song.

In Retrospect:

I learned NOT to play barefoot basketball the night before going on a walkabout. A quarter size blister before starting is the pits.

I have gained appreciation for the kind humanness of Fr. Ryan and I think he has come to appreciate me as a good, caring, and spiritual person (even though I'm not Catholic).

On one hand, I'm sure that people don't ask questions that they otherwise might on the walks because we are there with the Catholic priest. On the other hand his intimate knowledge of the people of the villages opens many doors and gives immediate credibility to those with him. I kept wondering if the villagers wondered why "Nurse Norman" only got a blessing rather than a host at communion – I hope they understood it to mean that people of many religious practices can work together in love for the good of God's children. This week I started to feel like a "missionary".

I look forward to the idea that I can use the forums of the church congregation and the times with the school children to do some very important basic health teaching (eg. "Kids have colds and it OK").

In the mean time, my foot is happy it doesn't have to walk today.

May 15, 2004 05:15 AM

Special Edition – Thunderstorms

Since arriving in Punta Gorda the locals have told us consistently that the thunderstorms here *are* something to write home about. There have been lots of small rain and thunderstorms in the past 5 months but tonight is the first (I suspect of many) "big ones". With the rainy season obviously deciding to come early this year and since we buy bottled water as the tap water contains a lot of bad tasting minerals we decided to go ahead and install a rain collection system (oops – lights just went out with a "holy @##\$" thunder crack). We bought a 200 gallon tank and 20 feet of rain gutter (lights back on) but only had time to install 10 feet of gutter before it got dark. At 03:30 the tank had a bit of water in the bottom – it is now overflowing 1 ½ hour later!

The lightening and thunder are constant. I am beginning to name the thunder – there is the usual "rolling thunder", the "train going by thunder", the "train wreck thunder", the "firecracker thunder", the "rifle shot thunder crack", and finally the "holy *\$#%^" thunder crack" (the one that makes us jump). (Time out for battery swap). I tried to get the thunder on the video segment but it is almost washed out by the sound of the rain on the roof. We foolishly didn't close our front window louvers and despite a 2 foot overhanging eave we

discovered that our kitchen floor had a minor flood from water blowing through the screen.

Well the good news is that the rain lowers the air temperature nicely and is usually gone by 8 AM or so.

May 23, 2004 (Sunday)

The previously described thunder storm finally completely left the area at noon (about 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours of constant lightening). I tried to make a video of it to put on the web site but the file size is far too large. In the video its difficult to hear the constant thunder because of the noise of the rain on the roof. We have had a lot of rain the last week but finally yesterday the sun came back out with a vengeance.

Last week was very busy as we continue to work with only the two of us as nurses. Clarice has added the duties of the home care nurse to her load and I have been very involved with getting the Hillside Healthcare Center web page up and running (I hope to have it go public by June 1 at <http://hillsidebelize.net>). This has taken hours of work but I am starting to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I have been waiting to hear from our son Bryan as to when he can help me build a forum section for the page and yesterday found out that he has been suffering with severe kidney stones for a week!

Clarice received confirmation at about 7:30 AM on Thursday last week that she needed to be in Belize City by 9:00 AM so she raced home, packed and caught the next puddle jumper north. The conference was a required prerequisite to the clinic doing rapid HIV/AIDS testing as we are required to have a certified counselor on staff. On the humorous side the hotel reservations had been made for a man so Clarice was set up to room with a Catholic priest. On the serious side she found the conference to be VERY well done and valuable and got a chance to really know some of the country's health care workers (only 15 people were in the group). She goes back for the final segment next Thursday through Saturday and is looking forward to meeting again (after she gets her homework done this week). In the long run we are hoping that this service will be of great value to the community as the private clinics have a much better reputation for confidentiality than do the public clinics.

On Friday I picked up the new RN and OT (Occupational Therapist) at the airport. They are a delightful pair of young women who have come down for a 3 month stay. We spent yesterday helping them get moved in to Mission House, buy a bicycle, learn to drive a stick shift, etc. etc.. They had us howling with laughter last evening when Leslie (the RN) sheepishly pulled a set of handcuffs out of her suitcase and tried to explain the history of them

while we kept interrupting the story with our suggestions of why she might have them. It seems that they are involved in a running joke with a friend for many years and the history of them has caused more than one blush between the friends (the “revenge” is already being plotted).

May 29th, 2004 (Saturday)

Our big distraction this week continued to be Bryan and his family. He ended up needing to have a stent placed last week to relieve the pressure in the kidney and will need surgery Tuesday this coming week to have the kidney stones removed. Between his family feeling overwhelmed and wishing we were present, needed to get closure on the problems with a tenant who is 3 months behind in rent and Clarice’s parents 50th wedding anniversary coming up we have decided to have Clarice head north for a week and a half. She will be leaving Tuesday and then I will be gone on a walkabout the next week so Leslie the new RN will be the “senior” nurse at the clinic for a week.

Leslie RN and Melissa OT have been quickly finding their way. Leslie is a very capable young (25 years old) woman for only being out of nursing school for 3 years and we are all impressed with her willingness to pitch in and quick learning. Melissa was told that as the first OT the clinic has had that she would need to plot her own course and she has. She has pretty well got herself booked solid working with various assistance people/agencies in the area in addition to our clinic. They both are fun to have around and it makes us feel like there are “kids” in the house again.

This posting cannot go on the web until after Clarice’s parents’ anniversary party as we are hoping that she will walk in quite unexpected. The other piece of information that must be public before I can post is that Father Ryan has been recalled back to his native Ireland. He stopped by the other day to let us know as we will plan for one more walkabout with him (we are not sure what will happen after that). He kept saying how much he will miss Belize but I don’t think it will be half as much as Belize will miss him. This will be an emotional loss on everyone’s part I am sure.

Clarice returned from her HIV/AIDS training today. The leader of the training thanked Clarice and the other expatriate in the small group for coming as he felt they would be much better received in their communities than would the representative from the government agencies. There is a general fear of a lack of confidentiality among the Belizean people and they will often have more trust for private non-governmental agency clinics and staff. Clarice seemed to feel that the training was very well done and that she had gotten a lot out of it in addition to making some close friends.

June 2, 2004 (Wednesday)

Today I find myself wallowing in self pity and jealousy. Clarice left this morning for home as did the clinic medical director. At this moment I am very much wishing that I had not played the part of the martyr and had gone home with her rather than stay behind.

I have spent all of my spare time in May developing a web page for the clinic. I am very proud to say that the web page is now active at <http://hillsidebelize.net> and will be used as the primary information/recruiting tool for the clinic in the future.

June 12, 2004 (Saturday)

Last weekend I really needed a “Punta Gorda break” (see comments above) so I took the bus to Placencia. I ran into a nurse friend and she invited me to spend the weekend with her and her husband and son at their house. I was able to de-stress a lot on the beach and went diving on Saturday. We went looking for the elusive whale sharks (the world’s largest fish) that come on the full moon for about 3 months each year to feed on snapper roe. On the first dive we spent a lot of time staring at open ocean without a fish in sight. When we surfaced our dive boat had taken on about 3 inches of water beyond what the bilge pump could handle and the swell had grown to 4 – 6 ft.. On the second dive we opted to do a “wall dive” on the reef where the water was calmer and forget about looking for the whale sharks. We got to see lots of reef life – my only problem was I got too interested and didn’t realize how deep I was until I checked my gauge at 129 ft (I’m certified to 130 ft). With care I was able to complete the dive within the safety margins set in my dive computer and was glad I had gone out.

On Monday I went on my second walkabout with Fr. Ryan and came back on Thursday. Some villages appeared to not understand that he (nor any other priest in the foreseeable future) was going to be coming anymore while other villages expressed their deep sorrow that he was leaving. In one village one of the village leaders was in tears as he expressed how much Fr. Ryan had meant to him and his village during his tenure in Belize. I did ask Fr. why he had been recalled and he explained that with the unexpected death of a priest in his native Ireland that their priest shortage had gone from bad to acute in a short time.

One of the more memorable events of the walk was a double wedding of two Mayan couples.

Fr. Ryan was concerned that Hillside Healthcare Center has no immediate plans to continue to do medical walkabouts in the future. I did run into the local Ministry of Health official on the walk and we talked about how the medical needs of the villages would be covered in the future. The plan is that a Cuban MD will be stationed in one of the more central villages but the

villagers have already expressed concern about the language barriers this will present. I'm sure that over time there will need to be more evaluations of if/how the health needs of the outer villages can best be met.

I think Fr. was a bit upset with me when I opted to take a ride back to town on Thursday after the last planned clinic. I'm now convinced I did the right thing as I had been having trouble keeping hydrated all week as the sweat just kept pouring off me. Despite drinking 3 – 4 liters of water each day I still lost 7 lbs in 4 days and had a constant feeling of mild nausea. I spent yesterday drinking orange juice and any other fluids I could get my hands on and eating stomach-familiar foods. Today I'm feeling much better but still not 100%.

Clarice is expected back in Belize tomorrow so I plan to go to Belize City and meet her then take in a movie and have a night at a comfy hotel before we get back to work. I'm still feeling that we need to get ourselves "centered" before we can be most effective in helping others.

June 14, 2004 (Monday)

I met Clarice at the international airport yesterday then we went to a hotel and watched Shrek II at the only theater in Belize (at the same hotel). She reported that she had also been a bit ill with the stress of travel plus all she tried to get done during the week. She reports that our son is feeling much better but not happy that he still has two kidney stones that could act up at any time and he has an age inappropriate propensity to create stones. His wife is feeling pretty tired after caring for a sick husband and a sick infant. Our grandchild is trying to communicate and gets very frustrated when he doesn't know how to express himself. He also is very stubborn as was/is his father (but of course, NOT his grandfather). Our rental house will need some cleaning up and the removal of vehicles and junk left by our tenant (who says she will pay us the back rent but whom we are expecting to have to sue to get it). She did have a wonderful time at her parents fiftieth wedding anniversary party – she said her mother cried for a whole day when Clarice called and asked if she still had an invitation to come.

Today we got off the plane in Punta Gorda and went straight to the clinic. We are looking at a week with some potential short staff problems on Thursday and Friday so we are trying to get everything organized and figure out a plan.

I think I will go ahead and post this to the web site – please keep us in your prayers. – Norman and Clarice

June 17, 2004 (Thursday)

The craziness continues. After not feeling quite right every since the walkabout last week I woke up yesterday at 4 AM with a severe pain in my right side. I figured it was something I had eaten and I would soon start throwing up and having diarrhea. Instead I did throw up but it was purely from pain. By 6:30 I woke Clarice and asked her to bike up to the clinic and get a motorized vehicle to drive me in with. When I arrived at the clinic the experienced MD who was here for a week and a half looked at me and came up with the conclusion I was afraid of; I needed to go to the hospital in Punta Gorda for tests and injectable pain medication. We were able to contact one of the resident MD's in town (who lectured me that I should have known to walk three doors down from our house to her house and woken her up at 4 AM) who promptly wrote admission orders to PG hospital.

Clarice took me to the hospital and we were sort of pointed to the men's 7 bed ward. I was the only person there so I sat on the nearest bed and waited. Finally a nurse came in and pointed me to the preferred bed (the only one with a top sheet – which was in reality a fitted bottom sheet put on top). I climbed up onto the old iron hospital bed about 3 feet off the floor and was pleased that at least the mattress was comfortable (it took asking three times to get a pillow). Clarice noticed that while there was a screen door between the ward and the hall there were no screens on the open windows. An IV was started and some pain medicine that I am not familiar with was given in it – I then continued to feel painful, and anxious and on fire at the same time! (It turned out to be scopolamine for spasms.) Finally the nurse brought the Demerol I had requested. The doctor seemed a bit confused when I asked for 12.5 to 25 mg when she was used to ordering 50 to 100 mg.. I didn't think about that at their level of practice they still give lots of intramuscular (IM) medications where we would give IV doses in the States. So I got the 25 mg IV dose via IM route but at least it shut down the pain for 2 hours.

I was asked to get a urine sample – I had to ask where the bathroom was and was told it was across the hall. The main bathroom door is too big for its frame and the stall doors open inward so even though I'm not very fat I still had to squeeze it past me to close it. I collected the urine sample (which looked "cloudy" as I've ever seen – almost always a sign of a urinary tract infection (UTI) – the cloudiness comes from white blood cells in it). After voiding I looked for a sink that worked so I could wash my hands– I was eventually told that since the sinks in the men's room and the men's ward don't work that I could go into the dirty utility room and use the utility sink.

Clarice stayed with me and our Anglican deacon was in a lot to provide moral support as I have always said, "I will never go to PG hospital!" and was a bit freaked out that I was there and because of the pain I didn't have a lot of choices. Clarice later brought by some books, some bottled water (I was given a small glass full to take pills with but no pitcher – pushing fluids is a

basic tenet of UTI treatment), some orange juice, some hand cleaner, and toilet paper (I was given a blank look and told that the family needed to bring it when I asked about it while Clarice was out fetching the stuff (I even got as far as trying to snatch some gauze pads to use if she didn't get back in time)). Dinner arrived just before Clarice left for the night and just added to her sense of frustration and guilt as she hadn't thought to bring me a sandwich and dinner consisted of 3 pieces of white bread with nothing on them, 3 half cold hotdogs and a cup of sickly sweet Mayan coffee (this was after Clarice had requested a low fat, low sodium diet for me).

Later in the evening I did get a room mate. His English was difficult to understand so we didn't have much to say to each other. He seemed to be a regular patient as his medication was ready when he arrived. After listening to his cough I suspect he had TB (which is NOT very contagious in an open room with lots of air flow and while under treatment). The only other disturbances during the night was getting my vital signs checked every four hours. I tried to engage the nurses in some conversation but they were not a talkative lot when it came to patients. I suspect that the only time anyone looked into the room was when vital signs were due to be taken and there was no call bell of any kind. I was never given any kind of physical assessment by any one of the nursing staff (an expectation of my hospital in the States so the nurse can tell if anything has changed in the patient's condition). I am convinced that the RN's were well trained and finally realized that I could pick them out despite their not having name tags or ever introducing themselves as they were the ones with the traditional nursing caps. I did get the impression that their goal in being nurses was to be administrators rather than bedside care givers (one stated she had a PhD in nursing education and was working on a degree in epidemiology – she at least talked for 5 minutes).

In the morning I was offered a tub bath by the orderly (refused) and the RN came in with a dose of pain medication without asking if I was in pain (refused). Breakfast was a few soda crackers (which were burned!), the inevitable hot dogs and sweet coffee (mostly refused). My doctor arrived at 9 AM and asked about me staying another night (refused – which didn't surprise her). At 9:15 our deacon came by and gave me a ride home.

