

FEBRUARY 21 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:

Dear parents and friends of our Mexico Team.

¡Saludos desde Monterrey! Greetings from Monterrey. Mexico's third largest city is nestled in a valley in the Eastern Sierra Madre. What a beautiful setting for your students to get to know the energetic and colorful Mexican culture. Last night after sorting out the huge cargo of donations, we headed down to the Douglas home for a wonderful Quinceañera birthday party for a young lady by the name of Norma. It was a huge gala event with elegant dress, dinner, chamberlains waltzing with the celebrant, dancing of all sorts and our students were full participants. Don't be surprised if any daughters come home wanting to begin a new tradition for their 15th birthday.

This morning after a much needed solid night of sleep we were up at 7:00 for breakfast and our daily routine of personal quiet time, small groups led by parent and teacher chaperones, assembly time at the big "palapa" (hut), and then off in our two ministry groups to the Casa Hogar Douglas and the other group to meet the children of the Casa Hogar del Norte. Our assembly in the hut was particularly meaningful as Hope shared with us the five levels of poverty that have left such deep wounds in the lives of the children to whom we will be ministering this week. She gave a great physical object lesson to help us remember the many ways that our parents bless us and what it is like to be deprived of those things. But most importantly, she helped us remember how God is in the business of restoring that which is broken.

The Douglas team then left, picked up the children and then all went together to the Vástago Epicentro Church for Sunday worship. After returning to the Douglas home for lunch with the children, they divided into three work teams -- mixing and pouring cement, painting one of the buildings and applying sealer to another of the buildings. All the students demonstrated impressive teamwork and were praised by the Back2Back staff. One of the girls approached me to talk about her aches and pains. I thought she was complaining, but realized shortly that she was exercising her bragging rights for a hard day's work. On a more relaxed note, they were able to spend the next hour having some awesome playtime with the children.

The Del Norte team met up with our children at the Divine Redeemer Church. There was a more traditional service there, but a very good experience for students experiencing Latino worship for the first time. Afterwards our students were invited to the teen Sunday School class where they were provided with a translator. Afterwards our teens were paired up with the del Norte kids and were bused to a brand new shopping mall where there is a trampoline fun center called Esfera. You should have seen the expressions of sheer delight on the children's faces as they spent over two hours in jumping bliss finishing with a delicious refreshment time. And you should have seen your students trying to keep up with the little ones they were placed in charge of in a frenzy of running from attraction to another.

Both groups met up at the Douglas home for a pizza dinner and pastel de tres leches compliments of the Claytons. We celebrated Jacqueline's birthday and happily Nick Otto's birthday as well. In Mexican style our birthday celebrants were invited to lean over and take the "first bite" out of the cake. I'm sure you will see pictures later of what happened next - it was definitely more cake than they had anticipated! The evening ended with a meaningful debriefing time and a couple of hours of free time. That's it for tonight. Stay tuned for further news.

Note: It is our policy for our participants to not be accessing communications media during the week. They will give you complete details on your way home next Friday. We will do our best to enforce this policy in fairness to all. If you happen to see photos that include the faces of the children in the homes, we ask you to not post them on social media as it is against Mexican law and could put these vulnerable children at risk. Thanks for your support on this. Mike Fite Sent from my iPad

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher

FEBRUARY 22 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:

Dear parents and friends of our Mexico Mission Participantes,

Greetings from the Mexican state of Nuevo León. We woke up this morning (I began this letter Monday night) to a clear, crisp view of the mountains surrounding Monterrey. It was a beautiful moment for taking photos before the dust of a work day in the city began to obscure the view. We began the day with a devotional and small group time focused on the invitation to draw near to God through Jesus our great high priest. Our morning training session focused on understanding the emotional baggage that so many children in these homes carry. Many of the kids have literally had all the normal support relationships that make for a healthy wholesome existence ripped out of their lives. Patty and I actually ended our day with one of our favorite people down here, a young man by the name of Cesar. Tonight was the first time in the 9 or so years we have known him that he shared some of the emotional hardship that unfortunately has come to define him. These children desperately need unconditional love and a support structure that most of us take for granted.

After our hour of homework time, our Douglas team took off for their days' tasks. They spent a good part of their day mixing and hauling cement, prepping a wall for painting, painting, preparing a meal for the group and the home, building chairs, installing a water heater, and knocking a hole in the wall for a window. You would have thoroughly enjoyed hearing your students describe these new experiences. There was still time left over for playing with the kids, doing crafts, and then helping prepare and serve a cookout that they enjoyed with the children. One little story is that some of our students allowed the little girls of the home paint their nails -- including a couple of our boys.

