

Village Updates June/July 2008



One Highly Anticipated and Enchanted Evening

From the day we heard the news that our Linaca Children's Center Directors Nidia Rodriguez and Franklin Avila were "an item" we secretly hoped that some day they would tie the knot. But we knew there would be plenty of obstacles to overcome, should our hopes become a reality.

Our Nidia is decidedly a City Girl from the municipality of Danli, boasting a population of over 50,000 souls. Always meticulously put together, Nidia thinks nothing of running around the mountainous (and often muddy) village terrain in very high heels. I would not tackle her spikes on a flat sidewalk in Florida!

In the pouring rain, Nidia will don a helmet and climb on the back of Franklin's motorcycle dodging cows, crazed dogs, and potholes the size of small lakes, to get to work in the remote areas they are sent. That this *seeming* little princess would deign to date, much less marry, the young man from the country was a culture-breaking shocker that delighted us to no end.

Franklin is certainly a diamond in the rough. He is smart, educated, organized, and does every job he is handed on time and under budget. While never living in a mud hut, Franklin is from Arauli, a very small town between Danli and Linaca where some folks do live in shacks.

Araulians think themselves superior to the surrounding villages, looking down their collective noses on their back country cousins in Linaca because the Linacanas live a few miles further from the paved road.

On a social basis, Hondurans seldom interact with people outside their caste - much less marry someone outside of their strictly prescribed norms. Yet, in the simplest of mud huts here, we have encountered children brighter, and with as much or more potential, to do good in this world than most of the upper crust in any culture.

With this wonderful couple, love finally



Pictured above: Tender moment during the wedding. Above left: Nidia and Franklin two months earlier. Center: Nidia and Franklin with some of our teen leaders. Above right: Franklin with Alexa two years ago.

conquered all, as Nidia and Franklin sent all cultural barriers crashing to the ground. After two years, spending numerous hours with us (learning how to navigate the waters of culture clashes, among other things), Nidia and Franklin had one big fat Honduran wedding on May 31st.

Hundreds of city folk and little country bumpkins locked arms and danced side by side into the wee hours of June. Pictures of the wedding can be seen on our website at www.wrgnews.com.

The wedding, from our vantage point, was one

of the most subversive events we have ever undertaken. Nidia insisted on having all nine of our teen leader girls in the wedding. I seriously doubt that any of those girls have ever attended a wedding, much less been bridesmaids.

The norm in most villages is for a young girl to move from the family home to live with the man and his family. That arrangement sometimes lasts as much as a whole year or two. When the teens get pregnant, they are often sent packing.

The man is then freed to prey on and impregnate another girl who thinks *surely* her fate will be different. Finally, her prince has come to rescue her from the monotony of caring for a house full of siblings. But her fairy tale will come to the same tragic end - the carriage always turns into a pumpkin, the prince hops off like the frog he is, as the remaining glass slipper shatters.

However, with the wedding of Nidia and Franklin a new standard has been set. Hope returns to our girls that there may actually be some knights in shining armor after all. The Rodriguez-Avila wedding created such a stir in Linaca that every young girl now sees the value in waiting for a husband.

Nidia knows the pain of being a single mother. She was abandoned by her daughter's father before Alexa was born. But in the most remarkable of ceremonies, Franklin vowed to be a father to Alexa. The surprise vows that Franklin recited to the astounded Alexa had the entire room in tears.

Dressed like a mini-bride, Alexa glowed with joy as Franklin took her hand and escorted her to the altar where he and Nidia had just taken their formal vows. Promising to care for, protect, and be a father to her, Franklin slipped a delicate ring on Alexa's finger and then helped her light the unity candle cementing the three as one family.

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...Enchanted Evening continued



Most Honduran men send their brides' children away when they marry the mothers. This Honduran man not only did not send the child away, he plans to formally adopt her as his own! This revolutionary action was the talk of the town.

Franklin and Nidia set a very high bar for all the teens and children who come after them. Their example of celibacy before marriage has helped our teen girls and boys understand the value of waiting and not engaging in sexual activity, as so many of their peers are doing.

Of course, the glamour of the wedding itself has left all the teen girls agog, fantasizing about the day when they are every bit the princess that Nidia was. And we cannot wait to see each one of our teens walk down the aisle with a prince like Franklin.



TEEN CHALLENGE - NEW CENTER LEADERS EMERGING

The village kids who attend the Linaca Children's Center are not the privileged ones whose families get remittances from their illegal brethren in the United States. Our children are those who depend on our center to feed, clothe, send them to school, and parent them. Many of our children have lost one or both parents. Time after time we hear the children tell us that without our teachers and center they don't know what they would do.

We have seen what they do. Nothing. The poor in Honduras live their lives only a step or two above the abandoned dogs roaming their streets scavenging for food. It has been nearly five years since we began working with the children of Linaca. In that time we have been grooming the leaders who emerged from the ranks of the poorest of the poor there to put us out of a job in Linaca.