I have to admit that I did get the basic care I needed and did get better and it didn't cost me anything. This is compared to a \$30,000 stay in the hospital for 3 days before we came down. I have to wonder if I didn't have insurance (or pocket money) and had a choice between free care but bringing my own toilet paper and \$30,000 care with a TV which I would choose (not a real good comparison as the surgery I got in Everett is not even available in Belize). Perhaps there is something in between that needs to be evaluated more closely. Tomorrow we were planning to go to Belize City to meet our daughter and her friend and my doctor has requested that I go to one of the

private imaging facilities there and get an ultrasound (price \$180 BZ) to see if we can figure out why a male has a UTI (rather rare). We also spent some time trying to convince my home hospital in Everett that it was not possible to stop by and pick up the tests I had done in December so how could we facilitate them getting faxed to Erin before she flies her in the morning.

June 29, 2004 (Tuesday)

The Friday after the last note I did get an ultrasound done and it clearly showed that I have an unhappy gallbladder and gall stones. I think that I got the UTI when I kept sweating uncontrollably the week before on the walkabout (very likely related to unfelt pain from the gallbladder) and wasn't ever able to keep adequately hydrated. Initially I had planned to stay in Belize as long as I was pain free but have since emailed a surgeon back home and he would prefer I come up and get repaired while the gallbladder isn't inflamed. We are currently trying to get arrangements made and then I plan to go up for 3 – 4 weeks.

Our daughter and her friend left yesterday after being down for a bit more than a week. I felt bad that I was in such a crappy mood the first weekend we saw them but I was frustrated, frightened, and tired. Frightened that the pain would return (and most likely at a very inopportune time) and frustrated that my "healthy" body is letting me down and forcing me to eat a lower fat diet when I was going to be in touristy places with good food (I really look forward to those opportunities). After a full week of no pain I regained my spirits and when we met back up with them for the second weekend we all had a great time in Guatemala.

One thing that I noticed through all of this is that when finally faced with the "opportunity" to "escape" I realized that I really do want to finish what we have started. There are days when I (and I'm sure Clarice feels this way as well) would just like to get into our comfy bed at home (with no bugs in it) and have a telephone and be able to see a movie, and visit friends, and, and, and. There are days when we feel like we just aren't making the difference that justifies giving up a year. There are days when we wonder if Belizeans would be better off if all of us do gooders would just leave the country to its own devices and let it sink or swim on its own. In the end though I think we both feel that we have made a commitment and that people here really do appreciate that commitment. It really does matter to them that we are staying for more than a short while and they do understand leaving comforts and family behind. We also do represent (the clinic that is) the most modern health care in all of southern Belize and that is important. More and more I notice that we are seen as being "locals" – you can pick out the long term folks by the tans, bleached hair (even my white hair has a different tint to it), and their attitude (as in acceptance that things are the way they are and not going to change soon just because we think they should change soon). I

suspect that we are starting to see past the rough seas of “culture shock” and it really did take 6 months.

Speaking of – we have passed the midpoint of our 1 year mission commitment.

Since soon after our arrival we have been working to improve the organization of our charting system. In theory the concept is that we should be able to give better care if we can easily access information on a patient about what was previously done (especially in a culture where people only know that a “pill” was given to them and have a very poor concept of time). In order to do this, and to gather statistical data for ourselves and the Ministry of Health we keep charts on pretty much everyone we see that includes demographic data and data about each visit. Needless to say it is time consuming to keep the charts up to date even when they are organized. Initially the filing system used for the villages gathered entire families into a single chart – a system that sounds great when mom brings in five kids and you can grab one chart and have them all in one place. The problem was that the system didn’t work for a number of reasons the biggest being that village families are very fluid with children moving from household to household and couples changing periodically as well. I spent hours and hours rebuilding the system to one where each person has an individual chart and each chart is organized in the same way and each chart form looks the same. Always in the back of my mind I have wondered what would happen when we got to a minimum available labor situation – would we just say “to heck with it” and start seeing people as fast as we could and ignore the whole system. Today the answer came clear. Dr Nick and I were the only ones available to do the mobile clinic and so the system was put to the test. I found charts quickly and easily and then was amazed at how often having data from previous visits affected our diagnoses and planned treatments. One family had been in each of the last three months with complaints of simple colds (they got free medicine each time) – this time we told them to drink lots of fluids and that they would get no medications. Another child came in with a complaint of ongoing loose stools – normally we just give rehydration salts and send them on their way but since we had a clear record that this had gone on for 6 weeks and the child was losing weight we recommended that they go to the hospital ASAP. In all we cared for 32 patients which is a fairly busy day even when we have a large labor pool but were able to handle it easily and I think that the organized charting system proved itself to be a help rather than a hindrance.

July 1, 2004 (Thursday)

Today the clinic is closed – we usually do mobile on Thursday but as there are no students here this week and it is a five Thursday month we decided to move the schedule a week.

I received word yesterday that I am scheduled for surgery in Everett, Washington on July 13 and need to have an office exam on July 9th. I spent most of yesterday on the internet trying to arrange for airplane tickets, insurance coverage, etc. etc.. We both plan to fly home on July 8 (Clarice's birthday) and then she will return the Saturday after surgery. I will stay and recover for 3 weeks before I come back down. On one hand since I feel well at this time I feel like I'm causing a big hassle for everyone by having the surgery done now. On the other hand our medical director and Clarice keep reminding me that if I have a second flare-up and need to be hospitalized (or emergency surgery) it would not be good. The surgeon would much rather work on a "quiet" gallbladder as well as it decreases the complication risk considerably. I'm trying to look at the bright side: I will get to see family (grandson!!!) and friends, I will get to visit my home church, I will get to see Harry Potter on the big screen and if I'm feeling well enough I will get to my 30th high school reunion. I expect it will be strange but I suppose it is a necessary diversion.

July 5, 2004 (Monday)

We didn't have much of a July 4th celebration except that a missionary couple that lives a couple of houses down had made hamburgers (they even found fresh lettuce and nice red onions), baked beans, and potato salad and they saved a plate for each of us. Mostly we did yard work all weekend. In some ways it is fun to garden here as anything that falls on the ground grows. At one point we had so many cucumbers from volunteer plants that we had to give them away to keep up. We managed to grow two very tasty miniature watermelons and some cantaloupe. We also have a huge variety of hibiscus plants which produce loads of flowers every day. On the other hand weeds grow just as profusely so we decided to mulch the flower beds. We borrowed the clinic pickup for a day and hauled two loads of rice leavings from the rice mill and 2 loads of wood shavings from a local cabinet shop. We noticed that the back of the truck had billions of tiny bugs after we removed the rice hulls and figured that they would happily stay in the rice hulls on the garden and help break down the mulch into soil. It seems that instead the bugs seem to like indoor living better so we have been sweeping out bugs for two days with no end in sight.

Clarice did get put in her place by our friend Miss Mavis for pulling up the Zinnias before they had gone to seed and not saving the seeds. Miss Mavis is the epitome of a black Garifuna woman who speaks in a Grandmotherly spirit with years of experience. She was the first nurse anesthetist in Belize and her mind is as sharp as ever. She has told me that she will pray for me with my surgery and I doubt that even God would dare not listen when she speaks. I really do feel comforted with a force like her supporting me.

Speaking of bug control last night we were all snuggled down in our bed about 10 PM when it sounded like someone started a lawn mower outside of our window and then the room filled with an ugly odor. It took a bit before we figured out that the neighborhood was being fumigated by vector control to control malaria mosquitoes. We decided to go down to the beach while the smell dissipated and enjoyed the relative cool breeze off the water and the reflection of the moon.

This evening I had a great surprise. Two of the elderly ladies from church felt that I shouldn't go to the states for surgery without a proper send off so they arranged transportation and arrived with quite a parade of people with cake and juice in hand. It was very heartwarming and I really appreciated the thought and effort.

Today we met our latest group of students 3 of whom are from Scotland. They are the first ones to come in response to the new web page so we all wanted to know how it was received. One Arabic man with a Scottish accent replied that he found it very helpful in fact he had printed it out to "give to Mum so she wouldn't worry 'bout me". I decided once you pass the "Mum" standard you've done a good job.

We've all been working hard to get as much work done up as possible to lighten the load for Leslie RN for next week and her and Clarice for the rest of the month. She and Clarice have been working long hours to get as many home visits done ahead as possible.

July 6, 2004 (Tuesday)

Last night we had another "significant" thunder storm. We now expect to see some lightening every evening as we get deeper into the rainy season. We often walk out to the bay to enjoy the cool evening and look at the stars overhead while there is an occasional flash over Guatemala to the Southeast or the Maya Mountains to the west. Most nights it rains with a "normal" lightening storm some time during the night and then it lets up enough by the time we bicycle to work in the morning that we seldom get more than a few sprinkles on us. I took some MPEG videos of the storm but I still have not got the files small enough to upload to the internet. Today I sorted through the videos I had taken and found them to be pretty impressive with 4 to 5 groups of flashes every minute. I set a pan out at one point and had about an inch of water in it inside of 20 minutes.

Nick asked us to think about what we would like to accomplish in our second six months here so we can discuss our ideas before we leave for my surgery. Clarice talks about trying to bring sanity to the pharmacy ordering and stocking system which has been the bane of the "organizing queen's" life. I would like to see us some how regain a bit of the sense of community

connection (for lack of a better phrase) which was so much a part of the Fr. Ryan walkabouts. As a means for providing health care clinics they had lost much of their purpose as roads pushed further into the bush but as a means of connecting with the communities they were invaluable. There are a couple of villages that when I visit them the school children immediately start singing *I know an Old Lady Who Swallowed a Fly* when they see me. They ask if I can teach them a new song if I visit their class rooms and then are VERY receptive to health teaching messages I have to give. This type of connection can only come with spending time with the people rather than quickly passing through.

I received an email the other day which verbalized clearly what a number of people have “sort of” said in their letters and emails. It is a message that causes me to be taken aback and humbled a bit and which leaves me a bit mystified. When I write in this log I do it as a way of clearing my brain of all the disorganized jumble of ideas that seem to need to get out in some organized way. In that sense I write the log very much for myself. I also write the log as a way of thanking the people who have supported us all along the way. Finally I write in the log as a way of saying, “Hey, you guys, we are still out here, please don’t forget us!” In all of these the log has been meant to be fairly self serving. But then this very wonderful friend writes, “Just because you don't see the end result doesn't mean you didn't make a difference. For example, your letters make a difference in my life and in the lives of many others.” She also asked that I pray for a person of great importance to her but whom I have no personal knowledge of – I’ve never received a request like that before. Who am I to be asked to “put a good word in God’s ear”. Yes, I must admit I am growing in my spiritual and religious life through this experience but I wasn’t aware that that growth was affecting others so many miles away. I don’t understand; I am humbled; I will pray as she has asked if for no other reason than I have learned to value the knowledge that others are expressing their caring for you when they pray on your behalf.

July 23, 2004 (Friday)

Clarice and I flew up to Seattle as planned on July 8th (Clarice’s birthday) and arrived at midnight. We stayed with our daughter and her husband and then Clarice’s parents picked us up bright and early to take us to see my surgeon for the first time. His only comment was that he was surprised that the inguinal hernia was as large as it was (he did the initial consults by email). He reminded me that if there was any problem getting the gall bladder out then the hernia surgery would have to wait as he had never done the two together before and did not want to jeopardize the hernia surgery if there was a higher than normal infection risk.

While we were both healthy waiting for surgery we visited friends, Clarice pulled weeds at our house, we fired up our truck and circulated the oil and got the car licensed and running for my use. We also got to see (all important for us rabid fans! – you muggles just might not understand) Harry Potter on the big screen. We also got a chance to see a Van Gogh exhibit in Seattle.

Surgery was on Tuesday the 13th and went very well. I was home about 3 hours after surgery (although it took two people to make sure I didn't keel over walking from the car to bed as I'm REALLY sensitive to sleep inducing medications).

I said sad farewells to Clarice on Saturday the 17th and she headed back to Belize to help out Leslie who had once again done a valiant job of keeping the clinic running while doing the work of 3. Today I talked to her on the phone and she sounds like its been a long week. It was made longer by two nights of thunderstorms – Wednesday she reported outdid anything else we had seen to date and then Thursday put them all to shame (she describes an hour of a vibrating bed only partially caused by her jumping from the cracks of thunder).

In the mean time I have been trying to be a “good patient” (which wasn't too hard until yesterday when I was finally able to go without pain medication). I've been staying with various family members and playing tourist. I visited Seattle one day and just enjoyed walking around the “big city”. Now I am in Portland with my son and his wife and my grandson. I spent the last two days riding the train into the city center and again just playing tourist. Portland is known as the “City of Roses” and I got to see the rose gardens in Washington Park today at their peak – it was amazing. The temperature was 103 degrees today but as heat and humidity don't go together in the Pacific Northwest I got along quite nicely with just an occasional run through the sprinklers in the parks while everyone else was wilting.

July 31, 2004 Saturday

I continue to recuperate in the my home state of Washington. I spent some time at the Pacific Ocean and ENJOYED freezing my feet in the water. It is surprising the things one misses that remind them of home and not being able to cool my feet in really cold water has been one of those things. I spent a night with my older brother and cleaned over 600 (six hundred!) virus “infections” off of his computer. The next day I went camping on Mt Rainier. The weather was fabulous and the wild flowers were beautiful even if they weren't at their peak but the ground is still very hard when one tries to sleep on it. Last night I spent with close friends at their cabin on nearby Hat Island and enjoyed walking the 5 miles around the island while the tide was minus 3.7 ft.. In all I have been a pretty good patient and have avoided activities that might slow the healing process. I have very little discomfort although I did

have to ask that the boat to Hat Island be slowed to a crawl to avoid jarring my abdomen as the boat went over the waves. I am looking forward to getting back with Clarice next week. I have been feeling some guilt as Clarice reports that the mobile clinics that are "busy" with any more than 30 patients have been suddenly running in the 90 patient range. If this continues it will require a change in care models or we will all burn out in a hurry!.

When I return I will have five months left before we complete our mission. We are both recognizing that the time is likely to fly by and concerned about making sure that everything is in place to allow for a smooth transition and continuance of the clinic's work at it's current or higher levels. We would love to hear that replacement long term RN's have been found and preparations are being made for them to come but as of yet we have not heard that anyone has committed to replacing us. I continue to grow in my faith that somehow God will provide but as usual am a bit impatient with Him/Her.

August 11, 2004 (Wednesday)

I got back to Belize on Saturday and then Clarice and I spent a night in Belize City – a bit of a tearful reunion so it was a good thing we had planned a day to ourselves.

We agreed that the things we enjoyed most about being in Washington were: 1) you can leave food out on the cupboard and its not covered with ants within an hour. 2) you are not covered in sweat 24 hours a day (including within seconds of exiting the shower). And 3) no bugs in bed with us every night.

I arrived to learn that our Medical Director has gone to the States for a couple of weeks to meet with the new Hillside Healthcare Board of Directors. Since we have no visiting MD's or Medical Students that means that the three RN's must/get too function much more independently. Clarice and I are finding it refreshing to really practice at our level of knowledge/training. We figure that we are able to see and treat about 4/5 of the patients with good confidence in our treatments and about 1/5 we have to send to PG Hospital to see a local MD there. Leslie has much less practice experience but comes to us with appropriate questions when she is unsure of herself.

