

## DESERT BLOOMS

March 2011

Across the street from Proyecto Santo Niño is a house surrounded by a brightly colored wall with the words “Biblioteca Buen Pastor” (“Good Shepherd Library”) painted on it. In that house lives a woman who is a beacon of hope. We first came to know Cristina Estrada around 1998 when our friend Father Bill Morton was living in Anapra where we eventually built the clinic. Fr. Bill asked Sr. Janet to come over to Mexico because Cristina had been burned badly in an accident at the maquila where she worked at the time and needed medical care. It was after this initial visit that we began going over to Mexico more regularly and started the ministry that became Santo Niño. Since those early days, Cristina has been a faithful and indispensable part of our service to those in need.

Cristina is one of those people who is always doing something for others. We often wonder how she manages to do everything that she does and when she sleeps. Each afternoon for two hours, she runs an after-school program in a building behind her house, the “Biblioteca.” She started this ministry years ago with just over ten children, helping them with their homework in the sandy street out in front of her house. Now, around 300 children come to the after-school program daily, and this year she is proud to see her first student graduate from the university.

On top of running her program, Cristina is seen by many as the social worker of the neighborhood. She works tirelessly to help families attain the resources that they need whether it be healthcare or education or something else. She receives donations of diapers, food and clothing to distribute to the families that come to our clinic as well as many other neighbors. Few are the times that someone is not knocking at her gate, seeking some sort of help. They know that Cristina will give it to them.

Cristina is a blessing to us at the clinic. She helps to coordinate the many medical and therapy appointments of our special children, and she also keeps track of the regimen of medication for each one. She works closely with the other outreach organizations for kids with special needs in Juarez. She is present each day at the clinic, talking with the families and offer-

ing advice and support in whatever way she can. She was even able to get social security for all of the clinic families so that their appointments and medicines are provided free or at

reduced cost. Her insight is very valuable to us, because while our understanding of the culture and systems of Mexico can only reach a certain point, she has lived all of it. She has also been a great support for Tania and Lupe, the young mothers we featured in last month’s newsletter, helping them to buy and plan the food



for meals, supervising as they cook, and even sharing (gasp!) some of her secret recipes!

Cristina is sometimes seen as harsh because she is quite strict and direct with people. But that is only because she cares so much. Whenever we talk with her about the situations she encounters in her work, her eyes well with tears. With all of her being, she desires change and a brighter future for the young people of Juarez. You see, Cristina has had an incredibly hard life herself. She has the equivalent of a third grade education and spent some of her life on the streets. She knows what it is to suffer. That is why she feels so passionately about education and spends almost every waking hour reaching out to those in need in her

community. Perhaps the most amazing thing about her is her humility. She sees her work as a way to thank God for all He has given her, and she is never really sure if what she is doing is enough.

It is amazing what God has done through Cristina despite her background and the lack of resources in her life. If we open ourselves up to His movement, how will He work through us? What could He be calling us to?



## Photos

- Top right: Cristina helps out with feeding Reyna in the clinic
- Center: In front of a mural painted by her students in the “Biblioteca”