

News from Suz

May-June 2007

Quena, niitztoc! Yes, I am here! Alive and well in the Huasteca. Forgive my tardiness in providing an update. May was a whirlwind of activity!

- I spent two weeks on the road as a guest preacher during Christian Home Week celebrations in 7 of our congregations.
- I began teaching English to a group of youth of the Frijolillo Church.
- Amalia and I taught the kids 3 songs in Nāhuatl which they sang during Children's Day celebrations on the 30th of April.
- I spent time in Tamazunchale getting my truck repaired (new break pads and a new sensor that regulates the accelerator).
- I ran over a dog on the highway just north of Tamazunchale.
- I attended my first funeral here in Frijolillo. An elderly brother died after a month of fever. We never knew what he had but he had decided to go home...refusing to eat. It was frustrating because during my visits I was unable to express what I wanted for lack of decent translation. Yes, I must keep working on my Nāhuatl!
- My apt shook during a recent earthquake centered in the neighboring state of Veracruz (after being told that we never have earthquakes here).
- I awoke one morning in fear of the torrential rains (literally a downpour for close to 2.5 hours); traumatized by what just a little rain did in Piedras Negras.
- I traveled to Xonacatlān in Mexico State, May 29-June 2, for a National Presbytery Women's gathering, accompanied by Sister Missionary Raquel of the Chapulhuacán Church (where I visited "old friends", Pastor Cáliz and family who helped start the Belen-Abishalom Mission in Piedras Negras 3 years ago). While there I got to drive my truck all the way up to the Lago Mayor in the crater of the Nevado de Toluca, the now dormant volcano where the Aztecs tossed their sacrifices to the gods of the Volcano. What an experience!

REFLECTIONS ON LIVING IN AN INJUST WORLD

In addition to these activities, I have had the opportunity to walk with my brothers and sisters in ways that have taught me much about the challenges they face.

The entire month of May we were without running water in Frijolillo. I was fortunate in that I was gone much of the month and I need very little water as a single person, but I also had the opportunity to draw water from the well near the river and haul it up to my apt. For the families here, however, carrying water was a daily event. The women amazed me how they could carry one bucket of water on their head and one in each hand as they walked up the stairs from barrio bajo to barrio arriba. It is a 5 minute walk straight up if you don't stop, but most of us have to take a break half way up. The steps are steep and the sun is hot.

They were not kidding when they said April-June were HOT! It averages 95-100 degrees with probably about 80% humidity. Think Miami in June without air conditioning. I learned to sweat in Piedras Negras. I am now perfecting the high art of constant perspiration. And with the dust and soot in the air...our bodies are constantly sticky and dirty.

Another learning experience was attending the bimonthly Oportunidades (government welfare support for women and children) support distribution. On Thursday, May 24th, I went down to Tempexquitlā (10 minute drive from Frijolillo) where people from approx. 10 different communities had gathered. Traveling shop keepers had set up their wares around the community square where the people got in long lines by

community to receive their support. Women are given different amounts based on how many children they have in school. The average is generally the equivalent of \$200-\$300 US. This was the first month of a new program for those 70 and above so we had also taken all of the abuelitos (grandparents) to town with copies of their documents so they could collect what was the equivalent of \$100.00 US.

We arrived at 8am and the final "truck load" of folks returned to Frijolillo at 7pm! Unfortunately, it was the elderly who had to stand in line the longest.

As we loaded the truck to leave Tempex at 7pm, we had to maneuver around drunks who wanted to pull abuelitas out of the truck. I even had to drive around one on the rock road leading up the mtn to Frijolillo, lest I run over him as he lay passed out in the middle of the road. This is why Christians in Mexico do not drink. And this is why the government gives the money to the women and not the men. Unfortunately more than a few are able to convince (or threaten) their wives into giving them a few pesos to cover their alcohol addiction. And the cantinas in the small town of Tempex (about 800 people) are open and ready to serve the "needs" of the men. What a sad reality we still live here in Mexico. Praise God for His transformational work in so many lives. But this experience reminded all of us that there is much work yet to be done. Too many still living as slaves to alcohol and alcohol-related family and community violence.

