

A wonderful, challenging time

December is a wonderful, challenging time at El Sauzal. October and November are extremely difficult months for us. Every year, we run out of money and food in the fall. We end up with bare pantries, eating the basics, mostly rice and beans. We struggle to pay taxes and wages and to buy propane to cook and heat with. Several times our needs have been big enough that we sent letters to our amigos, sharing our challenges. As God places it on people's hearts, they help us. God always provides.

The joy of Christmas

When December arrives, things change. Throughout the month we have many visitors. Some bring food for memorable meals. Many deliver Christmas presents for the kids. Placentia Presbyterian Church from Orange County comes with large supplies of rice, beans and flour both in December and June. For four years, Brad and Ron, also from Orange County, have filled our bare cupboards with staples and some luxuries. (You can read all about their crazy shopping adventures on page two.) Some of our friends even come and host unforgettable parties and events, like talent shows, movies and outings.



Nine-year-old Nayeli comforting toddler Alexis.

More Christmas blessings

We are also blessed this time of year by the Christmas and end-of-year donations we receive. These generous gifts are often enough to pull us out of our financial need and sustain us through January and early February. Our children enjoy a wonderful Christmas. December is a joyful time at El Sauzal.

A twice-yearly struggle

There is a similar struggle in the spring, with leaner donations in February, March, and April. By late spring we are often carrying debt again. During the summer, we have many visiting groups. They come bringing joy and love for our children. They often do crafts and work projects, and help with our expenses and food.

God always provides

For forty-five years God has shown that He provides; He sustains us in so many creative ways. If God places it on your heart, would you help us with either a one-time gift or a monthly commitment? We have monthly donors who give from \$5 to \$800 per month. Your monthly gift will help carry us through the lean times. In individual gifts, we have received from \$5 to more than \$10,000! Your single gift will help pull us out of the debt that accumulated this fall.

May the wonder of that first Christmas, the joy of God's abundant blessings and the peace of Jesus' presence be with you always. Muchas gracias!

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El Sauzal Foundation, Inc.
P.O. Box 154
Auburn, WA 98071-0154
www.elsauzal.org



Christmas 2012



The cupboards were bare

Ron Hill and Brad Duskocil of Orange County have come to Mexico the last four Decembers to help fill our bare cupboards. Here Ron shares memories of all four adventures.

“The human mind may devise many plans, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.” ~Proverbs 19:21

In November 2009, I received a copy of a letter written by Erika Espinoza, assistant director at the orphanage. Her note was full of thanks for all that God had provided for the niños and niñas at El Sauzal. However, she also expressed concern that they were approaching the Christmas season with woefully bare cupboards. While God did provide sustenance for the orphanage (beans and rice), she was heartbroken that, unless God intervened, they would not be able to have a traditional Christmas meal that year for the kids.

“He had called me to do something”

Let me say this: I believe that a loving God sent His Son to suffer and die for the sins of the world. I believe that the only thing necessary for salvation is the acceptance of Christ as our Savior. I believe the Lord gives His children guidance and wisdom. I believe in the providence of God. And specifically, I believe that this letter came to me because God’s hand is placed over this worthy institution [El Sauzal Orphanage] and He had called on me to do something.

Round one— Shopping, El Sauzal style

After sharing the letter with my brother-in-law, Brad Duskocil, the two of us decided to take a road trip to visit El Sauzal, and ‘take them shopping’. We worked out all the details with Roy and Erika, set the date and made our plans, purchased Mexican insurance for the car, dusted off our passports and away we went! It would be a quick one day trip. Our plan was to leave our homes in Orange County about 5:30 in the morning on a Saturday, arrive at the orphanage early to pick up Erika, shop at one, maybe two stores if needed, bring the bounty back to El Sauzal and then head for the border. Maybe we’d even stop to have some dinner in San Diego before continuing home.



Besides food, toilet paper, napkins, plates and cups are helpful

be unnecessary luxuries. (Some of those “luxuries” were cereal, mops and brooms, and ingredients to make flan for special desserts.)



Shopping is an adventure with Erika

Is cereal a luxury?

We arrived at our planned time, but Erika was not quite ready. Finally, we headed out to the stores; we hit about five of them. As we were more concerned about time than cost, Brad often had to convince Erika to go ahead and get the things she carefully paused over, stuff she was afraid might



*In the checkout line
at Smart and Final.
So many carts,
so much food!*

Patience is a virtue

When we checked out at our first store, Smart and Final (S&F), we started a whole new mini-adventure. Making large multiple purchases at one location, especially outside of the country, really grabs the attention of the credit card security departments. Multiple purchases, you ask? Well, yes. The S&F registers maxed out at around 3,500 pesos (about U.S. \$300), and so we had to break up our purchase into several smaller ones. We spent no less than two hours talking with the security departments at Discover, American Express and Visa. After nearly twenty calls (international rates on cell phones are not cheap), we finally finished our first stop of the day.

After a good lunch at a local fish taco stand we went to a Walgreens equivalent for personal hygiene products and then even stopped at Costco. During our travels, however, we did notice that we never seemed to take a direct route from one location to the next. It felt like we were going in circles some times, following Erika. It was a driving adventure, to say the least!

