

# Laughs, Cries, & Goodbyes

Judith Mencia—August 2017

I leave in less than 24 hours. The time keeps ticking by regardless of my feelings, emotions, or sentiments. I so desperately keep trying to hold on, but it just vanishes into thin air. It keeps escaping me. Just as quickly as I arrived, I must leave. My whole heart screams, begs, and cries to be here in Guatemala, my home. As I look back and reflect on my time here, I have nothing to complain about. I have laughed. I have cried, and now it is time to say goodbye.

They say laughter is the best medicine. They say happiness is key. They say just keep smiling. "They" knew Guatemalans. Guatemalans are some of the happiest people in the world, and that's a fact. Every morning, I am greeted with a cheerful and sincere "Buenos Dias!" and every night I hear a chipper "Feliz Noche Señor!" as I enter my house. People here are simply happy, cheerful, and optimistic. At the beginning of my third month here, I truly picked up on this special trait. HOME had the opportunity to visit a petting zoo on July 22nd. As we stepped foot on the property, all we heard was the squealing excitement of our children. Amber, the awesome director, led the squealing children. As she guided them, she quickly gave a forewarning of some not-so-appealing cow dung up ahead. Almost immediately, our most expressive little one squealed an "Uyyy que bonito!" (Ohh how beautiful) at the top of her lungs. Her reaction may have seemed silly and childish, but it stuck with me due to the innocence and happiness in her exclamation. Her heart was so pure, genuine, and joyful. The culture in Guatemala is not perfect; however, it sees the beauty in everything. I notice this nonstop with the staff. Our children have some crazy days where we question our entire purpose. Just yesterday, we had about 20 meltdowns over the span of a couple of hours. These meltdowns included dog-kicking, screaming profane words, throwing chairs, lifting tables, attempts at window breaking, standing on the window sills half naked, as well as other crazy occurrences. The day was crazy, but our Tias kept smiling. They were exhausted and well wore out, but they still had this positive aura. I have noticed this time and time again here. It is so beautiful. It is a horrid world out there, yes, but if we can just hold on to that joy from the Lord, everything else seems minute. If we just keep laughing, being happy, smiling, and noticing the bright side, God will surely give us that joy which strengthens. He will give us the joy of the Guatemalans.

This month, I also had the opportunity to enjoy Central American Seminar 2017 right here in Guatemala. It was such an amazing experience to worship alongside our brothers and sisters all over the region as well as rub shoulders with the awesome missionary team of Central America. The first day Anna and I assisted with registration, and the second day we assisted with picking up exams for a course. Anna and I felt so honored to be helping in such a grand event. It touched my heart to see brethren from 7 different nations worshiping the one true God together. At one point in the worship service, representatives from each country grabbed their flag and ran with them around the arena. The gesture brought tears to my eyes, as I began to envision how many lost souls in each country there are. If someone could just grab a hold on those flags, and bear that flag, and pray for that flag, and fight for that flag, and make a difference for that flag, where would we be? During the last altar call, tears were streaming down my face. I know I am nothing, but what I feel inside is something. There are lost souls in Central America, and as I stood there completely tear-struck God asked me "What are you going to do about it?" I'm coming back, that's what I'm going to do about it. I don't know when or how, but my prayer is to grab a hold of that flag and make a difference for that flag.

After CAS, we hosted a team from Wisconsin. Unfortunately, our missionary, Sis. Lynne Jewett, was hospitalized during this time. (She is still recovering, and I ask that you would keep her in prayer as the work here never stops.) That meant that the AIMers were up to be hostesses. I served as translator, and Anna served as guide. Team Elim from Wisconsin was so kind and generous. They blessed Team Guatemala tremendously with their gifts, donations, and most importantly sweet company. While they were here they served the Bible Institute, HOME, and did some sight seeing. One place we had the privilege of visiting together was Ixichime, an old Mayan ruins site of the Kaqchikel people. Now, I was simply ecstatic the entire time I was there. I turned into one of our nine children as I pointed at the ruins, ran around everywhere, and practiced my rough-around-the-edges Kaqchikel. I was having a ball, until we arrived to the last site. In front of me stood an altar, and on their knees were Mayans praying fervently to their pagan god. It crushed my heart. They cried their hearts out passionately to a god who would never hear them. I wanted desperately to run and tell them of my God who heals all sicknesses, saves all people, and cures all brokenness. It was absolutely heart-wrenching. I left that site with a different perspective. I have little, but what I do have is this burden raging inside of me. I want to help my fellow man, I want to make a difference, I want to complete the mission of God.

I leave with this mission in mind, this burden inside of me. With less than 23 hours left, it is time to say goodbye, for now. I am going back to the US, but it is not home. Guatemala, this is home. Here, I have laughed, and I have cried. I do not know when I will come back, but until then, my heart stays here. My laughter is here, my tears are here, my heart is here. Nonetheless, my passion leaves with me. My passion for Guatemala will always be with me. As I return, my heart stays, but the burden comes with me. This will push me to come back to the place that enamored me. And so, until next time Guatemala. N'qatz èt qi!







