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## La Palabra De Dios En El Desierto



1<sup>st</sup> group in 1986 left to right Jimmie Harr, Sally Layne, Dr Ottis Layne, Jack Smith, Carol Smith and not shown in the photo Sara Allerkamp



Sara always has had a heart for the kids. This child is now an adult in her 30's. Lasting impacts on both sides of the border!!!!



Unloading the boat on the Mexican side of the border, Pastor Santos (far left) always met us at the river until we started crossing at Eagle Pass in October of 2001

In the beginning..... Jack and Carol Smith contacted Sara Allerkamp. They were working in the region across the border from Big Bend National Park with the Southern Baptist River Ministry. They asked if Sara would head up a medical clinic into Boquillas and Las Norias. Sara did not feel comfortable doing this alone. She enlisted Dr. Ottis Layne to lead the medical clinic that followed soon thereafter in May of 1986.

This trip led to subsequent trips bi-annually in the spring and fall of each year. Soon after, the village of Jaboncillos was added. The group would head out with sample medications donated by various physicians' offices. The cost of transportation was borne by members of the team who used their vehicles to drive to Big Bend National Park. First Baptist Church of Fredericksburg funded the trips with \$1000 per trip for other costs which included groceries for the group, and pickup owners to transport the group from village to village. They would cross the river in a boat owned by a local Mexican Entrepreneur from Boquillas. From there they would load all of the supplies and luggage in the back of pickups recruited by Pastor Santos Oñate.



Breakdowns were common as we learned how to navigate the unpaved roads of the desert. Can you guess how we dealt with this broken hitch?



Sara with the children of Boquillas in 2009. Sara loves to do VBS with the children. Most of these kids are now adults. How are they impacting the world?



The children of Centinela receiving Christmas gifts during one of the annual "Well Child Clinics" Thank you for these gifts Fredericksburg-Nimitz Rotary!

In the spring of 1995, I came on my first trip. Some of you affectionately know me as "Oso Blanco" but to many of the people in Mexico, I am known as "esposo de Sara". They have a difficult time saying Curtis but I also believe that by referring to me as the husband of Sara, they are showing reverence they have for my better half. I have always esteemed what Sara and Dr. Layne accomplished on those early trips. I am "Johnny Come Lately".

On my first trip I was the one responsible for loading and unloading the boat on our river crossings. By this time the groups had become very large. On this trip, we had roughly 30 people. I had very little to do other than loading and

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unloading as we traveled from village to village. The following Fall, I made my second trip. I made a decision to not

return. I told Sara this as we were driving home. I did not feel that I could contribute significantly enough to make a difference on these teams. Needless to say, the Lord had other plans.

He began to show me that the "The Mexico Mission" needed structure. Misión De Candelilla was known as "The Mexico Mission" until 1999. This coincided with our first trips to La Union and San Vicente. Space does not allow me to go into great detail in regards to the structural development of MDC. However, in 2001 the changes that would take place challenge us to this day.

November of 1999 we did our first major building project. When we were moving the materials for the clinic building in La Union across the border we began to have problems with officials in the park. These problems persisted throughout the following year, and in the spring of 2001 we were faced with a decision. We either needed to shut our activities down or find an alternative route for our transportation. This led to Ottis and I traveling to Muzquiz for the very first time in May of 2001. Thereafter, the first team to cross via Eagle Pass/Piedras Negras was in October of that year. This was shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Soon thereafter the border was closed in Big Bend National Park. The Lord had already been preparing us for this life changing event!

We had much to learn. Our initial crossings were fraught with problems with Mexican customs and immigration. We considered a good crossing to be 4 hours or less. Today, if it takes us more than an hour, today we hear complaints from the group (if only they knew what it used to be like!).

At the time we did not realize that these changes would incur much greater financial expenditures and transportation complications. This issues led to the next major change.



*Clara Pluenneke, Madi Warhmund, Molly Pluenneke and Trent Henk enjoying some downtime on a Christmas during the first week of January this year*



*Dr Karen Cornett prepping Pastor "Bucho" Brito's knee for an injection in San Vicente this past September. Karen has been our board President since January of 2018! Thank you Karen for your dedication!*



*Kenny Johnson, Dr Ottis Layne & Dr Michael Dennis leading worship in Boquillas. This photo bookends the history of the mission! We hired Kenny at the beginning of this year and Ottis was there in the beginning*

It was the fall of 2005 I realized we had another decision to make. The mission was \$7000 in debt with no significant reliable sources of income. It looked like we had no choice but to discontinue the work.

We then took a leap of faith!

Discontinue the work, or step down from our respective positions of employment in order to devote ourselves fully to MDC. Sara and I are not, nor have we ever been financially independent. I have to admit that this was a frightening proposition. Nevertheless, we felt that the Lord was calling us to "step up to the plate".

The Lord has blessed the work. Much has changed! The mission has its own vans and is headquartered out of property acquired three years ago. Our service to the villages has grown not only in number but in quality. That leads to the next revelation from the Lord.

Five ago we began to realize that we needed to plan for the day that we could no longer serve the mission in our current capacity. We began to unravel all that we do and disseminate those responsibilities to others. We had no idea if how difficult this would be. There were so many moving parts to address but God has led the way.

Now, finally the time has come. As you know Sara stepped down and retired at the beginning of this year. Starting January 2020 Kelly Graham will become interim Executive Director. Kenny Johnson, our current Administrative Assistant, will go to work for us full time. I will continue to be a consultant for the mission, plus I will focus more energy towards donor relations. Please pray for us as we journey through this time of transition. I know that there will be challenges during this time and we need His wisdom for us to move forward!

I am very excited about all of this. I shared with our board of directors at our last meeting that I feel like I am writing the final chapters of my story. My desire is to finish the last chapter with a **wow!** We covet your prayers for us in the days ahead. Curtis