



El Salvador Trip August 7–14, 2008

The following are some random and not so random thoughts about my trip to Guarjila, El Salvador.

Aug. 7 Thursday:

Afternoon arrival

Conversation about what the Tamarindo does: Formation/educate/character/responsibility of the individual. Create leaders, give people the tools to take responsibility for their future

The Tamarindo Center (a.k.a. "The Shop") is the greatest asset to the group. It provides a safe place to grow, learn, dream and serve. It is an area free from the chaos that abounds in the homes and community. It also houses "Tamarindo Gardens" which is the single most important 30' X 60' space in Guarjila. The Gardens, a former chicken coop, is the venue for indoor soccer and inline hockey leagues. Like any good sports program, many life lessons are taught between the lines. There is no other space like this in the area and its positive impact on the community can be seen in all those who play within the walls of the court as well as those who come to watch.

Need to change our focus that nobody has money or things. *The fact is that there is money in the community and the kids do have things.* The Tamarindo is not about getting "things" rather it uses lots of different resources (athletics and recreation, art, travel, history, etc) to stimulate and foster individual development.

Development model (A 3-pronged attack)

1. Basic needs: the first prong of the development model is to provide basic needs (shelter, food, clothes)
2. Conversion of Heart: After basic needs are met, it's up to the individuals to change themselves. They must decide to take responsibility for themselves and their future. This is where the Tamarindo does the bulk of the work
3. Systematic or Structural Change: This is a larger scale set of necessary changes to the economic, political and social structures, which create poverty, injustice and general chaos.

Note: The Tamarindo works in all 3 areas of the development model but spends the bulk of the time working in #2.

The Tamarindo provides many social services to the town. The relationship with the Town Directiva is quite good. The current President of the Directiva (Necetli Dubon) is a Tamarindo. In fact, 3 of the last 4 administrations have been led by active or former Tamarindos. This accounts for the last 9-10 years of leadership. They turn to the Tamarindo for just about everything. The Tamarindos' reputation is very good and people know if something needs to get done, the Tamarindos will do it and do it right. This falls into the personal development area of "service to others"

While many Tamarindos can be considered poor, it's still important for each person involved with the Tamarindo to "give back" something for every benefit received. John has never subscribed to the "refugee mentality" that handouts are beneficial and he works tirelessly to avoid that perception.

We must put on the face of the poor, sit at the foot of the cross to see the gospel from the point of view of the poor

Aug. 8 Friday:

First ever meeting of the "Institute for Sport and Personal Development"

John has created the Institute for Sport and Personal Development to unite all the soccer teams in Guarjila by creating a standard of conduct for the teams. In the past, fights and brawls between opposing players as well as between fans have interrupted games and have continued in the community after games are over. Referees have also been assaulted after games. The Institute for Sport and Personal Development has enlisted the coaches of the teams to embrace this set of rules to make games more peaceful. The Tamarindo owns all soccer tourneys and leagues (both indoor and outdoor) and this is an opportunity for the Tamarindo to exert its influence on the community. The players know that if they break the rules they will not be able to participate in league play. For the outdoor league (played at the "Planchita Stadium", located near the high school, which the Tamarindos created many years ago and manage for the town) The 7 local teams and coaches represent 7 community leaders who have the most influence on behavior. The Institute stresses that no individual is greater than the team and that no team is greater than the sport. It lists other rules of conduct that players must do: shake hands after a game (a really big deal), weekly maintenance of the playing field, no drugs, no alcohol,

Each team represents a micro-organization in the town. The town people identify with each team so influence is spread amongst the fans.

Sports are the only thing kids will put cell phones and MP3 players down for.

The Tamarindo controls all soccer because it controls the facilities. If you control soccer, you control teams (approx. 18 players per team for outdoor leagues X 7 teams) and you control social life.

The outdoor leagues are 2 seasons (summer and winter), 16-week regular season + play-offs. Games are held on Sundays

Chele is the League Commissioner and John and Santos also help run the leagues.

Teams are very influential to younger kids

A facility means you have the ability to "program"

The indoor leagues (held at the Tamarindo Gardens) follows the same rules of conduct but has an additional requirement that each team must do 2 large projects that the town Directiva determines (community service)

The indoor leagues are as follows:

Age 13 and under: 8 teams

Age 15 and under: 8 teams

Open division: 10 teams

Tamarindos are represented on most teams

The teams generally have 5-6 man teams that play a 3-on-3 format. Games are played on Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturdays.

