



“Steady as She Goes in September”

by Julie Zaragoza

Early one morning at Refuge Ranch: Mom (that would be me): (to one of our teenage daughters while giving a hug) Good morning! How are you today?

Daughter: (returning a half-hearted hug) Normal.

Mom: Normal? That’s good!

This classic conversation between one of my daughters and me reflects the fact that “normal” and “steady as she goes” at Refuge Ranch are very positive things! While raising 17 children, 14 of whom have survived incredible circumstances, any day that can be considered “normal” is truly a work of God and a miracle! So with gratitude we report a September that went “steady as she goes.”

With that in mind, please remember that “steady as she goes” at Refuge Ranch is a far cry from “steady as she goes” in many other family situations!

A “steady-as-she-goes” homeschool: Ministry partners Lucy Marshall and Vero Gonzalez bless the children day in and day out with individualized attention, affirmation for jobs well done, support for hard-to-understand concepts and correction for those pesky bad habits! Caleb rejoiced at finally getting a 100% on a math test, and we were moved to tears at Diana’s report on Africa, a place toward which the Lord has been drawing her heart for several years now.

A “steady-as-she-goes” bedtime: This takes from two to two and a half hours each night from the first little tooth brushed to the last “Good night.” I start with the youngest, David (2) and Daniel (3) and work my way up to our teenagers. The youngest children get a story book, a Bible story, individual prayers and a medley of “Jesus Loves Me,” “Cristo Me Ama” and “El Sapo” (a fun Christian children’s song about a frog!). (Note: the songs must be sung in that order or I get duly corrected!) 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 prayers, hugs and kisses....now I can go to bed!

A not so “steady-as-she-goes” mealtime: Ana, who formerly did our laundry, has moved on to other things in life and has left the staff at Refuge Ranch. (See article on page 4 to learn how we’re dealing with this.) She also served as our substitute cook when Rosa went on crusades. This means that I now get to cook for the kids during crusade weeks! This would not be such a bad proposition if it weren’t for my serious deficiencies in the cooking department. For example, I discovered that you must light the burner if you



Julie teaching kindergarten

want the water to boil! I have signed up for a class on “cooking rice” with Rosa before the next crusade! At one point, when the Mexican meatballs turned out delicious, Diana commented: “Hey, Mom, the prayers from the people at church (who knew I would be cooking that week) must really be working!” Thanks, sweetie!

“Steady-as-she-goes” conversations: One afternoon Cirino came back from the bike shop with several of the kids’ bikes where flat tires and other repairs had been made. Ana soon came to me and declared, in the most serious five-year-old voice you can imagine, “Mom, they took my bike to the doctor and he couldn’t fix it!”

In our home, “steady-as-she-goes” conversations also include some of our children working through memories from past abuse, imagining what life would

have been like had the Lord not brought them into our family, and struggling with being loved and loving. How I would like to share with you more intimate details surrounding these conversations so that you could witness, along with me, what God has done and is doing in each of our children’s lives. However, as the kids grow, we need to respect their privacy and allow them to share their own stories when that time comes.

Interestingly enough, while we enjoy “steady-as-she-goes” days, they can also be the most trying days because there seem to be no new developments, no new growth, very little adventure and excitement, just the daily grind of the wheels of family life, and a family life marked with past pain, present fear and a whole potpourri of people!

Oswald Chambers wrote: “Drudgery is one of the finest tests to determine the genuineness of our character. Drudgery is work that is far removed from anything we think of as ideal work. It is the utterly hard, menial, tiresome, and dirty work. (Parenting?) The inspiration of God is required if drudgery is to shine with the light of God upon it.”

Even more interesting is that true transformation takes place through this “steady-as-she-goesness” of daily life! “I love you” one morning can give hope for a moment, but “I love you” every morning and every night for a week, then a month, then a year, then five years has the power to transform a life!

We thank the Lord for a “steady-as-she-goes-September” and for the transformations that He is working through not just any “steady-as-she-goesness,” but a Holy Spirit inspired “steady-as-she-goes,” a drudgery marked by God! Thank you for your prayers and your giving that have changed these children’s lives forever by providing a place where they can grow “steady-as-she-goes.”