The teen girls who were in Nidia's wedding started with us five years ago as street urchins. But do these gorgeous girls look like street urchins to you?

In the past few months our teens have put everything together we have been teaching them over the years in a manner that has astonished us. In May we decided it was time to promote them. Each of our teen leaders was made responsible for a group of children in the center. Every day after school the teens tutor, mentor, and teach the children how to become leaders themselves.

The first day we turned the teens loose in the center was beautiful to watch. The children responded with delight that their "big brothers and big sisters" were now their teachers. We expected problems with discipline, but the advantage gained by breaking the groups down into more manageable numbers actually improved the discipline.

On the second day after the teens began teaching, due to meetings on the other side of the mountain, we came in after the younger children were dismissed. The teens were so excited they could hardly contain themselves, each cutting another off in their zeal to tell us what transpired.

The night before the teens devised their own plans and made changes to the curriculum, which they implemented on day two. Their ideas were an instant success. The teens felt empowered, and went over the moon that their little students were now calling them Profe (teacher).

Since that day the teens have taken on increasing responsibility. They are rounding up other students to mentor using the same leadership training principles that we have invested in them. They are making rounds in the village talking to parents and gathering kids who have slacked off in attending the center. The added reinforcements are a big help in motivating parents to send their children. Seeing the newfound maturity our teens are exhibiting makes them value the training children receive at our center.

Asked to take on a public service project, the teens formed into groups and began brainstorming ways to fix problems they see in Linaca. Without being asked to submit anything in writing, each group came up with an illustrated plan of problems and solutions!

It seems the biggest concern each group had was the piles of trash everywhere you look in Linaca. *Independently* each group came up with plans for trash abatement. One group wanted to install garbage cans, one group wanted to gather volunteers to clean streets, another group wanted to hire a truck to come into Linaca and haul away the massive amounts of trash they would collect, another wanted to put up signs and educate people not to throw trash on the streets. We cannot wait to see the results of their first endeavor.

Most of the teens that comprise our leadership core were rescued this year from the bean fields. None of these enthusiastic and gifted kids' families could afford higher education. Almost every one of our teens had to be scholarshiped to attend high school in Danli. The bus fare alone is over

\$30 per student, per month! On top of this they must have tuition, books, uniforms, backpacks, shoes, etc. In addition there are the odd requirements that come up during the year such as purchasing a chair for \$14 to give to the schools.

We have never quite figured out that last requirement... But we have seen children drop out of school because there is no way a family can afford that chair. On average it costs us about \$50 a month to maintain these teens in school.

What an investment! For a mere \$50 a month we get an educated and motivated teen teacher and role model for the children in our center! This has freed up our other teachers and mentors to begin a new work in an area called Apali.



Leda and Waleska, pictured here at Nidia and Franklin's wedding, are both in our teen leadership program.

HEAD 'EM UP AND MOVE 'EM OUT! - WRG OPENS NEW VILLAGES

Recently we joined forces with our good friends the Maduro family. They are the former First Family of Honduras in the previous administration. Their passion is education and their benevolence helped us build and outfit our new children's center in Linaca.

The Maduros' foundation focuses on pre-school children. Most children who do not attend pre-school or Kindergarten in Honduras end up dropping out. The Maduro Foundation has designed and distributed thousands of their Pre-Kindergarten curriculums that have been highly successful in giving hundreds of thousands of children a leg up in school.

The teachers who lead these Pre-Kindergartens are for the most part volunteers. Each one receives a stipend of around \$30 a month. The Maduro foundation work is done in concert with the public school system in Honduras and overseen by the District Heads of each region of the country. Our aim is to follow-up on the heels of Pre-Kinder and keep children in school through high school.

A remarkable man named Vicente, the School District Head for our area, met with us recently in Linaca to see what we are doing there. He brought a very large staff with him to our meeting. We told the group that we were interested in expansion and wondered if the School District of Paraiso would work with us in opening up new territories. The staff was flabbergasted to learn that we were not asking the District for anything. We are there to serve the District.

The staff immediately grasped our vision for the children and promised their support in any way needed. Vicente was so enthusiastic he altered his impossibly busy schedule to personally take us and introduce us to the leaders, teachers, and principals in the Apali region where we will be serving five elementary schools and four Pre-Kindergartens.

WRG agreed to pay the stipend to the Pre-Kindergarten volunteers in the Apali region. This frees up funding for the District to start four new Pre-K's in areas that have nothing for children.

Six of our adult teacher/mentor staff from Linaca have spent the past months getting to know the people and the needs of the villages in Apali. Four days a week they drive the dangerous mountainous roads well over 45 minutes each way to serve the area.

