

THE CORNERSTONE FOUNDATION

"...the stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." Mt. 21:42

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The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

--Isaiah 9:2



Perched on the lower slopes of the mountain, above the point where two steep jungle ravines coalesce, lies a small park. Fifty meters across at its broadest point, it would be the first foothold for a giant climbing the mountain called El Toro. And El Toro is a small mountain, the lowest 1000-foot step on the arduous climb up from the beaches of the wild north coast of Colón, Honduras to the 10,000 foot crest of the mountain range called the Cordillera Nombre de Dios. In other seasons a tropical sun shines on these slopes filtering tangentially down to the forest floor. In other seasons the warm breeze from the sea stirs the treetops and pushes small diaphanous clouds up the windward flanks to gather like a gauzy crown at the crest. In other seasons untold hundreds of thousands of species of insects, 725 species of birds, 225 species of mammals, 196 species of reptiles, 100 species of amphibians, and one species of man strive and climb and hunt and hide and buzz and forage and flit and fly and crash and creep through these mountains. But not now. Now, they've all gone to ground.

The rainy season has come again to the Colón. A great storm has blown in and caught us unprepared, roaring across the troubled continent to the north, sweeping across the sea to crash against these

mountains. With legions of thunderheads carrying a trillion tons of water and a hundred leagues of darkness, it overwhelms us all. As if the whole host of the middle sky has gone mad, the rain throws itself against the mountains from all directions--falling to the earth like the arrows of some great army, crashing head-on in massive frontal assaults, and lashing, feinting, and charging again from the flanks. The wind rages and roars. The dark sky weeps and mourns for the dying of the light. Down on that little parkland on the lower slope of the mountain, as it is on every part of the mountain, the fruit trees and the flowers and the grass alike are streaming water and twisting and shaking in the wind. It is cold and almost utterly dark.

I had a vision of this in the second week of November of this year. Someone was there standing all alone in the storm in that park at the base of the mountain. I won't say it was some supernatural vision, just the natural kind we all have from time to time. And, I can't say whether the person in the storm was you or was me. I couldn't see the face. It was too dark. If it was you there on that little plateau in the midst of the storm, you were cold, soaked to the skin and almost completely blind to your surroundings. Only when the lightning flashes through the sky in unexpected instants can you see this surreal landscape.

If you know where to look, there are two graves there under the shivering fruit trees. On the west side of the park lies the first grave. That grave holds the mortal remains of Dr. Bob Lillard. His soul went on to heaven above the heavens and left us here this January past. The flowers now grow where the ground was disturbed, though these are flattened by the storm. A marker is planned to say something simple like this: "Robert A. Lillard, 1927-2012, beloved husband, father, & missionary"... because that is what he was, beginning in 1958 in Italy until the day he died here at Hospital Loma de Luz.

The grave on the east side of the park is a new one. There we placed the body of Fred Mahmood Eskafi. I believe his soul went on to heaven too, though it came down to the bottom of the ninth inning before Fred finally made the decision to run to home on God's sacrifice fly.

Considering the fact that this is the edge of the jungle in a Latin culture, it might not surprise you to hear that we don't have very many people named Mahmood Eskafi out here--none in fact, nor anyone named Fred, for that matter. Fred was 78 when he came to Hospital Loma de Luz for the last time. He was dying of metastatic cancer and heart failure. Originally from Iran, he went to the USA as a young man to study at a University and eventually earned an advanced degree in microbiology. He worked in various parts of the world, mostly for the US Dept. of Agriculture. Along the way he left his Islamic faith behind, and ultimately lost all connections with any faith, family, or close relationships. He ended up sick and alone at the end of the world, in a little house over in Trujillo, where he heard about Loma de Luz.

He came to us for the first time a year and a half ago, dying from intestinal obstruction from cancer and from heart failure. We operated on him, and, against all odds, with a lot of hard work on everyone's part, God gave him another chance. He recovered gradually in the hospital, where he was cared for, befriended, and treated as only the Christians would treat a sick and weak and crotchety old atheist. I think it was the only time in his life that he was treated with such charity. Surely the other atheists hadn't treated him that way. Since he was pretty aggressively anti-faith and yet was looking down the barrel of eternity, I witnessed to him very pointedly about the gospel, as did several others. He ultimately conceded that he would consider it, recovered his health enough to return to his little house in Trujillo, and there dropped out of sight for more than a year. In October of this year we heard through a short train of friends that he was in bad shape in the public hospital in Trujillo and wanted to come back to Loma de Luz. A couple of our missionaries went to considerable effort to get him back here to Loma de Luz, where he wanted to return to die.