I have not tried riding my bicycle since returning. The clinic has made a vehicle available for me to get back and forth from the clinic for another week or so until I feel more up to riding the 4 or 5 miles. We are also pleased to hear that our church back home is nearing completion of a fund raising effort to enable to clinic to purchase a vehicle for use of the nurses. We are working with the clinic to arrange who will pay maintenance/fuel/insurance etc. but it sounds like it will be doable.

Enough for now. Norman
August 12, 2004 (Thursday PM)

It was interesting coming back to Belize as I had wondered how I would feel about it. Basically it felt like I was returning to work after a vacation. I didn't look forward to being hot and sweaty and riding over bumpy roads but knew that it was necessary and it was time to get back. We both feel that we are getting a bit of short timers syndrome now that we are well past the half way point of our mission here.

I did have a lot of time to think and reflect when I was in Washington. Clarice and I both agree that we have grown spiritually since we have been here. We both agree that we have grown closer to each other (if that's possible). I feel that I have become much more confident in my own skills and abilities. We both feel that we have gained an appreciation of the work ethic in the USA but at the same time of the slower pace of the Caribbean. In the States the lifestyle says you must have this and that, and you must watch TV, and you must be busy or you are living a less than full life – and in being so busy it seems that the reason for living is forgotten. We hope that we can maintain some of our “Hey Mon, relax Mon” attitude when we get home. We both found ourselves being frustrated at the portions everyone from Jack-in-the-Box to friends and family were determined to feed us – I found that even when I ordered small restaurant portions I could only eat half of them. Why do people spend so much time worrying about their weight and then eat so much?!? (We were invited to eat with a Belizean family yesterday and about ¼ lb of beef was expected to feed four adults and this was a meal with honored guests.) We certainly hope we can continue to eat smaller portions and exercise more as everyone who saw us commented that we both looked physically and mentally healthier than we have in many years. We DID enjoy the variety of foods – we get very tired of eating the same things over and over here.

I got asked several times if I felt we are making a difference. I always have to pause – yes, we are providing a service that would not exist if we were not here but life would go on without us and we will soon be forgotten after we leave and the next people step into our shoes. This is the reality of living in a place that changes very slowly. We are more like pebbles in a pond with ripples that go out and join with other ripples to eventually form waves. The pond is simply too big to allow for us to make much of a splash on our own in the time we have allotted ourselves. If we were here for 5 or more years I expect that we would see much greater changes from our efforts but we are simply not willing to give more than we have already committed to. We talk about if we do this again what time frame would we use – 6 months is a nice amount of time to donate but doesn't allow for acculturation and for people to get to know and trust you – a year just barely allows you to become effective and then its time to go home – and 2 years can be a very long time.

August 17, 2004 (Tuesday)

Taking the morning off. This is our usual day to go with the MOH and do a joint mobile clinic but since we also have a regular clinic in the afternoon it was originally decided that we should tell them we would not go last week or this week when there are only Clarice and I doing clinic duties. Last week our afternoon clinic was pretty much empty as it often is and we found out that MOH didn't visit the village either as they are currently down from 9 public health nurses to 3 so I suggested that we go to the villages instead of doing the afternoon clinic – then yesterday we found out that MOH had gone yesterday for a nurse clinic so we are back to plan A. Next I asked if we could use the clinic truck this morning to go to one of the outer villages where we used to go with Fr. Ryan. The purpose of the trip would be partially pleasure (allow Clarice and Leslie to see the village and visit with a Mayan lady they know there and Leslie wants to buy some wood bowls that are made there) and partially clinic information gathering (I am curious to find out how well the villages medical needs are being met now that the walks are not occurring). Instead we woke up this morning to water water everywhere. It poured and thundered ALL night long and continues to be cloudy with rain off and on this morning. I checked with one of the locals who says that the weather forecast is for rain for the next five days at least until tropical depression "Earl" passes (yesterday Earl was a tropical storm and gained a name but then he disorganized but is expected to reorganize into at least a tropical storm before he gets here). With the condition of the roads very much in question it doesn't seem prudent to take our mini pick-up out at this time.

Our other household problem this week seems to be a GI bug that has hit everyone (except me so far) in our house. Leslie and Mellisa seem to have gotten mild cases but Clarice has been having cramps and running to the toilet for 2 days now and today went back to bed (never happens!) and has a fever (Clarice complained of being cold for the first time in 8 months!). All in all a light day seems to be a good idea.

We got word yesterday that St. John's Episcopal Church has been able to collect \$5000 US for the volunteer staff at the clinic to use to buy a vehicle for personal use. I hope to have something before the end of August. Now that this looks to be a reality we have begun to allow ourselves to dream about going to visit friends or go swimming after work which will be a great moral booster.

August 22, 2004 (Sunday)

Clarice was getting "Punta Gordaitis" pretty bad (especially after having felt ill for a number of days) so we decided to go to Placentia for a couple of days.

We took the bus north after clinic on Friday. Placentia is in a major off-season slump right now so many shops were closed and it was very quiet but perfect for sitting on the beach and reading with an occasional cool off swim thrown in. The room rate for the night was only \$15 US as well. The sun was out in force and we both got sun burns despite our 8 month tans. Saturday night we rode the water taxi back from Placentia (a narrow peninsula) to Independence/Mango Creek villages and stayed the night with Tess our Vicar friend from Vancouver B.C.. Since Punta Gorda now has its own priest she was moved up to the church there. This morning she drove us to Punta Gorda as she had been planning to come down anyway.

While in Independence/Mango Creek we go a look at pretty much the entire census of the villages (I still can't tell where one village ends and the other begins but to locals village identity is very important) as the local football (soccer) team had won the national title and so everyone loaded into about 10 vehicles and paraded up and down the streets of town. The church where Tess is now in charge is a modest 2 story building with a worship space on the first level and a small apartment on the second. The building was built on about 1/3 of an old concrete slab. I asked about the history of the slab and Tess stated that originally there had been a church, parsonage, and school on the site but that Hurricane Iris blew them away several years ago.

It was a big day at St. Joseph's church this morning. When we first came we added our significant numbers (the two of us) to the congregation which ran from 6 to 10 persons on a Sunday morning and we would often be the youngest people in the building. The service was led (on the weeks when Tess was elsewhere on her circuit ride) by Lorna Sampson a local Garifuna woman who acted as a lay minister. Some days when we left for church we would be met by a local Creole man, Elvis, and his Maya wife and his kids begging for money to buy their next meal. Today the building was overflowing (we now know it holds about 50 people). About half of the congregation was made up of small children a number of whom come each Sunday on their own (we have finally discovered the mother of several of them is a Maya woman who only speaks Spanish – she is now the church sextant). Elvis has become the church carpenter and works at the church regularly to make a living for his family building furniture for the preschool that will open next month in the parish hall. Today Elvis had the four of his children baptized at the service. At the end of the service was a major celebration for Lorna as she was sent off on her way to spend three years at the Anglican Seminary in Barbados so that she can reach her dream of becoming a full Anglican Priest. This is quite a change in 8 short months.

We did get to Crique Sarco last Thursday after our mobile clinic. It was another 20 minutes down the same road and then across the river. I asked a lady on the near side of the river if she had a "dory" (dugout canoe) and she offered to take us across. Rather than take us to the Crique Sarco landing

about 100 yards down stream she took us to the landing directly across the river (where I had never landed before) and we started down the path to the village. We quickly learned why the Crique Sarco residents usually use the down stream landing as the trail went through several swamps. Clarice and Leslie were not pleased with my description of a village “just across the river” and eventually returned to the landing (where they talked the boat lady into taking them down river to the next landing). Once they got to the village they were pleased that they had made the effort as it is a very nice Mayan village which shows a lot of pride. There is a woman in the village who sells wooden bowls at the clinic so she knows Clarice and Leslie (and I have stayed with her and her family when I did the walkabouts) so she was very pleased that we had made the effort to visit her home. I also wanted to find out how their medical care needs were being met and found out that the MOH Cuban doctor that had been assigned there had only lasted three days (the local MOH director tells us that a new doctor will be placed there in the near future).

Tomorrow we expect Dr. Nick to return and so we will be back to “normal” at the clinic. The next Sunday we expect 2 students from the UK and then on Monday our new housemate Jennifer (a physical therapist) will show up. Leslie and Melissa have decided to stay until at least Christmas so they will be moving into one room together. In all our three bedroom house will have 5 people living in it for several months. Melissa and Leslie will be leaving for a couple of weeks to attend a wedding shortly after Jennifer arrives. I do need to send a photo of the house to Patricia as she planted many bushes when she was here and now they are starting to flower on a regular basis so our yard has really changed from very plain to fairly pretty since we have been here.

August 28, 2004 (Saturday)

Nick ended up having meetings in the States through last week so we are still awaiting his return. Hopefully when I get the check from him from St. John’s church we will be able to move ahead on buying a volunteers car. Clarice has been busy at St Joseph’s painting furniture for the preschool that will open in the parish hall in a couple of weeks. I have been doing some work there correcting some wiring “issues” in the church and parish hall. The next group of students surprised us with an email last week that while they will be getting to Belize tomorrow they are not planning to start at the clinic until next week – since they are planning to stay for 2 months rather than the usual 1 month they can probably get away with this but it did catch us off guard. As far as we know we are still expecting Jennifer to come in on Monday and Leslie and Melissa to return to the States to participate in a wedding then they will be back in two weeks.

September 2, 2004 (Thursday)

Monday our newest team member and house mate arrived and has started to find her niche at the clinic and in the household. She is 26 and comes to us from the wilds of New York City after growing up in New Hampshire in a family of 8 children. She and Clarice have been having fun comparing notes about growing up in big families. We both have been impressed with her willingness to adapt and her breath of knowledge covering everything from cooking to minor auto maintenance (she even knew to turn on the heater when the car was at risk of over heating). She says I remind her of her father – he must be a great guy!

Our daughter informed me before I returned to Belize from having surgery that she thought she was pregnant. Yesterday she let us know that she was very worried as she was bleeding and needless to say we were both anxious on her behalf. Today she had an ultrasound and the baby is doing all it should be doing so while we continue to be concerned we are at least breathing again. She and Clarice can go back to planning who will baby sit when and how to decorate the nursery.

A tale of purchasing a car Belize style:

We received a check for \$5000 USD (\$10,000 BZ) from St. John's church in Snohomish this week which was donated so the clinic volunteers could have a vehicle for non-business (and business) related transportation. We have been eagerly awaiting a chance to go car shopping and since the clinic was closed today it seemed like the ideal time to go. The trip turned out to have so many typically Belizean parts to it that I will relate it in detail.

I had asked Evert, the clinic maintenance man to come and pick me up at 6:30 this morning so we could have a good chance of being back by dusk. I should have known it would be an interesting day when Evert decided to operate on "Belize time" rather than "American time" and showed up at 7:15. None the less we got going quickly and he and I and Jennifer were on our way (Jen decided it would be a good chance to see Belize from the ground level).

We were riding in the clinic's most prized and carefully maintained vehicle – a heavy duty diesel industrial quality Toyota Land Cruiser - which was chosen as it is the most economical vehicle we have when it comes to operating costs. About 1 and a half hours into the trip we watched as our front tire rolled up the Southern Highway without us (this is a "bad thing"). Evert brought the vehicle to a very nice stop at the side of the road and after assessing the damage (minimal - thanks to the heavy duty components of the vehicle) we decided that we could go on but shy one lug nut for each wheel (we borrowed one from the other three wheels and a man on a bicycle stopped by with one he had found on the road). We still can't figure out why

the nuts fell off nor how we were so lucky as to have the wheel come off without it damaging the studs.

We reached our first destination of Dangriga about 20 minutes later and looked for a vehicle that was reported to be sitting at a gas station there with a for sale sign. The vehicle had disappeared. We also looked for lug nuts and decided that there were none that fit after going to all three of the town's auto parts stores.

After driving carefully up the Humming Bird Highway we ended up at our second destination of Belmopan. I had been emailing an auto dealer there about a vehicle that sounded like it would work for us and was in our price range. I looked at the vehicle and was totally disappointed as it was in much worse shape than I had expected. At least we were able to find a set of lug nuts at an auto parts store next to the car lot and bring the number on each of the Land Cruiser's wheels up to their design expectations. The salesman in the auto parts store added his voice to several others I had heard suggesting we look in the Cayo District to the west.

Along the way to St. Ignacio in Cayo we saw several vehicles and while they didn't meet our needs it was obvious that prices dropped and quality improved significantly as we traveled west. I recalled seeing a large car lot outside of St. Ignacio and watched for it but all we could find was a field full of cars without any for-sale signs or other indication that it was anything but a parking lot. By the time we drove into St. Ignacio it was about 2 PM and it seemed like we were going to get skunked but getting skunked is always easier on a full stomach so I guided Evert to a Pizza Place I knew of (one of the few in Belize). We sat down to eat and Evert started talking to the family at the next table – we had ended up at the same restaurant as another group from Punta Gorda and in fact the woman was our clinic manager's aunt. I asked the waiter about the field without any signs that was full of cars and he replied that they didn't need a sign as all of the locals knew that it was the cheapest place to buy cars.

With full stomachs we moved on in our hunt. There was one vehicle in the field that was in much better shape than any of the others – it was marginal as a "back roads" vehicle but being a mini-van it could hold all of the volunteers in comfort with a couple of guests besides. I expected the price to be about \$19,000 based on what we had seen in Belmopan but since the waiter said the prices were so low I decided to go ahead and ask about it. The dealer was in the process of planning a clearance sale the next day and was going to reduce the price from \$10,500 to \$7500 – I tried to not salivate and lose my bargaining position. He pointed out that the vehicle had been fouling one plug periodically (bad valve seal ???) and that it needed a water pump. He offered to put another used engine in it next week (Belizean time?) if we would pay \$8000 total. I countered that if we could have it for \$7000 we

would pay on the spot and drive it away. We loaded up a gallon of emergency radiator water, 2 frozen turkeys, and a bushel bag of oranges (all purchased at the auto dealer) and were on our way.

Our first stop was to buy fuel. I had forgotten we would need cash so Jen and I pooled our resources and were able to buy 8 gallons of gas for \$70 (yes, you read correctly – still want to complain about \$2 fuel?) and fill the tank half full. At the gas station (still a long way from home) we met a friend of Melissa and Leslie's who were riding with a friend of mine from PG. Jen and I traded off driving until it was dark then I drove as I know the road better (even then it is very stressful with all of the people walking and riding bikes without any lights or reflectors and part of the road still being very rough gravel). I only had to swerve once to avoid a grey animal (I thought it was a dog – Jen thinks it was a pig) standing smack in the center of the road. We did trash one bat that flew into our mirror.

The vehicle is now sitting in our front yard awaiting its/our next adventure as we all snuggle down for another night (with lightning and thunder) in Belize land.