Most players play on a couple teams (both outdoor and indoor leagues) and some teams even play in leagues outside of Guarjila. It is a year-round sport.

Inline Hockey (Hockey played on Roller blades) begins in October and runs through February.

The Tamarindo Gardens is full of teams practicing soccer and John also hosts soccer and hockey clinics at the Gardens

Meeting with the Directiva

The Guarjila Directiva is the legal agent for Guarjila

Guarjila is a part of Chalatenango City and thus are governed more or less by them.

There is no police force in Guarjila

The Directiva receives some money from Chalatenango City but the bulk of it comes from other supporting Agencies, 5 from the Unites States and 1 in Germany

They spoke mostly of the leaking roof on the community center and their desire to get a new roof installed. The community center is used year round and hosts most important meetings held by the town. Other celebrations are held there as well.

They mentioned an approximate cost of \$8-\$10,000 for a new zinc metal roof. All materials could be purchased locally and local contractors could be used for the install labor.

John thinks this is an important project

A quote will be forwarded with at least 2 prices for our review.

They also mentioned they would like funding for the bakery project. This is an old community based bakery that was not able to operate and make profits. Things have fallen into disrepair and they would like to build it up again so the community could have fresh baked goods. Currently, commitment to this project is questionable.

John does not think this is a good project.

Friday evening organizational meeting at the Tamarindo:

John held his weekly organizational meeting with the Tamarindos.

62 kids were present.

The topic/lesson discussed was forgiveness. A group discussion was held and some of the kids presented a skit to act out scenarios of forgiveness. All kids participated in some way.

The kids were then asked about the message of the "Loaves and Fish" Gospel...again kids were randomly chosen to express themselves in front of the group. The discipline and respect each member of the Tamarindo showed to each other was really amazing.

John then asked the kids why they come to the Tamarindo and what does it mean to them:

The answers varied but the general theme was that the Tamarindo was a place to learn respect, discipline, punctuality, good study habits, service to others. Some were looking for good friendships while some only wanted to play with bikes and the other recreational items at the Tamarindo and ended up learning much more. Some wanted to learn things other than how to survive on the streets while others mentioned they wanted to learn things that their parents were not teaching them. Some learned spirituality and how to help others and some just love spaghetti.

Friday night meeting with Manuel Lopez (coach of the Falcons)

We talked about the importance of the land behind the Tamarindo facility. It is owned by the Town and has a severe drainage problem. Some of the local outdoor soccer teams use it when it's not flooded as a place to practice soccer. They have taken it upon themselves to dig drainage trenches along the sides of the field to try and help it shed water and they've also helped a local man work on his dump truck just so they can use the truck to haul in loads of dirt and spread it by hand over the field. They have showed lots of initiative, leadership and responsibility to take charge of this vacant lot in an effort to make it usable.

Aug. 9 Saturday:

Saturday morning discussion about "What is the Tamarindo, and what does it do?"

John delivered a list of vocabulary words that best describe the Tamarindo:

Empower, create, construct, build, form, develop, discern

He also answered the question above with 5 short sentences:

1. *We empower* youth to dream and *develop* life skills, which will enable them to *discern* a future with dignity.
2. *We create* organization and leadership through educational opportunity, diverse recreational programming, and micro-business development.
3. *Construct* community through a disciplined rule of life, spirituality and generous service to one another.
4. *Form* socially responsible and active lifestyle with environmental conscience by fostering a relationship with the natural environment of El Salvador.
5. *Build* responsible citizens by engaging youth in civic action and duty.

Analogy of the Surf: A swimmer has a difficult time swimming in the ocean against the waves but knows that if he can get past the turbulent currents pushing against him then the water will be smoother the farther out he goes. The Tamarindo provides Training, Tools and Resources so each person it touches can eventually break through the surf

John mentioned he does not use the word "youth" rather he works with everyone who wants to improve and form themselves.

The Tamarindo must be involved in the community because if it's not in the community breaking bread, then there is nothing.

We do not work with disadvantaged youth rather everyone in the Tamarindo is advantaged and ready

Basic weekly Tamarindo Community schedule:

Sunday 6:30am-8:30am: mandatory community service work coffee and cakes are provided after working

Sunday evening: Base community dinner (Dinner, Reflection, Analysis) Spaghetti is the food of choice and each week different kids are selected to serve the others the meal. There is also a food prep team as well as table set up and clean up teams.