Here we cleaned him up and cared for and witnessed to him again. The gospel, after all, whether in words or in deeds, is the best that we have to offer. Since Fred was a scientist by training and argumentative by nature, I presented him with Pascal's Wager. I know others visited and spoke with him. But it seems that it was the Holy Spirit of God who visited him all alone with his pain in the night and offered Fred one more chance. This last time, he finally got it. Because when Nelsi, one of our Honduran nurses, came in to check on him at the end of her shift, bustling around the room, quietly praying and singing to herself (as is her way) in the early morning light, Fred joined in praying and

calling out to God. Like Ebenezer Scrooge on the dawn of Christmas Day, he wanted to know if it was too late to repent. When I came in a little later, that was all he wanted to talk about. He was so full of joy. He wanted to call his ex-wife to ask her forgiveness. We did get him in touch with her. And he did do his part, though she didn't seem to care much about Fred's change of heart. But Fred did. And, we did. And, I think God did. Fred was so happy and at peace. That change in his spirit was a change you could sense when you walked in the room. And it lasted until the moment he died, a few days later.

Among the many good things that Fred Eskafi's homecoming represented, it seems to me that one of them was God quietly reminding us that He will not be put in a box. What do you think are the odds that a 78-year-old, ex-Muslim, secular-materialist intellectual would ever come to accept the grace of God? I have done my best to calculate the probability and they are astronomically long odds. Yet, that is just what happened. Despite all of modern Christendom's formulas and strategies for evangelization of the 10/40 window, it was his maker who Himself came to where Fred was, dying in darkness on the edge of the jungle in Colón.

But that was last month. That was before the storm. Fred has gone to meet his maker now and left us here behind. The storm was just gathering then. But now the darkness is growing to cover the world. Maybe you are like me and you fell asleep in this peaceful little park remembering the lives and strivings of those in the graves. Do you remember that song by Keith Green? He has passed on and left us here too. He was pretty radical, thank God, and his words still sting:

***The world is asleep in the dark
That the church just can't fight
Cause it's asleep in the light.***

***How can you be so dead
When you've been so well fed?***

***Jesus rose from the grave,
And you, you can't even get out of bed.***

Maybe you awoke as the storm was coming in. Maybe at first you thought the storm was a bad dream and you felt disoriented and unsure which way to turn. But no, the storm is real. From that cold, soaked and lonesome graveyard there is just one light left in a world gone dark. You can see it through the branches writhing in the storm. It is the light on the peak of the hospital, not far away to the east. It is the light of the cross on the chapel steeple. You've seen it before. Remember that light ... and get out of bed.

It comes down to this: you have two choices. You can stay there stunned, soaked and freezing in the dark. Or, you can set off down the slope with the polestar of that light on the cross in your mind's eye to travel by. As you descend the last skirt of the mountain you will have to pass through the valley at your feet. In that valley you will no longer be able to see any light. In that last valley you'll be navigating by the *memory* of where you last saw that light. It is the same light that shone from the manger. It is the same light that shines on the cross, the same light that shone from the empty grave. It's the one light that won't go out. Although you won't be able to see it, it will be nearer still. Though you won't feel anything but the rain and the wind, there is shelter over there. So if you come upon any lost souls wandering in that darkness, take them with you. For there is a whole world lost in the dark out there and it's going to get darker before we make it home.

God's grace,

Jeff McKenney, M.D.

News and Needs

Personnel We are in great need currently of more **Primary Care Physicians** on the field as well as more **Nurses** (a perennial need). We would also be aided greatly by people willing to serve as **Educators** in connection with the El Camino Bilingual Kindergarten and Primary School.

Cornerstone Video Samaritan's Purse blessed us recently by making a video about Loma de Luz which can be viewed online. To find it, you can check out the Cornerstone's video archive site: <http://www.youtube.com/user/lomadeluz> or simply google "**Dr. McKenney--Prescription for Renewal.**"

Fiberoptic Cable Project We are considering undertaking an I.T. project to bring fiberoptic cable from our transceiver hub to the Children's Centre and El Camino School (for reliable internet access), about a \$5,000 project. If you are interested in helping (financially or otherwise), please let us know. And pray that we will know whether and when to undertake this.