September 7, 2004 (Tuesday)

Today we went with the Ministry of Health nurse to San Jose Village. Last visit while I was in the States the team saw 90 + patients – I never have figured out how they survived. Today our patient load was much more reasonable with about 30 patients. The MOH nurse was very busy as she had been on vacation and needed to catch up on her prenatal patients and immunizations. When we got caught up with our patients I offered to see her prenatal patients. The first one was quick and easy with everything appearing normal. The second one should have been a month or two from delivery but I couldn't even feel her uterus nor find any fetal heart sounds (she still has a positive urine pregnancy test). In the States she would have had an ultrasound and other tests done months ago – here she is just now being asked to go on a several hour bus ride to a hospital about 100 miles north of us where there is an ultrasound machine. Of the other 4 patients I saw 2 had indications that they might have pregnancy induced hypertension (pre-eclampsia, or what ever the current name is). In the States they would have been watched very closely – here we asked the village midwife to please check their blood pressures daily and to send them to the hospital if they got worse and hoped that the patients would comply. Of the patients that I saw I doubt that more than 1 or 2 will deliver in the hospital – the others will be delivered by their husbands or the lay midwife. If they go to the hospital they will need to arrange to stay with someone in town as the bus runs only 4 days a week and takes about two hours to get there. When they get to the hospital they will need to have their own Pampers, toilet paper, sanitary napkins, etc. and they may or may not be treated well by the nursing staff.

We have had a month without medical students. Today we got two new ones from the UK. I asked what they thought of their first mobile clinical and one of them commented that she felt pretty overwhelmed by a mother and her five children all (including mom) with significant fevers, awful sounding coughs, and ugly sores where they had scratched open scabies infections. The other commented that the “British are just too healthy [to offer a good learning experience]”.

I’m still trying to figure out the problems with our new van. We are convinced it was a very good deal for what we paid for it but we knew going in that it had engine problems. We were told to expect a leaking water pump and a fouling plug but as we drove it more I became concerned that it also had a leaking head gasket. I sent our maintenance man to the local auto repair place that looks to have its act together to get a compression test done. He returned and told me that they said they didn’t even need to do the compression test (they didn’t do one) to see that it needs a total overhaul. I was very discouraged but was determined to get a compression test before I gave up on it. There is a junk yard/auto repair place near us – if one believes that tidiness is a reflection of the work that is done then this place can barely change a spark plug. I walked over and asked if they had a compression gauge and he handed me a brand new one. I drove the van over and borrowed the tools I needed to do the compression test (which shows that the engine does NOT need an overhaul) and then offered to pay rent for using them. The owner told me that this was his way of showing appreciation for the work we do and would not accept payment. So much for first impressions.

Jen the new PT has a whole lot of energy. People are surprised that we bike to the clinic – she has started *running* home from there. She has a CD with 1,000,000 recipes on it – she and Clarice are having a ball experimenting with new cooking ideas. She has just gotten certified to go scuba diving so she is looking forward to her first warm water dive (she certified in the north Atlantic).

We are still supposed to be in the wet season but we haven’t really seen any rain for several days (a major dry spell here). The temperature keeps staying in the 90’s so we are ready for some rain to cool us down. We watch the path of each approaching tropical storm and hurricane with great interest but they all have veered north once they entered the Caribbean/Gulf of Mexico so far (much to Florida’s chagrin).

I need to take a thermometer down to the bay one of these days – it is getting so warm that it provides little refreshment. One of the things we look forward to with the van is being able to go to some refreshing swimming holes that are beyond easy bicycling range. [Later: I did take the thermometer and put it

about 4 feet under water – the temperature reading was 93 degrees Fahrenheit!]

September 12, 2004 (Sunday)

We just got back from the big anniversary surprise Clarice has been planning for some time. We went to Tobacco Caye for 3 days. Tobacco Caye has a whopping 5 acres of dry land. The wonderful thing is how little there is to do there except snorkel, dive, watch the waves, read books, watch the sunset, watch coconuts fall, etc.. The boat ride out took about ½ hour and was very smooth. I asked to double check if in fact the reef that the island rises from is indeed THE reef as the water was so smooth on the seaward side. I was assured that it was in fact THE reef and it was suggested that we go snorkeling on the outside of the reef and take advantage of the situation (normally you only snorkel on the inside of the reef as the breakers are hitting the outside with great force). The next day was our 28th anniversary. I went diving with the local dive master. I was his only customer but as the dive sites are only 5 minutes away it was not a problem. The water remained exceptionally smooth which made for great diving. About 2 in the afternoon we watched as a thunderstorm approached the island. We had about an hour of wild weather and a pretty impressive light and sound show (Clarice stood out in the rain and rinsed off the salt water). Today we started to feel the effects of hurricane Ivan off at the other end of the Caribbean. The breakers on the reef were rising at least 10 feet tall. This was enough above the usual that the locals were all pretty impressed but soon changed to concern when one of the island docks on the lea side of the island was lifted high enough that its pilings were pulled out of the ground and it immediately broke up. We had a bit of a rough ride back as the local boats are made to be light, fast, and very strong and seaworthy but they are not made for comfort.

The other thing that happened to make our weekend wonderful was that we were able to contact our daughter just before we left for the island and confirm that an ultrasound that morning provided evidence that her baby is doing very well despite some disturbing lab test earlier in the week. Thank God – literally. Perhaps it is because of her pregnancy that I'm more concerned about pregnancies and births here but it provides for some rather stark contrasts. We were asked to check on a mother and 1 hour old newborn on Thursday while out in one of the villages. The birthing suite consisted of a section of the dirt floor house being separated off with sheets for walls. A special fire was made next to the birthing bed (it was 90 degrees outside!) The baby had been delivered by its grandmother (often it is the father and occasionally a midwife that delivers the baby). When I first saw the mother she had a warm stone wrapped in a cloth setting on her abdomen. The newborn was wrapped up tight next to her (with its ankles tied together with a piece of the umbilical cord). I taught her to rub her uterus, checked that she was not bleeding excessively, checked that her pulse was strong and

not excessive or slow in rate, and admonished her to drink lots of fluids and put the baby to breast as soon as possible. Meanwhile Dr. Nick did a quick check of the baby. We checked them again once again later in the day and that is all of the medical attention they are likely to get until the MOH immunization/newborn clinic comes to the village.

September 23, 2004 (Thursday)

I've been remiss in writing for a while I see. Partially I've been going through a minor "down/grumpy" period. I think just the usual stuff built up; living and working with the same people 24/7 gets old at times, living in 90 degrees with 85 % humidity for 3 weeks straight has really gotten old, being away from home when your daughter is exhausted with her first pregnancy pulls one's energies away, etc.. I think I have finally started to break free of the grumps today.

Speaking of the weather... Last weekend we took Jen to Placencia to go diving. She had tried to get in on a dive trip while there the weekend before but nobody was going out. We went up on Friday with our friend Tess and then stayed at our what is becoming our usual Placencia hideout the Yellow House Inn (guess what color it is). The Inn has ceiling fans and louvered metal windows like the ones in our house but no air conditioning. The humidity was so high that about 1 AM I had to get a towel to lie on as my side of the bed was a virtual swimming pool of sweat – Clarice and Jen reported similar experiences. We did get out to dive the next day and it was nice that Jen had the dive master and myself both watching out for her on her first post-certification dive as it was only the three of us on the trip (its much easier to negotiate with the dive companies when they are hungry in the off season). On the other hand the water was pretty turbid due to unusual current and wind patterns with the on going hurricanes.

Leslie and Melissa had gone up to the States for 2 weeks to participate in a wedding ceremony. When they returned they brought back a water pump and some valve seals for the volunteer van. The water pump went in right away as the original one was to the point of draining water out as fast as we put it in. I also took a day and put in valve seals for the cylinder that was fouling its plug. Sadly a damaged spacer on the rocker shaft broke the rest of the way when I was reinstalling it so I had to make a temporary replacement part out of a ¾ inch PVC pipe. Since I don't know the life expectancy of PVC in hot engine oil, I plan to replace the spacer with a proper one when I can get it delivered. Tuesday our priest brought down a timing belt and a bike carrier for the vehicle. The bike carrier went on immediately and will be a great help and should keep us from damaging the seats getting bikes in and out. The timing belt will go on when I get "in the mood" as it is a preventative maintenance part only. The thing we are waiting for now is an estimate on vinyl lettering to go on the side. It will say, "Hillside Medical Center Volunteer

Staff Vehicle Donated by St John's Episcopal Church, Snohomish, WA, USA" (luckily it's a long van). We can also thank St John's for donating a good set of tools so I have been able to work on it. When all the work is done I expect we will have spent about \$8000 BZ of the \$10,000 donated (the rest will go towards ongoing maintenance) for a vehicle that I thought would be priced at \$19,000 BZ when I first looked at it.

We are both becoming very concerned with trying to leave documentation of what we have done so that the next group in can follow through. So far Jen is the only volunteer that has committed to carrying over to 2005. We are hoping that we can get an RN here at least a month before we leave so that we can arrange a smooth transition. (Side comment: A gecko keeps crossing the living room floor as I am writing this – not sure why but I hope he eats lots of ants wherever he goes.) I am hoping to teach Jen the computer side of things as she seems to have the aptitude and I really am trying to stick to my word that when we return home we will be done with this mission (the alternative would be to do some of the computer work remotely). (Gecko now to the ceiling.) Clarice is trying to figure out how to make the pharmacy ordering make sense to someone coming from an environment where you order something and it comes the next day, into an environment where you order something and maybe, perhaps, if you are lucky and the person at the wholesale house knows you and likes you it might come in next month (or the month after). Today the satellite dish went down because of rain water collecting in part of it. I have developed enough comfort with the system and familiarity with the vendor who provided it that he was able to tell me where to put a pin hole to repair the system and we were back up and running within minutes. I hope that I can pass on enough of my knowledge of the system so that similar repairs can be done when needed in the future. (Now it sounds like a fire hose is hitting the roof with the rain – maybe the gecko knows to get high up before the flood comes!)

The other piece that I wish we could pass on is the cultural knowledge that only comes with experience. Knowing to look through the four spellings of the name Sho, Shol, Xo, Xol when searching for a chart is a good example (X is pronounce as Sh in Ketchi). We were both laughing about the possibility that we will start speaking Belizean English in a formal setting when we get home – "Me is da fodder of Erin and Bryan who me miss miss miss". Just being able to understand some of the spoken language has taken time. It will also take time for our replacements to get known in the community. Today a patient in an outer village came up to me and started using Spanish – I think she recalled from our previous encounters that I can speak a tiny bit of Spanish but only 2 words of her first language (Ketchi). The point is that it helped get our communication moving along because she knew me from seeing me on and off over the past 9 months. Clarice even made a comment the other day that she was sorry she was being pulled home by the allure of

grandkids as she feels she is finally making progress – she has never before even mentioned interest in staying on (no – we are not going to extend!).

We have enough data in our computer system at the clinic now that I can start making interesting statements.

Of the patients in our system who we have identified ethnicity on:

51% Ketchi Maya

23% Mopan Maya

9% East Indian (the clinic is located in a primarily East Indian village)

5% Garifuna

4% Mestizo

3% White

3% Mixed/Other

2% Creole

We have seen about 3050 different individuals since the beginning of the year
We have logged over 5000 patient visits since the beginning of the year
September 28, 2004 (Tuesday)

September 27, 2004 (Monday)

Dr. Nick is out of Belize at a conference on tropical medicine. We had a very nice pediatrician who filled in as the clinic MD to work with until she left early this morning. That left Clarice and I and two British medical students to run the mobile clinic. Since we can't sign as being in charge of the medical students we swapped roles for today (and will again tomorrow) and had the nurses do the diagnosis and treatment plans while the medical students checked in the patients and handed out the drugs we had prescribed. Overall it worked pretty well as we were able to put all four of our brains together when we had questions about a patient.

It turned out to be a tropical dermatology day in the villages we visited. I had one lady of about 20 years old who had had a small spot on her index finger grow until the finger tip was macerated looking and the skin was falling off. She had another spot that was starting the same process on her palm. I suspect that either she had received a fine skin prick or insect bite that she was unaware of that had started the process. We tried our most potent antibiotics and told her to get to the doctor quickly if it didn't get better soon! Another woman had tried to deliver a breech baby in the village for 48 hours. She ended up with a cesarean section at a hospital about 100 miles north of here (the nearest surgical facility). When I saw her she was doing well except for an ulcer on her heel that she says had opened up during her hospitalization. Luckily it didn't look infected so if she will keep it clean clean clean (Belizean for "very very clean") it should heal. A little 6 year old girl was shown to me by her school teacher (today clinic was in the school room after

we (tried) to get the kids out. The little girl was new to the village and only spoke Ketchi while all of her classmates and teacher spoke Mopan and English. The little girl had a very ugly weeping rash on her forearm so I asked for her mother to be fetched. While the child waited she started just sobbing as she didn't know what she was waiting for only that she was being left alone with lots of people speaking languages she couldn't understand. In all we saw 32 patients, most of them requiring significant treatment (other than simple advice).

Clarice went to bed early tonight with a sinus infection of her own. We are trying to get her healed up before we go on a 4 day weekend trip to Roatan Island in Honduras. After she went to bed I went out to the beach for a while and marveled at the full moon as it played between the clouds and reflected on the Caribbean. In the distance there were the usual lightning flashes as the nights thunder storms started to gather. On the way home I stopped to visit our friend Miss (Nurse) Mavis and she and I had a pleasant talk about everything from nursing in the "old days" to the upcoming US elections (which are being watched very carefully throughout the world).

September 29, 2004 (Wednesday)

The clinic opens at 8 am on Wednesdays but often we have several patients waiting for us when we arrive as the market buses that they ride in on pass Poppyshow road where the clinic is located at about 6 am or so. This morning was no different and Clarice and I didn't pay much attention to the family that was waiting other than to say hello when we drove in at about 7 am. At 7:45 Clarice decided to start checking in and seeing the patients. It took a very short time and she asked me to come and see the baby and we quickly agreed that we not only needed to send this one to the hospital but we needed to provide transportation. The baby was two weeks old and covered with a rash that was causing skin sloughing in many areas. She also had a 2 year old sister with a fever of 104 degrees. I loaded Mom, Grandmother, baby, and 2 year old in the van and went in to the hospital. Along the way the mother expressed concern that since it was past 8 am that all of the outpatient numbers would already be given out and the children wouldn't get to see the doctor. I assured her that the baby would be seen. On arrival at the hospital the person checking in patients went through her list of numbers and didn't acknowledge me even though I was wearing a name tag and am known at the hospital. I went looking for help and ended up finding the Assistant MOH director (who is also our next door neighbor). She walked out to look at the baby with me and immediately sent us straight to the medical floor where the baby was seen by a doctor fairly quickly. The doctor diagnosed the child with impetigo and explained to the mother that it would need to be admitted. I was able to get the 2 year old up for a quick look but she was sent back to be seen as an outpatient (the mother later told me that she ended up going back out to the village with the grandmother without

being seen). Later in the day I brought supplies and food money to the mother from the clinic (soap, water pitcher, basin, drinking cup, etc). She was still a bit distraught that the baby was in the hospital and she had not prepared with cloths for herself or the baby but at least the child looked more alert and was getting antibiotic injections. I keep wondering if I should have done more. I would be pretty upset if I were in the mother's shoes and I have things like money to buy food, friends and family with phones and cars if I need help, knowledge about how modern medicine works so I understand what is happening around me, and the ability to communicate easily with my medical providers. It must be much worse for her.