Monday nights: Arts and culture night

Tuesday night: Sports and recreation leagues and some kind of educational evening.

Wednesday night: Sports and recreation leagues

Thursday night: Open night, no planned activities

Friday night: Weekly Organizational meeting (mandatory)

Saturday night: Sports and recreation leagues

Note that the Tamarindo begins to fill up daily after school, around 3:30pm and there are generally kids there all afternoon and evening. Some play, some exercise, some work on homework and receive tutoring from older kids and some just hang out. Also important to know that on the 3 nights that the Tamarindo hosts the soccer/hockey leagues (depending on the season) the Tamarindos are busy managing the events. If they are not on a team that is playing that night then they assist in score keeping and time keeping, cleaning the playing surface at half-time and between games, handing out Tamarindo owned soccer shoes to be worn on the playing surface, locker room security, crowd control, assist in the concession stand set up, provide water for the players and installing tarps on the windward side of the Tamarindo Garden to keep rain from entering the playing surface. It is the attention to detail that the Tamarindos provide the leagues that has earned them the reputation as the best event managers in the entire area. They own soccer because of this reputation.

Saturday evening soccer: What a night! The games were great and the crowd was tremendous. Maria organized the concessions so some of the ladies could make some money and they did. The energy was unbelievable around the Tamarindo. It is amazing what that facility does for this town. It was really rocking and for just a few hours both the players and the fans acted like they were playing in a World Cup match. If anyone ever needed an example of how sports can transform people, I invite you to the Tamarindo Garden on a Saturday night and attend the 6:30pm game. It's the prime time game and you won't be disappointed.

Aug. 10 Sunday

Fishing with Captain Luciano and Beto on the For Tuna I
An awesome day on the ocean with a great crew.

Aug. 11 Monday

Meeting with Radio Sumpul arranged by Maria

The radio station has been off-air for about 6 weeks due to a transformer getting hit by lightning. They have asked if the Foundation would purchase a new transformer and lightning protection. Approx. cost \$10,000

John thinks this is a very important project.

We are to receive a formal quote from a radio engineer on this request

The radio is a community owned operation with no formal funding. It does not generate revenue.

It is extremely important to the community, as it is the one place people can go for information. It is part of 22 other stations across the country that all operate on the same frequency and belongs to the Community Radio Association.

Maria worked for the station for many years

Currently nobody draws a salary from the station however there are 14 volunteers who run the programs. The radio station is an educational tool for the community and is used by the medical clinic to broadcast info about health problems as well as upcoming health seminars.

It is a voice for the poor and a place where social injustices can be discussed.

It provides children's programs, local news, national news, music, live interviews and current events discussions, replays sermons from Archbishop Romero, and provides programming about Salvadoran history and cultural events.

The town gave the radio its current building after the old building burned down (the Tamarindos helped put the fire out)

Charlie (the person responsible for running the radio station) also spoke about his wish to broadcast the radio station on the Internet so it could be heard around the world. He said this is an easy thing to do. An added bonus: it would give people from Guarjila who are in the U.S. a chance to stay in touch with their village.

Charlie and Maria also discussed the opportunity to create a for-profit, micro-business enterprise: An Internet café at the radio station building. There is currently no public access to the Internet in Guarjila and only 2 private homes that allow people to use the Internet for a small fee. They would like to install 5 computers with Internet, charge \$1/hour for Internet use. (Micro-business opportunity)

Charlie currently is teaching computer training to some women from Guarjila, being paid from a grant from a European NGO (Non Government Organization)

Monday night Dinner at the Tamarindo

Because of our fishing trip, the normal Sunday night dinner was moved to Monday night.

A great night watching the "magic" of the Tamarindo in action. The electricity was out in the town for the entire evening but the dinner went as planned. Maria arranged the details of the food and the teams worked together to serve each of the 60+ kids who attended. Everyone had all they could eat of Spaghetti and Bread and it was all enjoyed by candlelight. Even the clean up which took place mostly in the dark went well. To see the kids take turns serving each other, sharing their bread and drink and then working together to clean up was an awesome sight.