Rainy Season Please also pray for the health and safety of all, as the rainy season has settled upon northern Honduras. Pray that transportation will be do-able and that communication will be operable at the times those things are needed most.

Thank you for your prayers. --Sally M.

Then the LORD said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

--Exodus 33:21-23

In 2003 when we moved the few miles from the village of Balfate to our little ranch near the hospital, Rosanne began to teach 5 Honduran children as she homeschooled our own kids. Four of the five were boys. Rosanne had worked in the public school in Balfate for 3 years. She had gotten to know the needs of the children and had become friends with the teachers and the principal. We asked the teachers and principal to select a handful of students whom they knew to have real promise, but who were most in need (through poverty or lack of family) to reach that promise. Children with real promise as students but the most need due to lack of support: we thought that was a good formula for who we should pour our energies into. With that handful of students and the promise of Proverbs 22:6 (*train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*), she began the Escuela Bilingue, El Camino (*The Way*).



Ariel at center (2003)

And, she did pour her heart and energy and time into them. For the next 5 years, sometimes with the help of volunteers, sometimes alone, Rosanne taught these children first English and then all the subjects on the highest level they could manage, while she homeschooled our children. By the end of those 5 years, when the Honduran students entered into high school, we considered the whole effort a miserable failure. At best we would have considered it "a long run for a short slide."

You see, these kids needed food and clothing and guidance and instruction, yes. But we learned pretty early on that what they were missing more than anything else was the presence of involved, caring parents. You see, instead of 10 parents for the 5 children, there was a grand total of 3 or maybe 4 reasonably stable parents among all of them. That was the measure of their real poverty. In such a vacuum of parenting, when the students reached puberty or whenever they ran into the least difficulty or bad attitude or bad weather, they just wouldn't show up. They wouldn't or couldn't do their homework, and toward the end they would show up with the sullen attitudes of young teen-aged boys. We just barely fought through to a reasonable endpoint and wondered what that had all been about. Where had God been after all of this effort? We had had such high hopes and had poured so much out, and in the end it seemed all of that had been poured into the dust. We sought God's face, and He just seemed to say, "...my face must not be seen."

The wounds of the disappointment and God's seeming lack of response to our prayers... they healed, but with some angry scars. After some soul searching and introspection we tried again, but with a different formula... the school went on in a different configuration, and life went on. But we always considered that period to have been some kind of failure, that somehow we either missed God's directions, or He just wasn't paying attention. That was four years ago. Gradually, one student at a time, God has brought several of them back around to show us what He had been doing in their lives. We would bump into them or learn of them in unexpected places. The scars of disappointment began to heal to some degree with the knowledge that there had been at least some success. The few we had heard from were using their education, were grateful, and to some degree were walking with the Lord. But two of the five had essentially dropped out of sight.

Then just yesterday, Ariel walked in the back door. It was raining, and I had just dropped Rosanne off of the motorcycle (since it was the only vehicle we had that was running). She was walking in the back door of the hospital, headed for the Operating Room when she was met by a young man coming out the door. He looked strangely familiar to me. But, the rain had slackened for a minute and I had places to go on that motorcycle before the rain started up again, so I left her to it. She later told me, with tears in her eyes, that it was Ariel. Ariel had been the reason for trying the school in the first place.

He was as poor as Job's turkey... a kid of about 10 years old when we met him--no parents, his sorry excuse for a father out of the country and out of his life, his mother in a different city and indifferent to his well-being, and a sick and tired grandmother who was trying to take care of him in a mud hut on the outskirts of Bejucales La Gloria. For some perspective on just how low-down this place of origin is...well, from Bejucales, Balfate is looked upon as the "Big City." It's a worse origin than that of someone I used to know who grew up "*on a dirt track, seven miles out from 'Resume Speed,' Mississippi.*" Ariel was sensitive, bright, solemn, angry, and so skinny Rosanne would always try to see that he got extra food because she was worried his growth would be stunted for want of food.