In starting up our focus is on working with the local teachers in their classrooms, tutoring students in the mornings. In the afternoons we have designed a myriad of activities for the children, ranging from sports, to dance, to guitar lessons, to crafts, and leadership skill training for the teens. Once we have transportation we will take some of our teen leaders over to the new area to further the commitment and development of the emerging leaders in Apali.

The introduction by the District Head of the Public Schools gave us an enormous advantage and instant credibility with the leaders in Apali. We are seeing an explosion of attendance there. The village leaders are 100% behind us, joyfully telling us that they had been praying long and hard for this day of help for their children. In the past year the area has become a haven for growing marijuana and drug dealing. Many of the young children *pictured below* are at risk and some are being recruited from schools to enter the drug trade.

It has been five years of sowing seed, fertilizing, watering, and loving those tender little shoots. This year we have reaped an amazing harvest of leaders and workers. What a time of celebration and joy we are experiencing. Yet, with each new village our need for more workers and resources grows. We are praying for the Lord of the harvest to keep sending workers our way!



WEB UPDATES

Please take the time to check out our website at www.wrgnews.com. There are slide shows, videos, past newsletters, and other articles that depict everyday life in the places we live and work in Honduras.

We are looking to update our email records - please send us your updated information. If you prefer to get your newsletters by email, please let us know. Many of our best friends in this work have come through our partners forwarding our newsletters via email. Please pass on the link to the web or this newsletter which is available as a PDF file.

NEEDS, HOPES, DREAMS



1. FIFTEEN THOUSAND DOLLAR MATCHING GRANT FOR TRANSPORTATION NEEDS TO FIVE NEW VILLAGES

A pressing need is transportation to the new villages in Apali. Beyond the plain above are the mountains we travel through on dirt/mud roads to reach the villages where we work in Apali.

For weeks our team traveled there on dirt bikes in the harsh mountain terrain.

During the rainy season it is nearly impossible, not to mention very dangerous, to be on motorcycles. If the team encounters mechanical problems it will be difficult to remedy them.

Since we have expanded our team and now are operating in four regions the need for an extra vehicle is urgent. We are looking to purchase a duel cab 4x4 truck.

We estimate a used truck in good condition will cost \$15,000. Anything raised in excess of \$15,000 will go to maintenance, licensing, gas (over \$4 a gallon) and insurance.

Very generous partners have offered a matching grant for the \$15,000 needed to purchase the truck.

To date, we have raised \$11,300! We are hoping to raise the rest before July 15th.

Please make your check out to World Resources Group and designate *Truck Fund* on the memo line.

2. FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLAR MATCHING GRANT FOR OUR CHILDREN'S WORK IN LINACA, DANLI, APALI, LA JAGUA

The same generous partners who offered the matching grant for the truck fund have set up a \$50,000.00 matching grant for the Linaca Children's Center, La Jagua, and the new work in Apali.

One hundred percent – yes, 100% - of your donation will go to the field for teachers', teen scholarships, supplies needed for our centers, nutrition, medical care, and other needs associated with the children's work.

To date \$6,000 has come in! We are hoping to raise the rest before December of this year.

Please make your check out to World Resources Group and designate *Children's Work Honduras* on the memo line.

3. FUNDING FOR TEEN GIRLS' HOUSE IN DANLI

After their wedding Nidia, Franklin, and Alexa moved into a small house with three bedrooms in Danli. They had no money for furniture or appliances.

The couple took out a small loan to purchase goods for the home but just as they were ready to buy Franklin's mother's kitchen walls and floor collapsed. All the money for the newlyweds' home had to go to helping Franklin's mother. The couple was forced to increase their debt to buy the very basics needed to live.

Beginning in February of next year, Franklin and Nidia will take four or five of our teen leader girls to live in their home. These girls are extremely poor and have difficult home situations.

The training these girls will receive in life skills and marriage will be invaluable. All of these teens attend High School in Danli in the mornings and bus to Linaca in the afternoon to work at our children's center.

All the teen leaders will be welcome in the home weekdays and for special events on weekends.

We would like to get this house stocked with everything needed to run the girls it. To date we have received \$500 toward the house. All donations will be used for setting up and running the house.

Everything over and above what is needed to furnish the house and pay off loans will be applied to the ongoing needs of running the house in the future.

Please make your check out to World Resources Group and designate *Girls' House* on the memo line.

HOW YOUR DONATIONS WORK

Did you know that 100% of your specified giving to WRG goes to the cause you designate? WRG is one of the few charitable organizations that takes 0% of designated donations for administration.

Any undesignated giving will go to the general fund to be used where needed as decided by the WRG board of directors.

This year we have gone to a whole new level in operations. Expanding into 5 new towns at the request of the Public School District has given us immediate credibility in the area and resources that otherwise may have taken years to cultivate.

Thank you for partnering with us in this exciting time and growing endeavor!