

Elevations

Most of my life I've kind of hung around at the same altitude, give or take about 1000 feet. I suspect that is mostly the case for anyone living in the US. Our elevations don't vary tremendously from day to day or hour to hour. That is not the case here in Honduras where everywhere you look there is the remnant of another volcano standing in your path. Almost every Saturday morning I wake up at 1624 feet in Concepción. I get on a packed bus with thirty some other people, at least as many backpacks, and sometimes a chicken or two and begin to climb. About one hour and forty-five minutes later, having traveled along 34 miles of road a total distance of 22 miles, I find myself in La Esperanza at 5577 feet. It's colder and clearer, the air much thinner, and the whole world seems changed. On Monday morning, I do the reverse, shedding layers of clothing on the way down. Everything changes in the rapidity of ascents and descents.



At San Marcos Clinic

Rapid changes in elevation is what best seems to describe Maine-Dartmouth's experience on their recent medical brigade to Colomoncagua, Intibucá. It's safe to say they started out at or about sea level in Maine. Because of the irregularity of flights from Maine to Boston to Tegucigalpa, their odyssey lasted almost two full days, and, by the time they caught up to us in La Esperanza, they were exhausted. Flying in and out of the heavens, they were diverted from their final destination in Tegucigalpa to return to almost sea level at San Pedro Sula. Back in the air quickly thank God, they arrived at Tegucigalpa, 3248 feet, where Shoulder to Shoulder was waiting for them. Up and down a few dozen times more in an escort van, they finally got to the highest city in Honduras, La Esperanza at 5577 feet. Oddly, the weather they experienced, the damp and penetrating cold, might have reminded them of the late April weather of Maine that they had just left behind. There only for one night, their elevation changed drastically again, falling about four-thousand feet to arrive in Concepción. After a brief bathroom break and tour of our main clinic in Concepción, they wended back up another mountain pass to finally settle in Colomoncagua at 2576 feet. Talk about a roller coaster.



Older Man's Consult

Laura and I usually spend a good deal of time with brigades on their way in and their way out. We hear about their expectations on going in and share in their reflections as they leave. We might get a half day

with them at their work site, but we're busy taking pictures and they're busy seeing patients. We did see Maine-Dartmouth on their way in. But we wouldn't be available on their way out as we were already committed to important meetings. Because we would miss them on their way out, we decided to spend the weekend with them in Colomoncagua. We were so pleased that we got such a close up view of their rich experience.



Happy Kid

The varied elevations, their varied experiences, and their varied characters and personalities weaved and waved in and out of their time together. But without diversity, harmony cannot be achieved. José was born and raised in El Salvador, a literal rock's toss away from where we were, but Barbara had never been on a medical mission trip and spoke no Spanish. But their voices blended in a theme of service and compassion. We witnessed them working among the simple townspeople at the San Marcos clinic. They had come from so far away, had traversed high peaks and low valleys, and yet they all seemed as if they belonged. Laura and I felt privileged to be part of this concerto of care.



Under the Fall

The next day was yet an entirely different experience. It was Sunday, it was May Day, it was Nancy's birthday, and it was certainly time for fun. After a great breakfast and a visit to the local market where hand crafted leather belts, woven shoulder bags, and other local goods were purchased, we headed out to see the beauty pristinely hidden within nature. The waterfall dominates the natural amphitheater where the stone walls rise majestically above us. One further elevation to consider and explore. I watched them all under the curtain of the water's fall. They surrendered to the experience of the moment, defined and enhanced by it, elevated to great heights and plunged to great depths. It is all so very enriching.