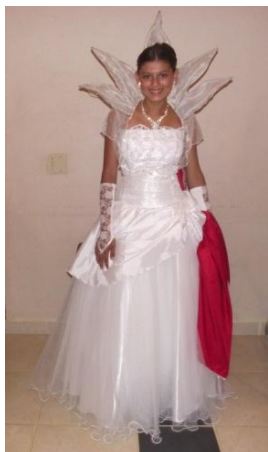
We knew that Ariel had completed high school in Balfate. We knew that he had been hanging out there with the usual suspects for a while. We had heard that he had made the semi-pro soccer team in La Ceiba.... And we knew that his grandmother had died. But that was about it until yesterday. Yesterday he was apparently bringing a patient in for surgery--someone from *his church* in La Ceiba. Rosanne told me, "*I knew him almost like one of my own kids, but I hardly recognized him at first because his countenance is so changed. He's happy. And he's thoughtful (and tall). The first thing he wanted to tell me was that he's a Christian now. The second thing he said was, 'Thank you for all you did for me... how much it means.' He is working at a new bilingual school in La Ceiba, teaching English to the first grade, no less. And his English is perfect.*"

Let me tell you... we needed to see Ariel again and to see that he is doing so well and to know that those 5 years made a difference. Because no matter how hard we sought to see God face-to-face during those years, He seemed to hide His presence. Maybe you have met with such disappointment and a sense of the absence of God, what Martin Luther called *Anfechtungen*, when all of your best efforts seemed to turn to dust and all of your prayers seemed to meet with a "wall of indifferent silence." Maybe you are feeling that way now. It helped us to see--4 years later--that what we had mistaken as indifference... may have been God's hand covering us and protecting us, in a cleft in the rock, unable to glimpse how near He was until after He had passed by. I pray this glimpse of God's work helps you too.

-- God's grace, - JCM

Then spoke Jesus again unto them, saying, "I am the Light of the world. He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."
 --John 8:12

One day a few years ago I remember getting an email from Dr. Jeff and being asked to pray for a young girl who was found wandering the Hospital. She had clearly been abused. Her name was Andrea, and she came to live at Loma de Luz's Sanctuary Children's Centre. That was four years ago. Since then she has lost her mother and her grandmother, but she has also gained a family at the Children's Centre and a safe home.



She was recently elected Queen of her school by her teachers and fellow students. This made her the star of a parade which marched through town--complete with a marching band, escorts, and all the school children in

her train. Andrea's Children's Centre family dressed her up beautifully for the event and took a picture.

When I saw the photo of Andrea in her resplendent finery, the image reminded me of a star.

In this season as we remember the birth of the Light of the World, Andrea's image and story fit right in. He is a God who brings beauty from ashes, a God who can take us--no matter what is in our past (whether years ago or minutes ago) and no matter what's in our future--and make us radiant with clear, clean light. We may not be able to see it all very well. To ourselves we will probably still look pretty shabby. We won't be able to see this wonder until we are perfected in His presence. But He sees the bright, glorious, clean version of us which He wants us to be and somehow has already made us to be and which is yet also somehow still to come. We can't see this yet, but we feel it. And that thing we feel is hope. Andrea dressed in her finery of purest white and radiant red and with a collar that looks like comet tails or rays of white light...well, it all reminds me of an angel or a star. And it was angels and a star which so appropriately (associated with light as they are) heralded the birth of our Lord, the Lord of Light. One day He will make us radiant ones too.

Blessings upon you this Christmas and in the coming New Year.

--Sally Mahoney for Cornerstone Foundation



Front: Caleb Pirkle, Philip Pirkle, Heidi Merritt, Ben Fields, Christine Bell, Kara Hails, Zina Lillard, Synne Risnes, Mariah Fields, Judy Blumhofer, Sarah Pirkle. **Middle:** Mike Yost, Peggy Yost, Mark Merritt, Dave Fields, Marinajo Fields, Rosanne McKenney, Hannah McKenney, Julia Barnett, Estelle Barnett, Rebekah Pirkle, Susan Pirkle. **Back:** Jeff McKenney, Heather Matthews (green shirt), Daron Dykema, Patrick O'Brien, Vance Pirkle

*May the Lamb of God Light Your Christmas and New Year
 ~ the Cornerstone Missionaries and Families ~*