

Desert Blooms
February 2007

Dear Sisters,

Last Saturday was the Day of the Oscars in Anapra.

Oscar, Patti's son, is eight year's old. He has cerebral palsy and has been coming to the clinic for almost a year. Last Saturday was the first time his mother didn't come to the clinic with him. Ordinarily he begins to cry as soon as she is out of sight but on Saturday his big brother came along so there were no tears. Oscar's big news was that he is getting leg braces that will hopefully allow him to navigate with a walker instead of a wheelchair.

Oscar, Luz Elena's dad, is suffering from Lou Gehrig's disease. At age 36 this giant of a truck mechanic began dropping tools and losing strength in his arms and legs. A year later and he can barely walk. His speech is unintelligible to anyone but his wife. She divides her time between Oscar and her two little daughters, Alejandra and "Nena" who has a severe seizure disorder and mental retardation. Carol and Laurette brought Lucy the mother and "Nena" to the clinic for the morning and then offered Oscar some therapy on the return trip. It was a beautiful afternoon, warmer outside the tiny dwelling than inside, so they set up the massage table in the yard. A caged rooster was crowing and some lively Mexican music was blaring from across the street as they attended to Oscar. Laurette asked Carol, "Isn't this just the setting where you always imagined you'd practice?"

Oscar, Gaby's son, was the first child with special needs to come to the clinic. A Sister from the parish knew we were offering massage and she wondered if it might help a boy with muscular dystrophy. He would cling to Gaby's neck as she carried him up the sandy hill in front of the clinic. The last time we had seen Oscar he was able to sit with us at the kitchen table but his mother had to feed him his tacos because he couldn't lift his hands to his mouth. The floods last summer filled their home so they had moved away. Now they are back in Anapra so we went to find them. We found Oscar lying in bed in the back bedroom. Oscar and his three younger siblings were at home alone because Gaby was "out cleaning houses". He smiled and greeted us, his voice deeper and sporting a little moustache on his upper lip. He is "almost seventeen" now. He spends his days in bed and is unable to move arms, legs or trunk. Oscar asked about Father Bill, the other Sisters, the other children. "What about Cindy? You know the one who used to spit at me!" We laughed and assured him that Cindy still comes but she's not spitting or hitting anymore. As we repositioned him for a treatment we all suppressed a gasp. His bright eyes, his keen mind, his spirit remains intact but his body has shriveled away to a tiny bony mass. We said we could come to get him on Tuesdays and Thursdays, so he could use the Jacuzzi, get some massage, have a change of scenery. He was polite but non-committal. We'll see.