Rescuing Mariana

Martha has been our precious daughter for over seven years. Those of you who have been a part of the ministry since the beginning may recall Martha's dramatic story. She joined our family as the result of an Evangelistic Medical Mission Crusade to her indigenous village in the mountains of the state of Oaxaca. She arrived at the crusade all alone, despite her 6 years of age, complaining of an itchy skin condition and asking to be examined by the doctors. Her clothing consisted only of an oversized adult t-shirt. The doctors, alarmed at her physical condition and sad eyes, began to investigate her situation. They discovered that her father, a severe alcoholic, had murdered her mother in front of Martha and several of her siblings. Upon surviving that tragedy, at about age 5, she was sent to live with a deaf/mute aunt who sold homemade liquor and lived in a dwelling no more than 50 square feet with a tin roof, cardboard walls and dirt floor. When Victor went to pick up Martha, she was curled up in the corner in fetal position. She spoke no Spanish, only Indian dialect, had never had a hot shower, did not know how to use a restroom with running water, and even silverware were foreign objects to her.

Today she is an outgoing young woman who speaks both Spanish and English and has dreams of becoming a missionary, a doctor or President of Mexico!

For these past seven years we have prayed and made numerous attempts to bring Martha's younger sister, Mariana, home from Oaxaca. Her father has thwarted these attempts time after time. Upon Martha leaving Oaxaca, only Mariana was left to gather firewood on the mountainside, make tortillas by hand and get her father home when he was so drunk that he couldn't find the way himself. On several occasions we have been close to getting Mariana, only to have Martha's father back out or not show up.

Martha has been increasingly passionate and adamant about our going to Oaxaca, finding her father and doing everything possible to rescue Mariana. You see, Martha suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder as a result of the abuse that she survived throughout her first six years of life. She knows that Mariana is suffering daily at the hands of her alcoholic and abusive father who has already sold two of her older sisters, one for money and the other for a case of beer, one into servitude and the other into marriage.

The only way to reach the local pastor in Martha's home village is to call the village phone center. This is a store with several phones. You call, they send a runner for the person you want to talk to and then you call back in a

little while to find out if they found that person or not and if you can talk to them. After not having any communication with the pastor for many months, we were finally able to reach him this past August. The news was not encouraging.

The pastor had not seen Martha's sister, Mariana, for "quite some time." She normally would be seen with her father in town on Thursdays, market day, but that had not been the case lately. The pastor promised to search for

Martha's dad to discover her whereabouts.

A few weeks later, we spoke with the pastor once again and he told us that Mariana is living in Tehuacán, Puebla, a small city on the border between the



Martha, the day Victor met her — May 2004

states of Puebla and Oaxaca. We are unsure as to why she is living there, whether she is with a family member or working as a servant in somebody's home or business. Despite the encouragement of the pastor, Martha's father did not make good on his promise, once again, to go get Mariana.

That is the way things have stood until this past Friday, September 30th, when we got an unexpected phone call from the pastor. He was calling to let us know that Martha's dad has told him that he is willing for Mariana to join our family! What a turn in events and a total change of heart! It appears that Martha's father has found another woman to care for him and no longer "needs" Mariana. So sad, yet such a blessing all at the same time!

So, once again, we are waiting....waiting to hear the final word on when to travel to Oaxaca or Puebla to pick her up. Please pray for Mariana and for Martha! Martha has faithfully prayed for her sister for SEVEN years and has shown such faithfulness and faith. I pray that the Lord may reward her with the best prize ever – her little sister!



Martha today, with Julie

Shining Like Stars on an EMMC

“Then you will shine among them (a warped and crooked generation) like stars in the sky.” Philippians 2:15

Just as in so many places around the world, the warpedness and crookedness of this generation seems to explode more each day here in Mexico. September gave us several opportunities to experience that firsthand.

The first experience was the kidnapping of the brother of one of our staff members, Vero. We praise the Lord that he was held for less than a week, was released safely and suffered minimal torture during this horrific experience. However, it certainly has caused all of us to cling even more to Jesus as our Rock and reminds us that the reality of kidnappings in Mexico is never far from home! May the Lord continue to surround us with His angels.

The EMMC (Evangelistic Medical Mission Crusade) to the state of Michoacan from September 18-24 provided the second opportunity to not only witness this warped and crooked generation firsthand, but to shine as stars among it!

If you follow the news at all, you have surely heard about the drug cartels in



Mexico and the havoc they reap through territorial wars, murders, kidnappings, and the trafficking of illegal weapons along with the actual drug use that they participate in and promote.

One of the main cartels is “La Familia Michoacana,” which carries the name of the state from whence they hail...Michoacan. This most recent crusade took the team into the heart of drug cartel territory – right into the midst of this

warped and crooked generation where light is so desperately needed!

On most crusades Victor and the other drivers carry federal ID’s. However, this time they left them home. Dr. Escamilla, a retired military colonel who serves on the team as a physician, usually proves to be an asset to get the team through military and federal police checkpoints. However, on this crusade, the team was instructed to simply call him “doctor” rather than “colonel.” Why? Because the government and the military are the two arch enemies of the drug cartels and it would not behoove the team to identify themselves with either.