Los Gringos Locos buy baby formula

On the way back to El Sauzal, I rode with Erika while Brad followed. Erika shared how they were very low on infant formula, but she couldn't go to the pharmacy where they normally purchased it as they had a large outstanding bill. I asked her to take me so I could purchase the necessary items. The bill they had accrued on credit was taken care of, and the necessary items were purchased. Heading out, I realized how lucky I was that my wife had been able to nurse our children when they were very young.

We finally arrived back at the orphanage around 8:30 PM. With all the kids excitedly helping, we were able to unload two heavily packed vehicles in a very short time.

Knowing the border closed at 11 PM, we quickly said our goodbyes and headed back. We arrived home around 1:30 AM, and VERY tired.

Round two—the best laid plans

The next year we were determined to plan better, allowing for much more time, and we even brought along my brother Russ to help. Trying to forestall the expected difficulties with the credit card companies, both Brad and I had called well in



Ron with a giant bag of Cheetos



The cupboards were bare (cont)

advance of the trip to tell them what we were doing and not to place a hold of any sort on our cards for the dates specified. All for naught, however. It didn't work. Each transaction took over twenty minutes and included making international cellular calls and providing all the answers needed to release payment. Then we got to repeat it—eighteen more times altogether. We did bring some cash along, but not the amount needed for the whole trip. Governments don't like to see large sums of foreign cash cross international borders for some reason!

Round three—an epiphany

After this was over, Brad had an epiphany. What if we were to buy gift cards at our S&F in California, then take them down to Mexico for use there? Even the manager at our local S&F thought it was a great idea and indicated that it should work without any problems. So we updated our plans: this time, for our 2011 trip, we planned to stay Saturday night and drive back across the border on Sunday. We also brought along two helpers, Serin and Melanie. In addition, Erika called ahead to her S&F, and they agreed to transport the cargo to El Sauzal so we wouldn't have to load it all in our vehicles.

Arriving at S&F, we smoothly conducted phase one of our shopping expedition and then proceeded to the checkout. Our smug confidence abruptly disappeared when we discovered that the gift cards would not work in Mexico. Since they



Erika happily stocking up our cupboards—no longer bare!

had been drawn against a U.S. S&F account and bank, the Mexican accounting system did not recognize them. It was back to the international calls to the credit card companies—ugh.

That evening more than made up for the minor inconveniences of the day. We had a great dinner with Erika, her husband Ruffo, and our two friends. We reveled in the memories that these adventures created (and laughed a bit, too) and fellowshiped in the love of Christ.

Round four—send it ahead

As I write this, we are planning our next adventure for this coming Saturday, December 1st. We have wired money to the orphanage ahead of time, so hopefully Erika can write a check against those funds and speed the process at each store. We have

made reservations at an Ensenada hotel, and we are finalizing the other details. I pray that the trip will go smoothly, that we cross the border both directions with no hassles and perhaps even have a pleasant stay in Ensenada—but most of all, I pray that God's grace would shine through it all.

[Editor's note: The process of writing checks did not work as smoothly as Ron and Brad had hoped. This trip, like the others, was an adventure.]

Ron's Facebook update after the trip:



Los Gringos Locos are back from Ensenada and taking Erika & Ruffo shopping for desperately needed supplies for El Sauzal Orphanage. It was great to see both and spend time together!

~ Written by Ron Hill

Our kids at a home-build



Jaime and Ramiro helping lift a wall. In October, our young adults worked with a group of Microsoft employees and the ministry "Pouring Out Hope." They built a home for a needy family south of Ensenada. This amazing opportunity was spearheaded by our talented and passionate friend Eric Uber.



University student Abel and orphanage operations manager Ruffo helping with the walls of the house. Ruffo shared, "I strongly believe that God worked in the hearts of our youth to understand that God is everywhere, not only in the orphanage."



In all, ten of our young adults went along with Ruffo to the build. Also with them was Bebo (far left). Bebo is a grown orphanage kid who now has a home and family of his own. He still frequently visits the orphanage.



The house coming together. One of our kids had the honor of giving the keys to the happy new home owner.



Sponsor a child: Melissa

Melissa is a fun five-year-old. She came to the orphanage a year and a half ago with her seven-year-old brother Gabriel.

Melissa is a sweet kindergartener with an infectious smile.

If you would like to sponsor Melissa or any of our other kids, go to elsauzal.org/sponsor.

Muchas gracias!



Not too late to get your calendar

Why buy a calendar?

- Remember our kids on a daily basis by seeing their photos.
- Get to know specific children and their joys and pains.
- Learn their struggles, as each month we share a different need/prayer focus.
- Share the orphanage with others by giving calendars as gifts.

Suggested donation: \$12 each

Two ways to order:

1. Order online through Paypal. (See elsauzal.org/ordercalendar.)
2. Pay with check, cash or money order. Fill out the order form on the back of the insert and mail in with your donation.

Got questions? Email Danielle Bergman at dani.bergman@elsauzal.org.

