

New Years

It's really nothing more than an arbitrary day; December 31 at 11:59 PM. Someone at some time somehow decided that according to the Gregorian calendar January 1 would denote the first day of a new year. Why? No particular reason. It is neither the longest day, the Northern Hemisphere's Summer Solstice, nor the shortest, the Southern Hemisphere's Summer Solstice. It isn't even the same time as twenty-four hours pass from the International Dateline through the various time zones across the world. It's really just one day, not much different than any other day. And yet, hoards will gather at Time Square to watch a humongous glass ball fall. Countless more will make resolutions. We'll toast with champagne, steal a first kiss of promise and commitment, and somehow believe that our past is left behind and our future burns bright. Out with the old, in with the new, let's ring in the New Year.



It's silly, right? Certainly every day, every moment for that matter, gives us the same opportunity; to put the past behind us and make our brave resolve to start fresh. Still, there is something special about having a time to do it. It gives it a context. In as much as we share it with others, it becomes festive. So, whether it is arbitrary or not, it becomes a time of hope. What will be new for you on this New Year's Day?

Shoulder to Shoulder in partnership with the people of the Frontera, Intibucá is building its third building of classrooms at the Good Shepherd Bilingual School. It has been fascinating to watch the progression of this construction from day to day. In the United States our technical skills have become so advanced that we are relatively removed from the physical labor involved in the construction of a building. There are big machines that men and women sit in to move the earth and place beams. Cement is mixed and poured without a shovel pressing into soft sand or gravel. Pieces of the building are pre-constructed in factories, shipped to the sight, and simply fitted together. None of this is true in Honduras. Here the building becomes a product of physical exertion. The cement is mixed by hand, scooped into shoots constructed with planks, hammer, and nails. The process is slow, but those who are involved in it are creating something from what had earlier only been an idea. There is an engagement, then a commitment in terms of harsh, demanding physical labor, and then something stands where nothing stood before. A cleared lot becomes a series of angled trenches, that later become foundational bases and walls, and a roof, and doors and windows and fine details, and finally a schoolhouse. It's really a miracle!

I guess it's a metaphor for what we do at New Years. We commit ourselves to a new hope. There is nothing there, but we know that if we give ourselves to it with the force of our daily labor we will construct something of value that can stand where nothing stood before. It is hope. An idea, a thought, the whisper of a dream, that somehow takes shape into a sustainable, objective reality.



Shoulder to Shoulder has done this for the last twenty-five years. It first expressed a dream, an idea, a resolution. It said, "the People of the Frontera of Intibucá, Honduras, will live longer, healthier, more productive and fulfilling lives in a strong community." That is our vision statement, our New Year's resolution if you will. There was nothing there when we first said it, no reason for hope other than the resolve. Then there was the hard work, the mixing of cement, the building of columns, the placement of roofs, an engagement of exhaustive physical labor. Today, things stand in place, the work of our hands, where nothing had stood before. It is today a sustainable mission of development.



There are still more things that we envision, more resolutions to be made. All children should have access to quality education. No children should suffer from malnutrition. Water should be clean. Illness and disease should not destroy lives. Poverty should not rob individuals from realizing their potential. The dreams and resolutions are there. We will continue to shoulder the work with the people on the Frontera of Intibucá. Please help us to make our dreams realities by adding your shoulder to ours.

Give a New Year's Hope!