Of course the experience also led me to reflect on the needs of the people in rural Mexico and how the government tries to meet those needs via hand outs. For the most part they do it "right"...analyzing family situations, providing a variety of programs, etc. (each month government officials come to Frijolillo with

another give away (sand, bags of cement, aluminum roofing, etc.). But all these programs do is placate the people and treat the symptoms of the poverty. They do nothing to provide jobs, help the rural poor compete in a global market, or help people truly improve upon their lives. In some communities the kids literally are just "doing time" until they finish Jr. or Sr. High so they can move to the city to find work. There is little here for them, until ways are found to make agriculture a real livelihood (income off the farm averages about \$500.00-\$1000.00 US a year) and government support adds another \$2,000-\$3000. The problem is complex and the solution will not be easy or quick. Pray that govt leaders will have the people's need in mind as they govern and pray that the people will be sensitive to the Spirit's guidance and find ways to work together for the good of all. As a Mexican pastor friend of mine says: "In Mexico the government has always been the people's greatest obstacle to progress". As if a cruel joke, it was land distribution programs after the Revolution which gave this land to the poor. But now in many ways, the poor are now locked into poverty because of the land. Their plots are small and spread out. They cannot earn a decent living off the land. They are far from the city, transportation costs are high (\$120.00 for a ride to the hwy), electricity and water services are sporadic and the roads are terrible. This is the face of injustice.

Yet your brothers and sisters march forward. They know their poverty and they know they are the victims of injustice. But they also know that there is nothing to be gained by living as victims. The Gospel gives them hope and strength to push forward. They take advantage of the programs the govt offers. They start small businesses. The men go to the city to work in 1-4 month intervals and the youth finish school and move to the city. Life goes

on. God provides. Christ empowers us. And the Holy Spirit inspires, encourages, and exhorts us.....wherever we are, whatever our circumstances.

This month I have been energized by the opportunity to visit, and pray for families throughout our presbytery. In one community, I spent an entire day with the lay pastor, visiting families, encouraging and challenging them. What was most exciting was to see God in action. I felt like some famous preacher being taken around the community to pray for people. I felt like a farce. Who was this Misionera Susy to whom the people were entrusting their concerns? The experience encouraged, energized, and humbled me. And again, taught me that if we will simply submit our lives to Him, Jesus ministers through us in ways that will confound us. But by His grace...

HEALTH



I am well. Some "buggy" and celiac problems here and there, but I am well. I have gained a full 10 lbs since December and have even had to start giving away some of my clothes! I am leveling off my consumption of some things in an effort not to gain any more. I am "good" as I am. Any more weight and I will be as "gordita" as the folks here want me to be! I am also sporting a good tan, thanks to many road trips with the windows down! The only problem is that my left arm is more "Mexican" than my right! Such are the challenges of being

binational! In the photo I am enjoying a day at a river at Tutitlân, near Huitzitzilingo, Hidalgo

PLANS FOR JUNE

This Friday the 8th the women of the presbytery have an "institute" in Tezapotla. I am looking forward to visiting the church in that community and fellowshiping with the women of the presbytery. We expect about 50 women to attend.

On Tuesday the 12th I will depart Frijolillo with Pastor Abel, his wife Martha, and another sister from the church, Sara. I will leave them in Monterrey while I visit mission teams and friends in Castanos, Monclova, Piedras Negras (Coahuila) and Bracketville, Kerrville, San Antonio, and Austin TX. I also plan to visit my doctors, have my truck worked on, and do a little bit of shopping. A home organ has been donated to the presbytery by a sister in Kerrville TX so I plan to bring it back with me. Pray that all goes well with Mexican customs! And thanks to Proyecto Amistad for the help in dealing with the customs issues. I will return to Frijolillo on the 23rd. In time to bring preparations for a July full of VBS! We will have two mission teams during the month and I plan to help two other churches with their VBS programs during July as well.

And folks around here ask me if I am never bored! Ha! Life is good. Life is full. And never a bore....even in the outback.

I will write more from Texas.....
With love and gratitude,

Susie