The del Norte team actually served on the campus of Back2Back helping remove sealer from a roof in preparation for a resealing. The kids poured themselves into some very demanding work. Not to worry, the roofs are flat and have walls around the perimeters. Others sanded and applied sealer to picnic tables and other wood structures around campus as well as doing other needed chores. At 6:00 came the always loved Pollo Loco which the group enjoyed with the Hope Home families. It was a great time of sharing and interaction with our Mexican friends. It will be back to del Norte on Tuesday.

The evening ended with a debriefing as everyone shared their picture of the day. And then there was a bilingual praise and worship session with some of the Back2Back staff.

Thanks for entrusting your students with us this week. Looking forward to another day of making memories.

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher

FEBRUARY 23 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:

Dea Parents and Friends,

This a report for Tuesday. The day ended with great pictures of the day and tears as kids share how touched they have been by the children with whom they have been connecting. One of our parent chaperones even commented that one of our female students was talking in her sleep in Spanish! After sharing our pictures of the day and a brief free time, we returned to the big palapa (hut) for a challenge and call to commitment to the cause of the orphan by Hope house parent Cruz Perez. He shared his and his wife's personal challenges with fear and being overwhelmed by their task and God's grace in helping them stick with the task.

Now let's go back to the beginning. The Del Norte group had our first day actually at the home. After a tour of the facilities and hearing the amazing story of Doña Marta, the nurse who founded the home as the "Association of Nurses" in her retirement, we were treated to a delicious home-cooked meal by the Del Norte staff. All were delighted. Then it was to work painting a future house parent building and pre-painting other construction materials as well as cleaning out a storage room. After a couple of hours of work, it was playtime with the kids on the swings and trampoline or just sitting down to do some simple crafts. Some accompanied their child to the library for craft time there. Playtime is one of our most important ministries, offering the children some individual one-on-one attention that is difficult for the staff with so many children under their care. The afternoon ended with a hotdog grill out and lots of veggies sprinkled with lime juice and chili. Most of our group ate jicama for the first time.

The Douglas group spent the day continuing their painting work. Part of the team prepared a hamburger grill out they shared with the children of the home. Afterwards they were off to the Esfera Trampoline Center and spent the afternoon jumping with their group of delighted children ending with a snack. I have pictures of my wife having a foam block fight in the foam pit with one of the youth. Mr. Otto shared with us about a tandem jumping experience with one of the little ones when they both hit the trampoline at the same time, almost sending the child into orbit. Fortunately Mr. Otto was the cushion for the fall, and after cracking up in laughter, the kid wanted to do it again. All our students had other similarly fun stories.

So that was our day in a nutshell. Everyone is happy and thankful for the opportunity.

Blessings.

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher

FEBRUARY 24 UPDATE SENT FROM SENOR FITE:

Dear Parents and Friends,

Thank you for your thoughts and prayers as we have pursued God's purposes here in the children's homes of Monterrey, Mexico. Tomorrow will be our last day with the children and it will be difficult for our students to say goodbye to the kids they have bonded with during these days. Your students have worked selflessly, enthusiastically, and have truly reached out to the children in many ways. Not surprisingly, we have heard plenty of talk of and interest in continued investment in the lives of these children from students and adults alike.

Today, the Douglas group had their day laboring at the Back2Back campus continuing the projects begun by the Del Norte groups two days earlier plus a some additional projects. Some worked on the Hope Project home, preparing the roof for resealing. Others were breaking up cement to clear out a space for a garden for the campus school as an educational venue. They also had their Pollo Loco experience shared with the families from the other Hope homes that weren't invited to Monday night's meal. Everyone had a great time but were pretty exhausted after a day's hard work. They will be returning to the Douglas home tomorrow.

The Del Norte group returned to the home today and began by writing notes of encouragement and blessing, (I would call them love notes) to the children and staff. The home is creating large bound memory books for each of the children filled with notes and pictures and art left by all the people that are coming and going to and from the home over the years. When they have to leave one day, they will carry with them this reminder of all the people whom God has brought their way and who care for them, hoping it will bring comfort and hope. After another delicious meal prepared by the staff, it was to work, painting the building that will become the new house parent apartment, prepping meals for the day, and working on a shed. Then there was playtime and a hamburger grill out for all.

The Del Norte group rejoined the other group at Back2Back for some free time. There was definitely some "not so" serious basketball going on. The evening ended at the big palapa with an all group Rock Paper Scissors competition in which Mike Phillips prevailed in an adrenaline rushing finale against second place Susan Vanderkolk. Then Jed, one of the newer Back2Back staffers, told his personal moving story to our students about how God had intervened in his life, from a dysfunctional and abusive childhood to his rise to playing professional soccer. And how as a result of a serious car accident and a close brush with death, he is now serving children who also have come from dysfunctional, abusive situations.

That's it for tonight. I'm sure your students will have plenty of details to fill in this Friday.

Bendiciones desde Monterrey,

Mike Fite Spanish Teacher