October 3, 2004 (Sunday)

We had agreed among the clinic staff that we would take Thursday and Friday off this week (we had no mobile set up for Thursday and Clarice and I had made plans prior to Nick deciding to go to the conference). This gave us a 4 day weekend and so Clarice, Jen and I went to Roatan Island, Honduras – AKA “Divers Mecca”. We just returned home a short while ago.

Our first problem with the idea of going to Roatan was figuring out how to get there. A small Central American airline showed that they flew from Belize City to Roatan but never answered their phone or their email (I learned while we were on Roatan that they contract with TACA airlines in Belize and other places). Since we couldn't get information about going by air we embarked on an overland expedition to Honduras. First we went via the daily open boat from Punta Gorda to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala leaving at 9 am on Thursday on smooth waters. In Puerto Barrios we found a taxi that would take us to the “frontier” (i.e. border) for the same price as a mini van. The road through Guatemala was a two lane paved highway in excellent condition. Once we hit the Honduras border the road became bumpy dirt and deteriorated from there. At the entry station for Honduras we had planned to wait for a local bus but after about a half hour we were getting antsy about catching our flight to the island so we hired a kid with a pickup truck. We couldn't understand why it would take 2 hours to go the 45 or so miles to Puerto Cortez until we realized that the road was bumpy dirt alternating with paved but under construction for the entire route. We rode in the back of the truck until a tropical rain storm came up then we were all able to squeeze into the king cab. When we did get to Puerto Cortez we jumped (almost literally) from the pickup truck into a local “chicken” bus (but no chickens on this one – in fact it was in very good condition). After paying the equivalent of about \$7 each to hire the pickup truck it cost us just over \$1 to travel the rest of the way to San Pedro Sula on a paved divided highway on the bus. We managed to get to the airport with about 1 hour to spare before our 5 pm flight took off. I had booked over the internet onto a flight from San Pedro Sula to Roatan. The plane was a Shorts 360 which is an interesting machine. If you were to give a 7 year old a shoe box, scotch tape and other odds and ends and said make

an airplane it likely would have looked much like this 36 passenger aircraft. Inside it was even more interesting as the cockpit looked like it had been designed by a builder of fishing trawlers with its twin entry doors near each outer wall and square window arrangement. We flew to La Ceiba where we had to change planes into a smaller Cessna Caravan for the final leg of our “direct” flight finally landing in Roatan just after dusk. I was surprised to learn that while Belize has one jet capable international airport, Honduras has 4 including Roatan meaning that we could have flown from Houston, Texas much faster than we made our little jaunt of 158 miles (as the crow flies). I also learned that with all of the stops the flights from Belize City make it would have almost taken us as long as it did the way we went and would have cost quite a bit more.

On Roatan we had the taxi driver let us off at a hostel listed in Jen’s guide book. We paid \$15 / night for the room with 2 beds and a nice veranda and a functional bathroom that we had to ourselves for the weekend as the other room that shared it was never filled. The roof leaked during the nightly tropical showers (aka – really really hard rain for short periods of time) but not over the beds. The nice thing was we were located across from the beach and on the main drag of West End village.

West End village is a really nice place to spend some time away. Its pretty laid back where we were or you could go a short way and have your choice of a number of international resorts. Most everyone spoke better English than we hear in Belize. Finally there are dive shops every 20 feet or so.

Jen continued to be in charge of price negotiations because she spoke the best Spanish and had the smallest budget (a good motivator). She worked out a price with a dive master for 4 day dives and 1 night dive for \$90 (I usually plan to spend up to \$85 for 2 dives when I go with a guide). We were his only customers for both days we dove. On the first day he and I were able to keep close tabs on Jen as she has only 2 dives after certifying under her belt. The diving was beautiful and it took all of 3 minutes to boat out to the dive sites on the reef. After we got back from the second dive I rented a 2 person scooter and went to meet Clarice and Jen who had taken a water taxi to a very nice resort beach up the coast a bit and gone snorkeling. When I finally found them after getting lost a couple of times Clarice was ready to rest with her ongoing sinus infection and Jen was ready to explore some more so she and I rode a good way up the length of the island. We saw some beautiful views and realized that the farther from the west end one gets, the more “Honduras like” the island becomes. On the second day our private dive master was ill so I talked him into letting us dive as a pair while he stayed with the boat. This was great from my perspective as I get VERY tired of feeling like a diver on a leash when I am used to (and qualified to) dive without that kind of guide. It was a very enjoyable dive for both of us. On the second dive of the day I put Jen in charge of the dive for practice and it was

the first time I could see that she really relaxed with her equipment and fully enjoyed the experience of diving. Since the dive master was to stay with the boat and since the water at the dive site was very clear and relatively shallow near the mooring buoy and since we had to go back to the same site to look for my glasses that had gone over board – we were able to get Clarice in the boat at no charge. She had a great time snorkeling while we dove (and we did recover my glasses). Jen really wanted to try night diving. With our dive master ill we arranged with another shop to go out at dusk. I wasn't impressed that we saw all of the wonderful nocturnal creatures that night dive fans say you do, but the phosphorescent creatures were something else. One crustacean creates what is known as strings of pearls. If you have watched the Harry Potter movies then recall the scenes in the great hall where the candles float freely in the air. Now imagine that scene as completely dark only the candles are replaced by glowing "strings" of three lights with about 3 inches between each light and these strings are floating all around you. The strangest thing that happened on the dive was one of those things you always worry about but seldom hear of it really happening – but of course it did really happen to Jen – she got hooked and reeled in. We had just noticed that she was descending away from the group when she was able to dislodge the hook from her chest and swim down to join us. All I can say is it's too bad that she didn't have something handy to send up with the hook to give the fisherman the startle of his/her life.

Today we returned home traveling in many of the same ways we had going to the island. The lucky thing was we were able to move from one method of transport to the next very quickly (at one point the bus conductor had Jen's bags loaded on our next bus before she knew she would be riding it). We managed to get to our final boat with 10 minutes to spare before it was scheduled to depart. The ride home was quite rough but we made it safely. All in all we had a great weekend – even Clarice with her illness (she kept trying to figure out how to come back for a couple of weeks some time).

October 9, 2004 (Saturday)

We are getting ready to leave on the 9 am boat to Guatemala. Since we have been here I have wanted to go to the Rio Dulce which is huge river/lake system just over the border. It is often used as a winter stopping ground for world cruising boats so we plan to take some time looking at boats (our "thing") while we are there. The med students went last weekend and have given us some pointers. Tuesday is a national holiday which the clinic is celebrating on Monday so we have another long weekend – probably one of the last before we leave so we wanted to take advantage of it. This will be a Norman and Clarice only weekend for us while the rest of the Mission House crew has joined with the students and some local folks to use the van as I had initially envisioned and gone to a resort a couple hours north for the weekend (they had all 7 seats full when they left).

Clarice is finally sounding better after fighting the sinus infection for over 2 weeks but of course she passed it on to me so now I get to sniff and cough. Nick was joking the other day that Mission House is becoming a sick ward with Jen having trouble with her knee and bronchitis, Melissa having a sore (broken?) foot and her chronic cough, Clarice having the sinus infection and now a stitched up finger (see below), now me with the sinus crud. I suspect this is all part of living in an area with bacteria and viruses and lifestyles that we haven't fully adapted to in addition to living in very close proximity to each other.

I mentioned in an earlier log about a patient who was showing signs of pre-eclampsia and the public health nurse and I kept reminding the lay midwife to watch her blood pressure and swelling and get her to the hospital if it got at all worse. I found out this week that the patient had not gone to the hospital until she was in a full eclamptic seizure (I have never seen one even when I was doing labor and delivery – I've just been told I would never forget it if I did). The baby did not survive and the mother remains in intensive care. Once again I am reminded that while it could be argued that we go overboard with our watching every twitch of the mother and baby at home, that doing nothing is incredibly dangerous. Every time I see a Maya woman over 55 I am impressed at how "old" she is (only a few years older than myself) as there are not huge numbers that survive that long. When people talk about the women crossing the prairie and stopping for an hour to deliver a child they forget about the numbers of those women and children who did not survive the experience – it is still much the same in the villages here.

We have had "OK" med students while we have been here and then some like our current set that we wish wouldn't leave. We currently have Beth and Becky from Great Britain who are both very kind and always willing to pitch in and help with the extra work. We had to laugh a couple of days ago when Clarice was having her finger stitched after an accident with a kitchen knife (again) and Becky walked in and in a very concerned voice asked if a "spot of tea" would help. We are convinced that as far as the Brits are concerned a cup of tea can solve all of the problems of the world. The good news is that the Beth and Becky will be staying two months rather than the usual one. We also added a guy from Cyprus this week who also seems to be fitting in very nicely. Since we have loosened the ties with the Medical College of Wisconsin and developed more of a World Wide Web presence we are becoming much more international in flavor. We currently have students from China and Australia expressing interest in coming as well.

October 11, 2004 (Monday)

I forgot to mention in last weeks note that Thursday was the first time we have had to cancel mobile clinic because of flooding since we have been here.

The locals kept telling us that the reason it was so dry and hot was that the hurricanes were sucking all of the weather into themselves. Last week was the first cyclone free week for some time and the rain did indeed return with a vengeance. We got about 5 miles up the main highway and had already passed through three flooded areas of roadway. Since we would have had to cross one very low bridge over a major stream on the way to our destination we asked a bus coming the opposite way what he thought our chances of getting through were – he just said it wasn't going to happen so we turned around and went back.

When I came back from having surgery I brought a new wireless printer and a computer projector in my suitcase. When I declared them at customs I was told there would be a \$400 BZ tariff placed on them. I decided to leave them and let Martha get the tax exempt papers in place and then have them retrieved – that was two months ago and we finally have them in hand. The printer suffered some minor damage during packing that I was able to fix with tape but would rather get a replacement part. It also refuses to print a full page over the wireless network or work at all on the Ethernet cable. I spent hours on-line and by email with HP – their response is that it needs to come into a service center and no, they cannot mail out a simple part because it is not “user serviceable” (mind you I have already serviced it once successfully). I have explained that I choose not to phone them as their toll free number from Belize doesn't work and that there is no way that the unit is going to a service center. Clearly on-line service techs are not required to have a good background in geography or world politics! (I suspect that the printer will be relegated to being connected by USB cable for the remainder of its days.)

We did have a really nice time in Livingston, Guatemala and boating up the Rio Dulce (“sweet/quiet river”). Livingston is a very active fishing town with no overland road access. We first took the local water taxi to Puerto Barrios, Guatemala and then the smaller, more local, water taxi back to Livingston. The Rio Dulce must not rise much more than a couple of feet as you travel up stream to the entrance to Lago De Izabal (Lake Isabel) which itself is over 40 Km long. The Rio Dulce canyon is very pretty with its limestone walls covered with a dense jungle canopy. All along the river and its tributaries are periodic native homes serviced by families in small dugout canoes – Clarice and I both commented that it was in many ways how we imagine parts of Amazonia to be. There are also jungle resorts along the river and then very fancy marina resorts near the inlet to the lake itself. We had a good time practicing our Spanish and are beginning to feel that even though we have a very difficult time following normal conversation that we can make our needs known with less and less of a struggle. We returned home over smooth waters (a nice change from last weeks outing) and will get back to work tomorrow.

October 15, 2004 (Friday)

Bugs:

A description from Clarice:

Well, I got to check off another "must see" while here in Belize...We had been told about army ant invasions, but had never seen one. Yesterday I was greeted with the warning "don't go into the community center - army ant invasion". So I decided to go look inside...OH MY WORD!!! millions of army ants in a wide swath progressing from one end of the building to the other...and all other specimens running out of their path in huge numbers...Now I will say that when I heard of army ants I was thinking GI JOE ants...well compared to the ants that live with us in our bed, food, etc, they are big...however, they are only about 1/2 inch long in reality. So I think to myself...OK I can use the dirt redistribution machine and get some smell out of our laundry since it's in another building....As I pull half of the load out of the spinner and walk out to hang it on the clothes lines, I am met with the progression of the army ants...yes, they have left the community center and proceeded to the tree house. The tree house is a two story complex - student residences above and one half of the bottom is open patio with picnic tables and clothes lines and the other half is enclosed storage/laundry area....I decide I can quickly hop over the swath and jump on the picnic table (since no ants are on the tables) and then hang up the laundry. As I'm about half done with my job there, I feel little creepy crawlies on my feet (yes, I'm in sandals) and see the ants have discovered the tables. I throw the rest of the clothes in a pile, on the line, carefully balanced to not fall off and proceed to jump down, run out of the swarm and stomp my feet madly, but not fast enough to avoid a nasty bite...(I've seen kids come here with army ant bites that are big abscesses)...I get by with intense stinging and red welt...I decide the laundry can wait and so, from a safe distance, watch the etymologic smorgasbord falling from the tree house (scorpions, lizards, spiders, other various ants, etc.)- The scorpions were pretty angry about it all (tail curved to strike - pincers going like crazy). The locals like the ant invasions, esp. if you live in a thatch roof, dirt floor home - which is VERY common. The ants go thru the house and clear out all the other specimens that have taken up residence and literally "clean house" for you.. It was interesting seeing the birds thinking they had a free for all with all the ants - however, the ants were biting their feet and so they were hopping around like crazy - guess there is not "free lunch" after all.

A description from Norman:

While I was sitting the other day I was entertained by a tiny black bug – I suspect he was a flea of some sort. He would scurry about 5 inches forward then hop/boink 2-6 inches in a random direction. Often he would scurry forward about 2 inches then hop/boink back to exactly where he had started

from (sometimes 2 or three times in a row). Occasionally he would hop/boink 4 or five times and just about make a circle. All in all I think he covered a total area of about 8 inches on a side in the 5 minutes I watched him. I realized that at home in the States if I had seen such a beast in my house I would have assumed a major invasion was in progress and immediately gotten out the bug bombs. Here the bug fit into the description of – not an overwhelming number and he wasn't biting me or eating my food therefore he was to be ignored. We live with many such "house guest". There are the little ants that we try to keep under control as to numbers (NO particle of food may be left open to air for more than five minutes). I really don't like the little green bugs that visit us in bed – why a bug that is obviously camouflaged for living on leaves finds attraction in human chest hair I can't understand. The little green bugs wander about until the owner of the hair gets irritated enough and then jumps to the next person in line. If someone finally gets irritated enough to squash the bug then he gets his final revenge by smelling really bad. On the other hand the lightning bugs that hang around our window screen and occasionally get into the house do provide some evening entertainment as they flash and fly about.

I hadn't realized that this section had grown to 7+ pages – I think I'd better go ahead and post.

Norman
October 19, 2004 (Tuesday)

Not much unusual to report but I decided I had some quiet time and felt like writing so I would put fingers to the keys and see what came out.

