

My first trip to San Francisco de Yojoa in May 2007 was a grand adventure. I felt like I was journeying into the unknown on a mission of good works. Giving of my time and life experience to young people has been a secret desire of mine for many years. I've had an infinite number of excuses as to why I couldn't get involved in the past, mostly centering around the transient nature of my work. When the opportunity arose to accompany Bob down to the project for a long weekend with no strings attached, how could I resist?

I had the distinct desire to *give* when I planned my trip to Honduras. I wanted to make a difference in these kids lives, although I wasn't 100% sure of how I would do that. I expected poverty and dirt, scared faces, sadness. The reality that greeted me was something different altogether. These kids are healthy and *happy*! They run around in Florida Panther jerseys and hand-me down jeans; eat three well-balanced, tasty meals a day plus candy whenever they can get it; and are supervised by a loving, intelligent, hard working staff.

I was a little overwhelmed when first arriving, I wasn't sure how best to fit into the scene, how best to demonstrate my good intentions. The kids are eager to meet all newcomers and before I knew it I had been introduced to a dozen smiling boys ranging in age from 5 to 18. Everyone speaks Spanish and while trying to get my tongue around the rolling r's and the unfamiliar accents more boys had come to take the first group's place. I felt a gently rising wave of concern as I realized I couldn't possibly remember everyone's name, let alone name and face, before I slid into the moment and just smiled and hugged. It didn't matter what was being said or whether it would be remembered later, all that mattered was the personal exchange as it was happening.

And that thought stuck with me throughout my two visits. By staying present in the moment and paying attention to the people around me, the best way to give became apparent and easy and I no longer worried about the language barrier or how I could communicate my good intentions. Just being there was enough. I listened to the kids and saw their lockers, hung out and played games. This was the gift in the end, both to the boys and from the boys. While their physical needs are met through the hard work of the boards and the donations of generous people everywhere, my presence there met emotional needs that all humans have. To be listened to, to be loved unconditionally just for being alive, to share times of joy and times of sadness.

I am extremely grateful to the Boards of Directors in Florida, in Germany, and in Honduras for supporting this wonderful endeavor. I am grateful for the sake of the children that are helped and also for sake of visitors like me.

Rachel Shapiro