As the team neared the location for the first half of the week, they passed a checkpoint set up by the drug cartel. One of the cartel’s vehicles pulled out, caught up to the team and signaled for them to pull over. The local missionary had warned Victor of these types of situations and had joined the EMMC team in a previous town to lead the caravan in case his presence was needed. One of the cartel members approached the pastor’s lead vehicle to ask about the team’s identity and purpose. The pastor simply stated: “I’m the Preacher from Tumbiscatio and they’re with me. They’re coming to do a medical brigade.” The team was promptly waved on.

The walkie-talkie laden look-outs served as proof that the pastor’s simple explanation had been sufficient. From that point on, the team witnessed young boys, store owners and loafing young men, even “road repairmen,” with walkie-talkies all along the route. Rosa overheard one conversation: “Yep, they’re heading by here right now.” The light from the local pastor’s shining star was going before them!



Throughout those three days of work the team was able to consistently shine for Jesus through the healing hands of the doctors and dentists, the skillful scissors of the hairstylists and the wonderful words of the evangelists. In fact, just being there strengthened the local pastor’s ministry, because the people had not believed that a medical team was really going to come. The local people have now seen that the Preacher, as they call him, is a man of his word, and we pray that they will now be more willing to believe his words about The Word, God’s Word.

From that mountain town, the team drove to Uruapan, one of the main cities in Michoacan, a place also greatly affected by the illegal drug industry. Many times crusades have a smaller turnout when they are held close to cities because people have greater access to medical care, but that was not the case in Uruapan. 316 local people took advantage of the free services provided by Fishers of Men and 109 responded to the invitation to accept Jesus as their Savior!

Each crusade tends to have an overriding theme. For this one it was the Lord’s protection. From the location in the middle of the drug cartel’s territory to having to drive around at least four landslides that had covered the highway, the team witnessed God’s protective hand. Thank you for your prayers that certainly played an important role in the team’s safety, although we won’t know how much of a role until we are in heaven. In the meantime, let’s keep on shining like stars among this warped and crooked generation!

Statistics for EMMC

to Michoacan September 18-24

General Medicine: 286

Gynecology: 78

Dentist: 87

Hair Cuts: 98

Children’s Ministry: 52

Total People Attended To: 619

Total Decisions for Christ: 206

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Lots of Laundry!

Josiah (10) and Miguel (8) have discovered a new "steady as she goes" recently. Our laundry lady, Ana, has moved on to other adventures in life, which leaves the family and staff to figure out how to do laundry for a family of 19, plus linens, while we all already had more than full-time responsibilities. Actually, Victor has picked up most of the laundry slack and the boys have taken notice! While the EMMC team was on crusade, leaving only Lucy and me (Julie) at Refuge Ranch, Josiah, Miguel and even Caleb pitched in with the laundry. This requires filling the washing machine



with a hose (don't let it run over!), sending it through sufficient wash cycles to get the clothing clean, hand rinsing the clothing in a separate tub of water with fabric softener, then spinning the laundry in a separate spinner before hanging it out to dry! In fact, Josiah even got so ambitious as to hand scrub the dirtiest laundry! It is so encouraging when we actually see the following Biblical principle in practice: "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." I Corinthians 11:1 (especially when it means the men doing the laundry!)



Even YOU Can Make a Difference

Last month we shared with you some creative ways to financially support Fishers of Men in the midst of these difficult economic times! Well, just the other day, I (Julie) received an email that inspired and challenged me, and I pray it will do the same for you.

"I noticed the "Easy Giving in a Hard Economy" piece in your Sept. newsletter. After trying three times to register, provide your NPO#, etc., I had gotten exactly nowhere. So called customer service. They were very nice and helpful and the lady there says your NPO# of 82464 is now officially registered to give Fishers of Men a percentage whenever I swipe my Kroger card. As a widower, my purchases there are not great, but every little bit helps. Right?" (Max Gerber – age 82, widower)

Every little bit sure does help! Max and his wife, Rosemary, who is now with Jesus, have been a presence and blessing in my life since I was a little girl. They watched me grow up, witnessed God's call grow upon my life, and Max now continues to be a vital part of what the Lord desires to do! I now realize that one reason that I am who I am is due to people like Max who influenced my life and continue to do so by showing me that we can all make a difference, and who feel a calling, no matter what their age, financial status or situation may be, to persevere and do all that they can do in obedience to God's promptings.

May Max's obedience, his perseverance and his example encourage you to make a difference too! Your contribution may be "small," but God is an expert in taking small contributions to do great things! (If you don't believe me, check out John 6:1-13, and maybe the story of a little boy and his lunch of a few loaves of bread and some fish touched by Jesus can convince you!)