On the subject of medications deteriorating. In the last log I wrote about Clarice's extended sinus infection and finger that had to be stitched up. Since she was still on antibiotics from the sinus infection she wasn't concerned about the finger getting infected – but it did. In retrospect we now believe that the antibiotics we had in our personal supply had deteriorated to the point of being ineffective because of the heat and humidity. She switched to "fresh" drugs from the clinic and cleared up very quickly.

I am currently concerned after having a mild but persistent headache (I seldom have headaches and those that I have quickly respond to a simple Tylenol) which is accompanied by a blood pressure of 140 /90+ . The headache seems to be gone this evening finally and my blood pressure is easing back to normal. I will need to watch and see if something triggers the reaction again or ????

I/we have been really pushing that the clinic hire a translator. A couple of weeks ago it was decided that adequate funds were in the bank to go ahead and do so. We hired a Mayan woman who speaks Ketchi, Mopan, and

Spanish (along with English). As we suspected we are finding out that our translators-of-convenience were often giving us their interpretation of what the patient said rather than what they had said. We also use her when we are explaining medications and treatments to patients even if they seem to understand English well enough and believe that the messages are getting through much better.

Margaret Cho, the Mayan woman our churches are helping through school stopped by the other day for help with a science question (“How would you tell the age of the General Sherman tree without cutting it down?”) I was on-line at the time and able to show her a photo of how a tree coring is done and a photo of the General Sherman tree in addition to instant messaging with our daughter. She was pretty excited at the prospect of one day being in a place where she would have access to a computer and all that it offers. She is so excited about her studies that it is fun to talk with her. She often brings her home study books to show us as well as her report cards.

Jen has been very excited at the prospect of her brother coming to visit. She and he are very close and have traveled to a number of exotic places together. He arrived on Friday and they have been zipping around seeing the sights as fast as they can (in between watching the Boston Red Socks in the playoffs).

October 24, 2004 (Sunday)

Our Episcopal priest is gone back to the States for 3 weeks so he asked if I would act as Lay Minister at the services while he was gone and Clarice would cover the Sunday School. I did this once before for him and found it to be an interesting experience. Since I am not ordained and cannot consecrate the bread and wine he does that at the service before he leaves and we store it for use while he is gone. I decided that since the sermons are short I will go ahead and enter them here for people who are interested – if not then just skip ahead to [the] END.

#1

Luke 14: 25-33

I'm faced today with trying to give the first sermonette of my life. Looking forward to today I was eager to see if I was up to the task. This is something I always wanted to try – *until* I read today's gospel message.

On the surface it's a message from Christ himself not only saying that we should drop everything and walk away from all of our worldly possessions and follow him if we are to be true disciples but we need to “*HATE*” our fathers and our mothers and our wives and children as well!! I reread the passage a

number of times, then I decided it must have been taken out of context so I went back to the bible and read the preceding verses and the verses that followed only to realize that in the bible it is a stand alone message just as it is here.

About the time I was moving towards total despair – believing that I must be the only Christian in the world that just didn't "get it" when I read this message Fr. Malcom walked in to our house. I hardly said "hello" and "welcome" before I told him that I didn't like the gospel message I had ended up with. He replied that he didn't like it either – well at least I felt better knowing that a man with a collar was having trouble with the message too – it wasn't just me. We did talk over the Gospel and Fr Malcom gave me some thoughts that started to illuminate this difficult passage.

I was still hung up on that word "hate" though as I tried to put my thoughts together. How could the God of the ten commandments say "Honor your Father and your Mother..." and then tell us to hate them in order to be ideal followers of Him. I looked in other versions of the bible thinking that there must be another translation of that word.

I did find some helpful thoughts in a neighboring missionaries bible study library including the suggestion that the word doesn't mean to literally hate our families but rather that it admonishes us to put God before all others. Now here is a thought that makes sense in light of the rest of the passage where Christ tells the crowds that if they truly want to follow him that they need to carefully consider what they are doing because they are saying that they are willing to leave their past behind and move forward into the unknown.

When Clarice and I decided to come down to Belize we did so because we believed it was what Christ wanted us to do. We don't ever expect to be "perfect" disciples, we are never going to make it as one of "THE TOP TWELVE". We do want to give it an "honest try". So what did trying to be better disciples mean to us? Did we need to "hate" our parents? Did we need to forsake all of our worldly possessions? Yes and No.

My mother is convinced that every roadside ditch in PG has its man eating alligator and that huge snakes lurk in every mango tree waiting for her son and daughter-in-law to be their next meal. I bet you didn't know that every house in PG gets hit by lightning at least once a week – I'm sure my mother would tell you it is so. Needless to say she resisted our coming to an extent. Did we need to 'hate" her in order to follow what we believe to be Christ's will – not at all – we still love her with all of our hearts but we did need to put our desire to be disciples first. We needed to be willing to choose God's will over our families will even though we love our families dearly. In a sense I expect it might be easier following a different path at times if we did "hate" our

families but I really doubt that we would be following God's path as he teaches the strength of love and the value of families.

In the gospel passage Christ talks about carefully planning before building a building or fighting a war – or becoming a disciple. Did we need to plan carefully before we came down – you better “Belize it mon”. We both feel strongly that a commitment is the same as a pledge or a promise. If we give our word then we will do all within our power to follow through. We gave our word to the people of Toledo that we would try to use our skills to improve health and healthcare here for a period of one year and we planned/plan to follow through. We carefully planned for how our finances would be taken care of, we spent a year building an addition on to our house so that we could collect rent to pay our debts while we are gone. In all we spent about 5 years getting ready to go on a mission and 6 months actually preparing for Toledo itself. We believe that we've acted as good disciples in that we prepared to do what God had asked us to do so we could do it right.

But what about giving up possessions – we still have a house back home, we still have our boat and car. We didn't really give them up we just set them aside for a while. It turns out that was the easy part – the possessions of the heart have been very hard to leave behind. Friends to visit and work with, our children to watch as they move into adulthood, our grand child as he begins to explore the world. Time with our parents who may not be with us to many more years. These possessions were very hard to cast aside.

But God is not one to forget his children and followers. I've always believed that if God asks us to do something then He will always make sure we are able to succeed. We believe God asked us to go on a mission trip. We believe he led us to Belize not at all by accident. I'm convinced that finding extended family we didn't know we had in a country we had to look up on a map and then being invited to visit them two years before we would be asked to serve in the same country was NOT a coincidence. I'm convinced that getting sent to a place where we have running water and electricity and a familiar language on our first mission abroad was not a mistake – I think God knew we could handle this but would fail if we ended up in place much more remote.

When God asks you to follow – think carefully about it as there will likely be sacrifice and pain involved. Then make the choice to follow knowing that He will never give you more than you can personally handle and don't be afraid to let Him know in prayer that you need a hand along the way. Put Him first, love your neighbors and honor your mothers and fathers and while your journey may be difficult it will be down the path that is best for you.

#2

October 24 (Luke 18 9-14)

In today's gospel we hear the parable about the Pharisee who is sure he is going to heaven because he has followed all of the rules set out in his faith and the tax collector who pleads with God to be merciful as he knows he has sinned. At the end of the parable Christ surprises his audience by saying that it is more likely that the tax collector will go to heaven than it is that the Pharisee will.

When I read the gospel it brought two stories from my own life to mind that I would like to share with you.

The first story concerns my mother who grew up in a family with a very unbending fundamentalist country preacher as her father. At home she learned that all she had to do to go to heaven was to follow the rules: no smoking, no drinking, no swearing, no, no, no. She related to me how easy she found it was to live with these very clear guidelines and she enjoyed the simplicity of it. When my mother married my father she found herself in a family that went to a church that had many many fewer black and white rules. Instead of rules that told her what not to do she was told only that her task as a Christian was to ask what Christ would want her to do and then to do it. She found this one guideline to be in many ways much more complex than the "no this" and "no that" that she had learned growing up and was initially a bit overwhelmed by it. As she later gained understanding about her new Church family she realized that in fact that one guideline had led her to a deeper understanding of Christ and His message. She no longer was only guided by rules of "no" but also with words of "yes" and "hope", if she looked at a child in need and there were no rules of "no" for that situation then previously she could have walked away and felt herself to be very self-righteous just like the Pharisees – now she was required to look at the child and say "Christ would have me care for this child – that is what I must do".

The second story is from my many days of caring for patients with cancer, AIDS, and other illnesses as they lay dying. One thing I learned from them is that how one ACTS as they grow up has little to do with the depth of their true faith.

Some of my patients would come to death's doorway after a life of proclaiming that they were very righteous and good as they had gone to church several times each week for all of their lives, and they had been quick to point out the flaws in other people so that they could "save" them from themselves, and they had given generously to their church (and everyone knew it). But after a life of proclaiming that death is not to be feared – they feared it and fought it. What I saw were people who had proclaimed faith but had not let it grow deep in their hearts and souls where it could take root and

provide them comfort when they most needed it. They had told the world to listen to Christ – but not taken time to listen when he spoke to them.

On the other hand I had patients who, like the tax collector, expressed their fear that God might be angered because they had not gone to church every Sunday and had not prayed twice a day but when you watched them you realized that they truly did understand the message of life after death. If you asked them you would find out that the reason they hadn't been in church on Sundays was often because they were helping at a local hospital. They had forgotten to pray twice a day because they were exhausted from spending time loving and teaching the children that God had given them to raise in His image. These people met death with a sense of "I have lived my life as I thought Christ would have me live it – now it is time to move on and I am ready". When I think about these people I hope that I can be like them when my time comes.

Remember: The Pharisee lived by rules but forgot to meet God, the tax collector sinned but chose to face God – it was the latter of the two that Christ held up as an example for us today.

END

We had something unexpected happen the other day when we were having a conversation at the local restaurant. We mentioned that we will be leaving in 8 weeks and the person we talked to asked where we would be assigned next. We have never thought of ourselves as career missionaries but rather as long term volunteers. It was surprising to hear someone else thinking of us in that way. I know that at this point Clarice wants badly to go home (not to escape Belize but rather to be in her own house with her family and friends close by) and does not see herself doing a long term expedition again in the foreseeable future. On the other hand when I think about doing this for 6 months I keep coming back to the recognition that we were only beginning to make real changes when we passed the 6 month mark. I think if we ever go on a shorter mission it will have to be in the role of doing an established job/task rather than as people bringing potential change. If we go again I think one thing we will look for is a setting where we feel freer to give out information on family planning as this limitation has been VERY frustrating to us both.

At the clinic its hard to imagine feeling rushed when you have 8 weeks left (considering how many people never go on a mission of over 4 weeks) but we are trying to make sure all "loose ends" are tied up before we go. I spent yesterday morning doing some final programming in our data base program so it will be useful as a tool for medication inventory control – we now have only one month (November) to test the concept. I spent my spare time the past couple of weeks trying to input all of the patients we saw in January into

the system (the system went on line in February) so that year end reports can be done electronically. Clarice has been busy writing notes about how the clinic is run and how to keep the medication supplies stocked. I have been working to write computer system manuals and then need to write information about the mobile clinics. Martha the clinic manager has agreed to learn to maintain the computer network and web page so every Wednesday she and I have a training session. There are no long term volunteer nurses lined up to replace us when we leave and we feel that the Healthcare Center needs 2 – 3 nurses to run most effectively. There is talk of hiring a person to come in and do the data entry tasks (about 6 hours a week) and Clarice is teaching the translator to do basic filing, copying, etc. which are also time consuming things we have done the past year. It would be wonderful to expect that the systems we have put in place and the programs we have grown will continue (and grow further) but the reality is that I only give it a 50:50 chance unless stable staff can be found – soon.

October 28, 2004 (Thursday)

Weather:

I finally found out how to make it not rain in Southern Belize – wash out the rain barrel. I kept thinking that it would be a good idea to wash out our rain barrel that we use to collect drinking water off of the roof and finally got around to it over a week ago. In fact it had a fair amount of dirt in the bottom, despite the screen the water goes through, and we were glad we did the cleaning. The plan was to clean the barrel then put some bleach in it and let it refill over night then empty it again. As soon as we cleaned it the skies cleared and it took several days to get enough rain to fill it (in our usual heavy storms it takes less than an hour to fill the 200 gallons). We emptied it again and it sat until we got a small amount of rain yesterday and overnight but still it was only filled to about the 6 in mark (its about 4 feet tall). Today it has been clouding up and now the rains have started with some sincerity (its 5 PM and usually they don't start until about 9 PM so it should be an "all nighter"). The nice thing was that not only was it clear and *only* in the low 80's but the humidity dropped below 70% - it felt really comfortable. The moon has been full and the Caribbean calm in the evenings so it has been wonderful to sit on the community dock in the evening and enjoy the moonlight on the water. Last night we got a very good look at the lunar eclipse – the last I saw it before I got to concentrating on the world series game it had gone from a full moon to a small sliver at the top (Jen is originally from Boston so she got my interest up in the series this year).

Monkey River:

Two months ago we finally abandoned one of our regular mobile clinic villages as we would only see about 6 patients after a very long drive and

they are right on the main bus route so they have “easy” access to several regular clinics. Dr. Nick has had his hopes set on setting up a regular clinic at the Creole village of Monkey River to the north of us. He even dreamed of going by boat. Well today he got his wish (Martha was even able to talk another local agency into running us up in their boat at no cost to our clinic) and we went for our first visit.

The water was very smooth this morning and we got to see a group of dolphins a ways off and to travel among the mangrove cayes that protect the coast from hurricanes. The village had a very nice facility for the clinic (it, and most of the buildings in the village were built after hurricane Iris devastated the village 4 years ago) and we were warmly welcomed by the people. Many of the villagers were concerned that we check their blood glucose levels – and with good cause – it looks like we have many newly diagnosed cases of diabetes to work on (even a number of the children had elevated levels which is of great concern). The village provided us a lunch of conch chowder, rice, and fried plantains. The water was a bit rougher on the way home as the rain storms we had watched approach in the morning were now all around us (but never over us).

All and all it was a really enjoyable work day. We got to enjoy being on the water and seeing some new scenery (even though it is nothing like it was before Iris from the pictures they showed us in the village). We got to visit one of the cayes where our boat and driver were based at a ranger station and we got to feel like we have provided a real service to an appreciative population.

November 4, 2004 (Thursday)

Our group of three delightful students left and in return we got a great group for a couple of weeks. We have an MD and his wife (non-practicing LPN who pitches in wherever she can), an RN and her husband (a handyman with skills and interest to match my own heart), and an MD and the resident studying with her. They are a really great group and most of them are our age with adult children of their own so it is fun to just enjoy the camaraderie.

Everyone at the clinic is becoming very concerned about what will happen when Clarice and I leave (and now it sounds like the only other RN – Leslie will leave as well). The clinic badly needs a long term nurse with experience and leadership skills who enjoys working with people from various cultures and doesn't mind doing the “junk” work like maintaining the pharmacy inventory and keeping the data base up to date. Currently there are only short term nurses coming for January (a very difficult time as there will be a full complement of students) and a 6 month person coming in February. I went over to Miss Mavis's rosary session yesterday and asked that they include a request for a (some) nurse (es) in their prayers (for a non-Catholic –

this is a sign of desperation but I figure that divine intervention would be helpful and every little bit of prayer power helps). Please include this need in your prayers as well.