Aug. 12, Tuesday

Meeting with the Clinic

The first part of the morning was spent visiting with the Special Needs staff. Of the 4 women who work in this area, 3 are the mothers of Tamarindos. The Special Needs Center is separate from the clinic but they do work together and share the same geography. The Special Needs Center is divided into two main areas, education for the mental and physically challenged patients and families and the Rehabilitation area.

The education area helps the individuals and their families learn to cope with their particular problems. They also try and help the patients become more independent if possible. The rehab area helps with the physical maintenance of the patients. The staff also does house visits for more hands-on education and therapy. There is no cost for any of these services and they are funded by "The Angels," a donor group from Europe.

The Government has very few programs for special needs, none are offered in Guarjila.

The Clinic meeting with Dr. Dagoberto Menjivar and Marlene Cruz Gonzalez

Clinic operations are running very well and for now they are ok financially. They have been successful at raising awareness about diet and exercise and their preventive medicine initiative has worked well.

They've developed a 10-step level of care, administered during the 9 months of pregnancy and the women have access to almost daily care during pregnancy.

Recently, a woman physician, who is a Director of the National University, brought a group from the United Nations to the clinic so they could study their operations and programs to see if it could be duplicated around the world in other rural areas.

The Clinic has started a Nutrition Program where they allow women from the town to sell soymilk, fruit drinks and a tuber called Yacca, out in front of the clinic building, as an alternative to store bought food items.

Dr. Dagoberto's specialty is Public Health and he is currently getting his masters in this area.

He told me that the Gov't hasn't updated public policy in medicine in the last 25 years and that according to last years census, the National Budget was \$48/person for health care and that health care accounted for only about 2% of the National Budget.

In addition to patient care, the clinic also does home visits to every home in Guarjila every 6 months. They check the latrines and pilas for cleanliness and they also check the water quality for bugs. They grade the overall cleanliness of the homes and the surrounding areas for standing water and general sanitation. Two health promoters generally visit 40 homes per week. If a home is found to be unsafe, it is written up and gets re-checked every 2 months.

I spent the afternoon doing such house visits with Dr. Patricia Melora who visits from San Salvador 3 days a week. She comes on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. She is in general practice and is getting her masters in Public Health. Every Tuesday she visits about 10 homes throughout Guarjila and checks on many elderly who have heart conditions and other respiratory problems. We are accompanied by Marlene Cruz and 2 women volunteers visiting for 6 weeks from Spain. Marlene carries the patient files with her and updates each patient's records. Dr Patricia says that there is no other health plan in El Salvador like the one in Guarjila. The fact that people can get prescriptions filled either at the clinic or at the other small pharmacy in town and it doesn't cost them any money is amazing. The clinic pays for everything through private donations. These house visits truly put a face to the gospel message.

The clinic has 10 staff people working full time.

6 health promoters, 2 doctors, 1 lab technician (Juan Luis) and one ambulance driver (on call)

The clinic would like to advance the eye care and the dental operations. The donated eye equipment is in the clinic but is in need of some service. An ophthalmologist is visiting monthly but has agreed to come twice a month if there was more equipment for him to use.

The eye equipment donated by Dr. McCord was successfully delivered and inventoried by the clinic.

They would also like to create a permanent dental room but realize that it is a major expense to pay for equipment and salary for a dentist so for now it's just a wish list item.

The clinic is working with a group who is providing material for new toilets and each family would donate labor to build it

Also they are working with a German group who is looking into how to get water down the mountain better and to look into some type of sanitary sewers.

The medical clinic instigates most of the improvements in Guarjila.

All of the work the medical clinic does supports the welfare of the people of Guarjila.

"Viva Guarjila" is a program from a German group wanting to help in town. They are doing a feasibility study to improve drainage around homes in town. They've seen an increased interest from the European Economic Community in Central America. Many Governments in Europe want to support labor movements and human rights causes.

The relationship between the medical clinic and the Tamarindo is very strong. It's a great partner to have in Guarjila.

Aug. 13 Wednesday

School Meeting (Grades 1-9)

Met with Nicolas (principal) and Mauricio Morales (teacher)

Discussed the toilets project. This project is larger and nicer than we were told. The concrete block structure will have water filled, flush toilets--(3) each, boys and girls. In addition, the boys will have a large stand-up urinal. At the entrance there will be a large community sink basin with 3 individual faucets with running water for washing hands. The sewer drains into a large and deep concrete walled septic tank and from there an additional pipe will spill into an overflow septic tank. It is designed to serve the 527 students for many years before needing to be emptied. An NGO from the Netherlands called "Plan International, Inc." donated the material and we paid for the labor. The project is moving along well but Nicolas explained that they need an additional \$610.00 to complete the project. He said the labor has been very difficult because of the rock that had to be busted up in order for the septic field to be installed. Also the holes needed pumping every morning due to the heavy nighttime rains.

