

Parramos, Guatemala *Lauren & Kevin Sanchez*

Hope in the Midst of Disappointment

I would consider myself (Lauren) a generally positive person. I feel more Guatemalan than American these days, since I have been here 8 years and speak Spanish more often than English. I fall more in love with this country every day, but the level of poverty and lack of opportunities still astonishes me on a weekly basis. I *still* struggle with the fact that youth do not take advantage of opportunities we have given them. I often think, *"Why am I trying to help this person more than they want to help themselves?"*

I read somewhere that Guatemala has more missionaries per capita than anywhere else in the world. *With all of this help, why are things not changing? Why am I here?* Guatemalans have become experts in receiving handouts. Why work when things can be given to you? If you have not read the book, *When Helping Hurts*, I highly recommend it.

Kevin and I agreed from day one we would choose the harder path when called for and work long-term to help break the cycle of generational poverty, not only physically, but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

But, being totally transparent, in a moment of weakness driving in the car, I saw a group of people handing out food bags and thought, *"Why do we have a school, handing out food would be so much easier? I could do some good, feel good about it, and then go home."* (To be clear, food bags can be done in the correct way, but often aren't.)

A few minutes later I saw **Kevin Montezuma** wiz past on his motorcycle with his work uniform on. Then I saw **Yeni Celada** behind the counter at Taco Bell taking an order. The

following week we went to a local restaurant and our waiter was **Oscar Burrion**, who told us he had just received a promotion because he knows English. I also see **Fernanda Simaj** daily using her English working online doing background checks.

Kevin Montezuma barely graduated from middle school. His grandmother was in her 80's and couldn't send him to career school since she was illiterate and had no stable income. My Kevin took him to enrollment and was having daily phone calls and in-person visits for months since Kevin Montezuma also tried to quit career school at least 10 times. The other 3 students have similar stories.

All four of these young adults we financially and emotionally supported through career school, and they most likely would not have finished studying without our disciplining and **reminding them of the life they told us they wanted**. Now they are all the top earners in their families, providing education to younger siblings, and putting food on the table.

I snapped out of my funk and thought about the story of the starfish being thrown back into the ocean. I smiled and reminded myself this is worth it. **They are worth it.**



Continuing my reflection as I walked into Academy of Future Leaders, I know we are planting seeds and, in a few years, I will have similar experiences when I see these students out in the world with stable work. They will be pouring back into their communities as lawyers, nurses, psychologists, educators, and business owners. (These all are things that our students are currently studying; some in career school and others in college.) I feel so honored to have the support we do, to feel mentally and emotionally able to choose the path less travelled, and to choose to have a school, the more difficult but more impactful way to change our community.



The Simaj Girls have had an extended stay with us, Keke and Hazel love having their sisters around all the time.



Andrea presenting on how we can change our community



Our staff at an appreciation dinner provided by visiting group from First Methodist Tulsa



Our family at the rehearsal dinner for Grant and Alex's wedding

BIG NEWS

A few years back, Hal Hamilton, the president of *Cornerstone International*, made a visit to Guatemala. We got to sit down with him and his wife. As conversation flowed, Kevin felt comfortable telling his story, a large part of which included Kevin's deep desire to help Parramos, a city where his great great grandparents were one of it's first residents. An hour later, as tears were in everyone's eyes, Hal said, "Kevin, I see you like a modern day Moses for Parramos, leading your people to freedom."

What an honor.... And what a responsibility.

Kevin and I take what we do very seriously and do it to the best of our ability. So we are very excited to share some news! First, we were able to purchase our school's property, giving us the ability to make updates and dream big. Second, we found an architect that will donate plans for a new school building, leaving space, proper plumbing/electrical and foundation for growth. This will include a community water filter, turfed soccer field, and the potential to build multiple levels of classrooms. Third, we have decided to create our own NGO in Guatemala, *The Moses Project*, inspired by the hope and brighter future we want to provide to Parramos. We are thrilled to be able to provide further credibility and development to our ministry and school. Lastly, after much prayer, we have submitted the paperwork to open a Christian bilingual elementary school in 2026. Thank you for following our journey and being a part of the change happening in Parramos.

"From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." Luke 12:48

Support

With love, *Lauren, Kevin, Keke, and Hazel*

Thank you for your gifts and prayers.

Reach us by email at lauren.s@cimissions.org

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