The rains have returned in force. I have a photo of Jen, who hadn't taken off her night cloths (shorts and a top) yet in rubber boots playing out in the pond that replaced our yard yesterday much like a little kid on the first day it snows. Apparently it was a very localized storm (even though it went on all night) as there was only minor flooding in our area and not in other areas around us. We had a "medium" thunder storm on Tuesday night and the new doctors raised their eyebrows a bit when we told them it didn't qualify as a "big one" (even though most of them are from the mid-west).

For the third time since we have been here we rearranged/moved the back stock pharmacy again yesterday as the termites had found its latest location. Luckily there was no significant damage this time before their trails were noticed. The pharmacy has now taken over one of the student dorm rooms in the concrete clinic building. Martha swears that she will find the funding in short order to add on a pharmacy room to that same building (she even claims we will be able to move the pharmacy into it before we leave). We shall see – in the mean time the drugs and supplies are safe for now.

November 7, 2004 (Sunday)

6 weeks and 4 days until we leave – yes, we are counting. It is with mixed feelings – on one hand we are so very excited to see our friends and families and to experience our own home again but on the other hand we will leave many friends here and feel that our work is still very much "in process". It is a chapter of our lives that will take some time to fully understand even though we were the ones who lived it.

Today at church only one adult showed up besides Clarice and I. I was a bit frustrated since I had spent time preparing a nice homily (if I do say so myself). There was a large group of children so Clarice took them for the Sunday school lesson she had prepared while the church matriarch and I sat beside each other and had a fairly intimate first part of the service. For the communion half of the service we brought the children back in and did an annotated version – that is, I explained each part of the liturgy for the children as we went along. The children seemed to really appreciate the explanation and participated much more than usual. Before serving communion I explained to them that in the Anglican/Episcopalian church, a formal first communion is not a requirement for taking communion – only that one has been baptized. I wasn't sure how they would respond but in fact most of the older kids did choose to take communion which was quite a change from the past. In the end I felt that we had taken a less than desirable situation and

made it memorable and valuable. (If you have any interest in the homily – see the “addendum” at the end.)

We lost Jen last night (temporarily). She left yesterday morning with some Peace Corps friends to go “to the sea” (sea = Caribbean) and the last we saw of her she was waiting at the local boat launch. All indications were that she expected to return yesterday afternoon. When she hadn’t returned by midmorning today I tried to find out more about her destination – all I could find out was that they were going to the Sapodilla Cayes. We had planned to meet some other people and go touring at 1 pm (and she had planned to go along) so we headed out to their hotel. We were really glad to see her just getting off a boat as we passed the launch site on our way. It seems that her group had tried to return last night but had only been able to make 3 miles in an hour of fighting against a storm. At that point they wisely chose to pull into a very very small Caye that has a house on it (that gets rented out). She said that the caretaker was a bit of a character but that the accommodations were pretty good all considered. Anyway, we are certainly glad to have her back safe and sound (and having lots of fun with the Gilligan’s Island jokes).

One of the places we went touring today was to the “mystery place”. Along the southern highway there is a gated facility that is obviously very fancy but has no signs or other identifying information. We had at various times speculated that it was a drug runners home, private resort of the banana growers, or a very exclusive resort. It turns out to be a very nice resort that is just starting to really become active built on a huge nature reserve. We met one of the men who works there who invited us to stop in when we got a chance so we took him up on it. The land is owned privately and is part of a continuous mosaic of parcels that provide a huge natural area from the sea to the Coxcomb Nature Reserve. To provide support for the land a “small” section of it is being made into the resort that we toured. The facilities are VERY nice (and come at a premium price). There will also be a second set of cabanas that can only be accessed by boat (\$300 US/night including 3 course meals) down a jungle river. There will also have an animal area for some captive animals – currently they have 2 jaguars were born in captivity and were to be put in a zoo – now they will have 2 acres to roam over.

November 17, 2004 (Wednesday – I think)

When I thought about writing in the log tonight I was sure it wasn’t going to happen as I am exhausted. Now with a meal in me and after a very welcome shower I think I can try to catch up on this crazy week.

I have been emailing back and forth for several months with a group from St. Louis, MO about coming to do a medical mission in Toledo District. The story goes back to me grumbling to one of the Catholic priest in town about being frustrated with mission groups that come down and go into any village they

choose and hand out medications without working with the established clinics in the area.

A pharmacist who sets up missions with groups from his hospital was down looking into doing a medical mission to Southern Belize and approached the priest for ideas who referred him on to me. Since our clinic director and medical director were unavailable, and since the pharmacist needed to get home I sat and talked to him about how I imagined the people in the villages could best be served if his mission group worked with the Ministry of Health and our clinic. Since then we have been sending lots of emails back and forth trying to get a plan in place.

The group arrived last Friday and I have been on mobile and walkabout clinics with them every day since. Saturday we went into the local village of Boom Creek and since we were the first team back in since we did our whole village worming project months ago they wormed everyone, screened everyone for diabetes and high blood pressure who looked to be at risk and evaluated anyone who reported an acute problem. They also brought gift bags from school kids back in the States for every child in the village. On Sunday we drove 2 hours to the village of Delores, did pretty much the same thing (245 people seen) and then drove 2 hours home. On Monday we drove 2 hours to Delores, loaded our supplies on horses and walked for 3 hours (it was expected to take 2) through mud up to 12 inches deep to Machakilha. We ended up treating one of our team with IV fluids for dehydration. I thought I was facing a mutiny when we got out. (I'm not sure how to explain to people that a 4 mile walk in a rain forest is not the same as a four mile walk most any place else!) Yesterday they had to evacuate one of the team to the States with a possible eye injury so we got a very late start. We went to the Village of Crique Sarco which is one short canoe ride from the end of a road. Crique Sarco has a clinic that is periodically manned by a Cuban doctor so we focused our efforts on acute problems and education. We stayed in the village for the night and then those of us who still were sure we could do another jungle walk (two of their team, myself and our housemate Jen) walked in 2 hours to the village of Graham Creek, saw patients for 3 hours and then walked back out. (The rest of their team did health teaching a school back down the road a ways). When we got out I had at least ¼ inch of mud caked on my pants.

One serendipitous thing that happened was in the hiring of a translator for the group. I had met the guy once and hoped he was as good as he claimed. It turned out that not only is he an excellent translator speaking English, Spanish, Ketchi, and Mopan but that he is also an excellent guide. He has traveled to the States and Canada in the past to present information on Maya culture. He is known throughout the villages and is familiar with all of them. He is also an herbalist and taught us about some of the plants along the trail as we walked.

Thankfully the group of doctors and nurses who were helping at our clinic couldn't get a flight out when they originally planned so they have been helping keep Clarice afloat while I was gone. We are not sure what we will do next week as we have no doctors available until Nick arrives on Wednesday and I am supposed to be helping rebuild the van engine with Jen's dad who arrives tomorrow. The good news is that this Friday is a holiday for Garifuna Settlement Day (which should be very interesting since we are in the center of the Garifuna area of Belize).

November 23, 2004 (Tuesday)

I feel like we have been constantly on the run for the past couple of weeks. By the time the group from St. Louis had left I had been on 6 mobile clinics in a row (the usual 2 a week I do can be tiring). The group spent their final day in PG touring the tourist sites and were entertained in the evening by the guy they had hired as a translator playing his Mayan harp (I haven't even had a chance to hear one yet!).

Garifuna settlement day was a real let down. We were very unimpressed with the local reenactment celebration and the local festivities (lots of drinking – not a lot of reenacting). We didn't go to the Catholic Mass and I understand that it was pretty neat with lots of drummin [sic] and Garifuna dancing.

Jennifer's dad and I tore into the van starting yesterday. We currently have the engine apart and have begun reassembling it which is pretty much on schedule even though I am having to help Clarice cover the clinic since we have no MD's until Nick gets back on Wednesday. We didn't find the broken ring I had predicted (nor any other major problems). So far it looks like I was correct in thinking it was the valve seals before but may have mis-seated one when I tried to do them with engine in place.

December 1, 2004 (Wednesday)

Well December has arrived so we are on the final countdown. 23 days to go.

The van remains apart. Well that is it was back together but was putting out tons of black smoke indicating it was using far too much gas. Another mechanic and I both agreed that it was a plug that was left undone from a sensor or a vacuum leak but we could not find it. Finally I decided that the timing belt must have slipped (a service bulletin reports that if the car idles poorly after installing a new belt then a worn tensioner pulley and slipped belt is the likely cause). Also the one new part that didn't fit was the front crank seal so I put the original back in and it was leaking of course. After I tore the engine down to where I could see the belts they hadn't slipped at all – THEN I noticed the edge of a gasket on the intake manifold sticking up 1/16 th of an

inch where it shouldn't. I think the gasket was the main problem (it took two minutes to fix) but I won't know until a new seal (and tensioner) arrives tomorrow.

I had planned to use the van to provide reliable and comfortable transport to Belize City when I went up on Monday to take a little boy for a test. Instead I drove our priest's truck with a starter that only occasionally worked and headlights that are bright when they should be dim and vice-versa. We ended up with three adults and three children in the king cab.

The story of the boy deserves telling. He is a 4 year old that was found to have a very loud heart murmur on a minor exam (he came in for a "cough"). That was in June and I have worked with the family every since then to convince them that he needed the test done. It wasn't until the first week in November that they finally consented if I would go with them and guarantee that all costs would be covered (the father is a subsistence farmer who can't afford shoes for his children). I arranged with a pediatrician to fund the test through the Friends of Pediatrics organization, made sure that the bus driver would be sure to go to the families village on this Monday (he only goes on Mondays sometimes), arranged for a place to spend the night and reassured the father at least twice a week that everything would work out (the one village phone is in his house).

I also wanted to do something special for a little boy that we know from church so I used the chance to take him on an "adventure". With him we had Myself, the 4 year old and his 2 year old sister, his mother, and his father. The mother had the hardest time with the trip as she has probably never been out of southern Belize. We did stop at the Belize Zoo and the children were very impressed with the animals there. Once we got to Belize City I sent the boy from church back to Punta Gorda on his first airplane ride and then we went to the hospital for the ultrasound. The test shows that the child has a patent Veinus Arteriosis – a left over vessel from fetal circulation that should have closed at birth. He will probably need to go to the States eventually for intervention and is already on a list through Rotary International.

We stayed at Ian Anderson's luxury jungle resort (Mr. Anderson and Co. kindly donated the rooms and meals). In the morning I showed the family the fancy heated outdoor showers but they expressed that if the river was clean they would much rather bath in it so they bathed Mayan style while I enjoyed the shower.

Serendipitously (or heaven sent if you prefer) I ran into a nurse from Seattle at breakfast at the lodge. She is very interested in coming to work at the clinic for a year if she can put a student loan on hold. Amazingly she did an international study piece of her nursing education in southern Belize and then later returned for a couple of months – she even has a Belizean license! She

and her father were at the lodge on vacation – almost feels like too much of a coincidence. We are all hoping that something comes of this contact.

Addendums:

I have included the following for myself as much as anything. I am realizing that this log will be a very valuable “memory tool” for me in the future and I didn’t want to lose the 2 final homilies I wrote nor the letter from Martha so they are included here.

Homily #3
October 31
Ritual versus Giving

Isaiah 1:10-20
Luke 19:1-10

Today’s old testament lesson and gospel are interesting to look at together. In Isaiah we hear the message that the Lord is tired of burnt offerings and offerings of incense. He then tells us that on the other hand if “even though are sins are like crimson If [we] are willing and obedient, we shall eat the good of the land”. In the gospel the people with Jesus are upset that he would eat at the home of a sinner but Christ responds that he has come to seek out and to save the lost.

I am not well versed on the beliefs of other religions but I am led to believe that one of the powerful beliefs of Christianity in comparison is the clear message that we are not bound for the rest of our lives by the mistakes we make along the way. Christ consistently sought out the most lowly people of his day both by their position in life because of birth (such as the story of the Good Samaritan) and seen as sinful because of their professions (such as the tax collector in today’s parable).

What strikes me in both of the lessons is that God is sending a message that he looks at our hearts when he judges people rather than our outward appearances and trappings. If a person is a leader in the community and gives money to build fountains and parks but lacks a moral character then while he may be judged well by the people in the town I doubt that he would be judged kindly by God.

One of the questions that comes up often in relation to the Anglican/Episcopal Church and to our close relatives in ritual the Roman Catholics and Lutherans is why do we focus so much on ritual and the trappings of faith. In some churches it is forbidden to hang pictures such as we have over our altar for fear that God will perceive this as worshipping graven images or idols rather than the True God. There are many people outside of the Roman Catholic

Church who are sure that our brother and sister Catholics are going straight to hell because they worship the many statues that adorn their churches. We Anglican/Episcopalians can easily be accused of the same thing as we focus on making sure that the priest has the correct garments and that incense is used correctly. What about making the sign of the cross when passing a church does this gain one “heaven points” or is it worshipping the building?

I believe that today’s lessons help us understand this dilemma. Clearly Isaiah teaches us that God is tired of us giving things/objects in his honor – he wants us rather to be willing and obedient. In the Gospel we are again reminded that God is more interested in our hearts than in what we have.

So if this is the case then why do we do it? Why do we build grand buildings for our churches (after all isn’t the true essence of a church the children of God who occupy that building no matter how impressive or lowly it is?) Why do we create rituals with bishops in tall hats with golden staffs and brightly colored robes? Why do we put up pictures of Christ in our churches and in our homes? Why do we bow before the altar and why do people cross themselves as they pass a church?

If we do it to impress God – that is if we do it so that we can get those “heaven points” (you know – for every fifty times you bow before the cross you get an upgrade in your personal cloud size in heaven) I believe that today’s lessons clearly say that God is not impressed. On the other hand if we build a grand church so that we can be reminded of the grandness of God then it makes sense. If we have ritual with fancy vestments, beautiful music, and smelly incense so that we can be reminded of the mystery of our faith then it makes sense. If we bow before the cross so that we remind ourselves that we should worship and praise the Lord with our whole hearts and our whole selves then it makes sense. If we put a religious object in our home to remind us that our faith requires us to live in God’s image every day at home, work, and play then it makes sense.

God is not impressed with what objects we can give Him – after all he created the heavens and the Earth – what more could we mere humans give him? In Isaiah he tells us how tired he is of burnt offerings and rams and fattened calves. He does not allow us to sin and then make amends for those sins by presenting “things” in his name. He is impressed when we give him our hearts, our lives, our souls, our trust, our love, our obedience and he is impressed when we care for his children who are our children and our neighbors, and our friends and our enemies and our families. He is even willing to give us his forgiveness if we are willing to give our hearts. The tax collector/sinner gave Christ a place to stay and provided for God’s children and Christ held him up as an example over the Pharisees who only gave God things that they thought would impress Him. Remember when you are bowing as you approach the altar you are not doing it to impress God or the other

people in the church - you are doing it to remind yourself of your personal desire to be obedient to His will.