I believe this is a necessary and reasonable charge after viewing the job site and viewing the work that's been done.

The school does have Internet access now. It was paid for by Father Paco from Spain. He has done many projects in Guarjila over the years. The Internet will have a full curriculum developed for classes next year.

The school is not part of the Ministry of Education. It has stayed private (non-government funded) and will continue privately funded. It represents something very dear to the town and is a symbol of the blood, sweat and tears that the town has sacrificed to build it. They do not want to turn it over to the government and have to abide by the Gov't. rules.

The Gov't. does pay some salaries so they do have some say in things but really they just stay away and offer no services to the people or the school.

The relationship between the school and the Tamarindo is very solid. The school asks the Tamarindo to help in many ways throughout the year. The Tamarindo assists in purchasing uniforms for kids, book bags, pencils etc. They also help in the transportation of kids to various events throughout the year. The school also uses the exercise equipment at the Tamarindo Shop for Gym classes. The Tamarindo also pays for and transports the teachers on a retreat every year.

PEI= Projecto Educativo Institucional is the 5 year plan designed by the school administrators. They look ahead 5 years and figure out where they want to be. The current plan expires in 2009 at which time another plan will be developed.

The school has a large waste area between parallel rows of classrooms. It is used for some play space but is really unsuitable for anything due to the large rocks and no grass. The school would like to someday install some type of concrete so kids could play safely inside the school property and use it all year round even in the rainy season.

Tilapia Project

On Wednesday afternoon, we viewed the Tilapia fish project. This is a great program where the Government dished out \$175,000 to start a fish farm. It's an election year so they figured that's why they received the money. Approx. 25 families work this small fish farm and they helped clear the land and dig the small ponds. The Tamarindos helped install underwater pipes for drainage and aeration. This project is 9 months old and really thriving.

The boat workers arrive in Guarjila

It's now Wednesday late afternoon and the first satellite community of the Tamarindo (the boat workers from the coast) have just arrived. John had Luis drive the 4 families up to Guarjila for the afternoon and to spend the night. Many of the men have never been in the mountains as they've lived on the ocean their entire lives. These people really live on the margins of society and truly do not have much of anything. Their kids ran and played with the Tamarindos who John instructed to make a point to introduce themselves to the guests from the coast and to make them feel welcome. The Tamarindos proved to be good hosts and everyone really enjoyed themselves. Everyone had a small meal of Papusas and we even had an exhibition soccer match between some of the Tamarindos and the men from the coast. It was a great evening and as we watched everyone play together and laugh, John made the comment that "the servants are being served today." It was a beautiful example of the Tamarindo model practicing what is preached.

Brief conclusion

As I left Thursday morning, I thought about the many conversations I had with John about the Tamarindos. While it wouldn't do any of the topics covered any justice to try and summarize in just a few sentences, there are some things that really stuck with me. First, John spoke about the importance of geography and how necessary it is to really understand someone's situation. You must walk with the people to feel their pain and to experience their joy. (One idea that sprang from this was to have the Board of Directors meet every other year in Guarjila to keep the Tamarindo experience fresh for everyone.) The Tamarindo is everywhere in Guarjila, side by side, helping many different groups. The Tamarindo truly walks with all those who seek help. Some are young and some are very old. Some are kids whose parents have left for the United States while some are parents whose kids have left for the United States. Some are economically poor while others are spiritually and morally poor. Some are wonderful young people who know they will create a better life for themselves while others don't yet know how good they can be but trust the Tamarindo to teach them how to dream and believe anything can happen. Loving, listening, teaching and living in communion with all people, the Tamarindo is helping people discover how they can grow and is providing opportunities for that everyday.

We talked about the Tamarindos being about opportunity and action. We want to project our image as one of success and strength not disadvantaged and weak. After spending a week with the group I believe that the Tamarindo is full of strength and action. The Tamarindo is creating leaders giving people the ability to decide how to live with dignity.