Homily #4 All Saints Day

Today we celebrate All Saints Day (which was actually on November 1st). I have always had some confusion about the concept of “saints” because on one hand we have a concept expressed in the song, “When the saints come marching in” that we all can be among their number. On the other hand we have the concept of canonized saints that have to not only perform miracles while they are alive but even after they are dead if they are to be canonized. So what makes a saint – anyone who lives a good, honorable, and Christ Like manner; or only those through whom God makes himself known by enabling them to perform miracles far beyond the reach of common humans.

I did what I do when I am confused and went to my computer and connected to the internet looking for THE definition of a saint. What I found was very interesting – here are a sampling of the definitions of saints that came up:

- a person who has died and has been declared a saint by canonization
- person of exceptional holiness
- model of excellence or perfection of a kind; one having no equal
- hold sacred
- in the Catholic church; a dead person is declared to be a saint after he or she has been shown to have performed miracles
- (1) A person who has been set aside for a holy life; in this sense, all Christians are saints. (2) A person whose life is upheld as spiritually exemplary. In some churches, there is a process for recognizing saints. In the Roman Catholic Church, it is very formal. In the Episcopal Church, it is done informally by the Prayer Book committee. (3) In some groups, the word saint has come to mean a deceased Christian, as in the phrase “my sainted mother.
- a title of honor and recognition given by the Church to people who lived holy lives, who are believed to be in heaven, and thus, capable of interceding
- A spiritually evolved person
- From the Latin word Sanctus, meaning "holy, sacred". 1. A person who is devoted to serving God and other people. The Christians in New Testament times called each other saints because they regarded themselves as specially set aside from the pagan world and dedicated to God and Jesus Christ through baptism. 2. A person who is in heaven. Sometimes the Church recognizes the status of such a person officially by the process of canonization. The pope then canonizes a saint

- Typically, the term saint refers to someone who has lived a life of exceptional Christian virtue, totally dedicated to God, and who has passed on into heaven. In heaven, a saint can be called upon to intercede for the living. In Orthodoxy saints are often venerated with the use of icons, while in Catholicism, their relics have been the focus of veneration and worship.
- a person whose virtue and holiness was considered to be proven and who was already with God; a saint was considered capable of interceding with God on behalf of a person who prayed to them, and of performing miracles

I didn't feel so bad about being confused after I read through that list but I was still left with the problem trying to bring meaning to All Saints Day for myself and for all of you today.

I think we can find that meaning in both "high" definitions of saints – that is in the definitions that make a saint as something far holier than any of us ever expect to be and in the definition that makes saints to be common humans living in God's image.

Last week I picked up a book that Clarice had left lying on the bed that had several stories in it and started reading one of them without even realizing that I was reading about Saint Bernadette of Lourdes. I found the story to be uplifting in that it reminded me that God is fully capable of working miracles – not just simple ones like healing a sickness that might heal on its own anyway – but the really big ones like taking a very poor and simple girl and using her as an instrument to lead thousands to believe in God through an angelic vision and presenting them with a healing spring.

Another saint-to-be I think about is Mother Theresa of Calcutta. I believe she would be the first to tell us that she was merely a human being and yet by allowing God to give her strength and guide her path she was able to do work far beyond the strength of 10 men.

Finally I think of the saints of Paul's writings. Paul referred to anyone who was doing the work of Christ as one of the saints.

So the message I hear for us today is – God gives us the great saints, that is the canonized saints to remind us that he is capable of anything including using any of his children as a fount from which to disburse and demonstrate His great and everlasting power, glory and love towards us his children. A second message is that we can do work far beyond what we expect of ourselves if we ask for and then accept the strength that He provides for us to do His work. A final message is that we are important in His eyes every time we live, work, play, love, care for one another, and praise Him as long as we do it with the love of Christ in our hearts guiding our every step along the way.

Today let us all go forth and live our lives in such a way that we can all be among the number when the saints go marching home.

Martha's letter:

Dear Norman & Clarice,

This week I have been looking back at all the people that have made a difference in my life and want to take the opportunity now to say that both of you have a difference. You are both very special people both to me and the people of Toledo.

The time both of you have invested at the clinic helping out is very much appreciated. I know at times it must have been very difficult but I assure you, we are all grateful for your input.

Clarice, you are a very nice person to be around. You remind me so much of my mom always trying to get things in order. And Norman, you do have a good personality. I believe that with the skills you have, you will no doubt be needed anywhere. It is nice that you were able to assist us just about everything. From the vehicle to the computers but most importantly to the patients. Both of you are great nurses. I know you know that already but it never hurts to let you hear it from us.

On a personal level, I also look upon your marriage as something wonderful and very much encouraging. The way you communicate and work together and came down to Belize together is admirable. I pray that Terence and I will be bless with long and happy years as you two share.

So once again, to the both of you. THANK YOU for giving of your time, expertise, friendship and most of all being here at the clinic.

Martha

PS Thank you for managing the clinic the few days I was not in. It is comforting knowing that the clinic is in good hands.

December 3, 2004 (Friday)

Well this is likely to be the last log unless I post one after we get home. We have 20 days left to go and my anxiety is building as is the anxiety at the clinic.

I continue to fight with the mysterious gremlin that haunts the rebuild job of the volunteer van. I feel like everyone is watching and wondering what I screwed up and in reality I am convinced that the interior of the engine is good. For some reason it continues to pour fuel into the cylinders at an alarming rate – it just fouls the plugs and smokes up the air. I have now spent a week trying to exorcise it and haven't been able to. Hopefully tomorrow, but I have lost my optimism.

Dr. Nick asks us about once a week (now I think we are up to twice a week) if we are sure we need to leave. One of the village health workers suggested chains to keep us here. I think the reality is hitting about all of the little day to day stuff that we (especially Clarice) makes sure gets done.

I was going over photos that were taken by a visiting group a couple of weeks ago. It is always interesting to see this place through other people's eyes as so much that is uncommon to them is common to us. I copied a bunch of them to bring home on the computer as I'm sure I will look back in the future and say, "yeah, it really was like that".

It is hard to face leaving and feeling like there is so much we could do especially now that we are acculturated and acclimated. On the other hand we are both VERY excited to go home. I can't believe that we really are owners of a castle with windows and central heating/air conditioning, and carpets, and a big kitchen, and a big garage, and, and. Clarice says she looks forward to walking into a grocery store with LOTS of fresh vegetables and a large selection of foods to choose from. We both look forward to seeing our families and especially our children. The strangest thing is believing that it is really Christmas season. We see some lights and "trees" here and there but my brain still says "days are long, its 70 to 80 degrees, kids are playing with fireworks, it must be July". I think it will be VERY weird to smash into the holiday season over night. It will also be strange going back to a "normal" job after almost being like independent contractors here. I do find myself somewhat motivated to go ahead and finish getting a nurse practitioner license but that will very much depend on what kind of a position I secure for myself.

December 5, 2004 (Sunday)

The van gremlins have finally been vanquished (I think). When we pulled off a plug some solder joints had failed. After a week of hunting for it – it took about 10 minutes with a soldering pencil to fix. It still runs a bit rough at times but I think the computer fuzzy logic is still learning. It also still puts out a bit of

blue smoke at times – the only explanation left is that the heads should have been rebuilt at a machine shop. We chose not to do that as the machine shop is in the other end of the country and I feared that a 3 day job might take weeks instead. In any case I will leave knowing that I did the very best I could under the circumstances to leave it in top running condition for future users.

This afternoon we went to a village about 15 miles away and caught up with the translator I had hired for the group from St Louis last month. We talked him into playing his Mayan harp so that we could hear one before we left. He related some of the Mayan beliefs behind the music then played beautifully. It was interesting to me that it was tuned to a 13 note chromatic scale the same as “western” instruments. I was able to record some video clips with the clinic camera that came out very well of him playing it.

One of the patients Clarice has come to know very well wanted us to come to lunch before we left. We had wanted to try gibnut (a large wild rodent considered to be a local delicacy) while we were here and had never had the chance and that was what she served to our surprise. We both decided it tastes more like pork than anything else.

Malcome, our priest, asked me to do the services for the first two Sundays in advent while he was away. Today I chose to use the homily time to say goodbye to the congregation. When I teach in a classroom I usually use an outline so it doesn't sound like I am reading from a script but when I am nervous in front of a group and need to get across a very specific message I do write one to fall back on. Today I was glad that I had written the script as I got too choked up to talk – I handed the paper to another woman in church who did a lovely job of relating my thoughts to the small assembly.

I am feeling better as I check final items off of my mental check list – getting the van running right was a BIG item and saying goodbye in church was another significant milestone. I am now looking at the calendar in disbelief as we quickly come up on the two week mark.

December 12, 2004 (Sunday)

I had hoped to get one more dive in before we left tropical waters so we went back to Tobacco Caye for the weekend. Jen had planned to go with us but she was very ill last week with the vomiting/diarrhea stuff that we have all had and just wasn't up to traveling on Friday. The dive master suggested since there was another advanced diver on the island that wanted to do a site known as “shark cave” that he could justify going if we both went. The cave itself was indeed guarded by an 8 ft black fin shark but he graciously let us enter (and leave) without showing any interest in us. The cave is entered through a hole in the roof and so the exit is always visible. We descended to the limit of recreational diving (130 ft) and then gradually ascended while

looking at the walls of the huge abyss. It was nice to get a chance to go on a truly advanced dive with very competent people so that I didn't feel like I had to play life guard for new divers. It was obvious that everyone was watching out carefully for themselves while being very aware of the others in the group which is how it is supposed to work. For the second dive we had lots of air left in relatively shallow water with a sand bottom so we started having underwater Olympics with events such as "slow motion sprints" and gymnastics where I was able to support the girl with us with a single finger (such strength ;-). In other words we just had fun – it was a great way to end my year of diving here.

Clarice is starting to realize that we will be pretty much done with getting things ready for January at the clinic within a day or so of closing this coming Friday (when the clinic closes for the holidays). We will enjoy part of the following week when my cousin and her Belizean husband come down for a visit – it will be their first visit to Southern Belize.

December 16, 2004 (Thursday)

I went on my last Mobile clinic today. I think everyone is aware that the holidays are coming and everything will be closed as it seems like every clinic and mobile the last week or so has been very busy.

The clinic gave us a goodbye party last night which was very nice. Jennifer left this morning for the holidays – she will return and is committed through March. Melissa is also committed for at least a couple more months. Leslie up until last week said she was going home for good – but then she relented to return for 3 weeks in January to help get the year off to a better start at the clinic.

The clinic has received a grant to hire 2 Belizean RN's and a community outreach worker. The plan is that then nursing students will come down from the States as early as February. So far no one has responded to the advertisements for the positions and there are still a number of questions in the air about where the students will be housed, what will be the need for future volunteers, etc.. In other words the clinic looks to be at the threshold of another major transition.

I am beginning to realize the temperature shock we will be facing next week. It is Seattle drizzle and in the high 60's tonight and we are all complaining of the cold (the Belizeans are in their winter coats).

December 19, 2004 (Sunday)

We are waiting to go to church so I thought I'd catch up a few notes.

The daily green parrot migration just headed over. We aren't sure if there is something they like to eat that is in season or if it is mating time or something else but it seems like the flock grows daily and is now huge. We can always tell when they are flying over as they gaggle and squawk constantly whether they are roosting or are in flight. They pair up (for life?) and even when they fly with the flock they are always in pairs within the mass. They have very short wings for their size so they have to flap like crazy to keep airborne. They are about 10 inches tall and bright green with bright red and yellow markings around their eyes. They are often taken as pets and there is one near here that talks up a storm when it is out on the porch and sounds very human but I think it speaks either Creole or Spanish as I can't understand anything it says. There are also a few flocks of Jamaican parakeets around which are of a similar color but much smaller.

We are planning to go to a bazaar in one of the Mayan towns later today – hopefully I will be able to find some copal resin that is used as traditional incense to take home.

Our preparations for going home are well along. The clinic is pretty much closed up – Clarice is going in tomorrow to further orient a local woman who will be doing patient check in and some office work and I will go in Wednesday to orient the school computer administrator who lives next door to the clinic to the clinic network so he can help maintain it and eventually hopefully use it for providing internet access to some of the local kids. We have two of our bags packed and I see that Clarice is organizing things further this morning (hopefully I will find stuff I need during the next five days!).

I downloaded some classical style Christmas music off of the internet yesterday – it wasn't particularly cheap but it was great to get some nice stuff to listen to. Ms Mavis listed to it (she loves classical music and has a difficult time obtaining it) and was delighted.

December 22, 2004 (Tuesday)

We are about to head to bed for our last night in Mission House. It all seems rather strange – I had an urge the other day to take my bicycle back to the States with me (even though the bearings are failing and it is a cheap one speed) as we have gone a lot of miles together. We have everything pretty much packed but every time we get ready to seal the bags another neighbor or co-worker brings buy another good bye gift. Today Mavis brought by a plum pudding, cassava bread, and a drum. This evening Martha brought a CD by a local group. I keep telling everyone that tells us we should stay longer that it seems better to leave when people are asking us to stay rather than wait until they cheer when we leave. We just took a walk down to the dock on the sea and looked at the stars and the moon which is almost as full

as when we arrived. It truly feels like we have come full cycle except that now the water feels cool to my feet where it felt very warm when we arrived. The local people are all sure we will freeze the minute the plane lands in Seattle but we are looking forward to Christmas weather to go along with the holidays.

December 28, 2004

We had an easy time getting back home with only a minor delay in Houston. We arrived home at about 2 AM on the 24th and then managed to only sleep about 3 hours before the adrenaline and “normal” waking time (Central Time Zone) hit. For about the first two days with excitement of being home and Christmas we barely slept. We have now had a couple of nights of solid sleep and feel great.

I had to laugh at Clarice. Most of the year in the tropics she kept telling everyone that if it was snowing when she got home she was going to run naked through the streets and celebrate the wonderful cold. That lasted for about the first third of the jetway in Houston (where it was 39 degrees) and then she spent the next two days complaining how cold she was.

I have felt like I am in two dream states. Before we came home I couldn't believe that I was “rich” enough to own a house with carpets and hot showers with lots of water. Now I find it hard to believe that my memories of the past year are not a dream. I just can't seem to make the two realities seem real at the same time.

We both laid on our bed with its fancy foam mattress (and no bugs) and thought we had died and gone to heaven. Clarice went to the store and had to stop herself from buying everything in sight.

Our friends and families have been wonderful. Some people from church came in and put up a Christmas tree and some lights in our house and made sure the pantry had some food in it. My boss talked to me today about the job she has funded and wants to build with my input (it would put me back teaching nursing students and helping them adjust to the hospital after they graduate). Our church is planning a pot luck dinner tomorrow and “pantry filling party”.

Everyone asks if we are glad to be home – the answer is a resounding “YES”. Next they ask are we glad we did it and again the answer is yes. Our goals were to bring positive and lasting change to the healthcare system of Belize and to learn and become part of a culture that was foreign to us. We feel that we fully realized both goals. When we look back the work at the clinic was rewarding but it was “work” – the jewels we will retain in our hearts are the memories of the people we worked with and served.

