

DESERT BLOOMS

October 2012



In our August newsletter we shared happy news of the arrival at Proyecto Santo Niño of Juanito Alexis and his mother Cynthia. The tiny infant with Down's syndrome and his young teenage mother became the darlings of the clinic. We nicknamed the baby "Frijolito" (little bean) and indeed he was our tiny beanie baby: a pretty floppy little guy with the loose muscle tone characteristic of the syn-

drome. Everyone loved to hold him!

But on Thursday Sept. 20 Sister Peggy noticed that the baby had a fever and significant chest congestion. Cristina took Cynthia and "Frijolito" to the government clinic nearby and they were referred immediately to the Children's Hospital on the other side of town. He was admitted with pneumonia and his condition worsened rapidly. By Saturday he was on a ventilator and the infection passed into his bloodstream. A congenital heart defect made it difficult for him to tolerate the stress of the infection and despite heroic measures, our "Frijolito" went home to God on Sunday morning, Sept. 23.

Cynthia would have been completely alone through this painful and terrifying experience if not for the community of support she found at Proyecto Santo Niño. Imagine being fifteen years old, a single mother, being asked to sign consents for intensive care of a critically ill baby. Cristina stayed by her side, in contact with us by cell phone with every new development to ask our advice. Cynthia's mother had rejected her before the baby was born and she had been living with a step-grandfather, then with an aunt, but none of them came to the hospital to help her. The father of the baby never

acknowledged his paternity.

As is often the case in Mexico, funeral directors descended on Cynthia to offer burial services. Cristina stepped in to manage all the arrangements, calling us to see if "Frijolito" could be laid out in the clinic since there was no family home for the vigil. And so on Sunday afternoon the body was brought to Proyecto Santo Niño: a tiny white wooden coffin, crudely painted, placed against the wall covered with photos of our children, including those who have passed to eternal life. The mothers came with their children and arranged a schedule to keep vigil with Cynthia all through the night. They brought food, made coffee, lit candles and placed artificial flowers around the coffin. Some slept on mats in the other room while others sat with Cynthia.

On Monday morning we gathered for the blessing of the body and the burial. We brought framed photos to place by the coffin and fresh flowers. Salvador, the Santo Niño handyman, led prayers and songs before Fr. Augustine, a

Columban Associate Missionary priest from Korea, arrived for the blessing prayers. The trip to the cemetery took almost two hours. It is located in a desolate spot far out in the desert on the other side of the city, but it is the only place the poor can afford. "For the poor, it's even difficult to be buried," Tracy noted.

What a deep sadness we felt at the loss of our "Frijolito"! But there was one surprise that gave us great consolation. When Cynthia gave the information to the admitting clerk at the hospital, she said that her son's name was "Alexis Emmanuel"- not "Juanito Alexis" as she had told us when she first brought him to the clinic. Apparently she decided she liked "Emmanuel" better. Well, we do too, because in the ten weeks that Alexis Emmanuel was in our lives, we knew "God-with-us" (Matthew 1:23). As much as we prayed for his recovery,

we also know that there is a splendid mystery in his life, death and resurrection and we can hear Jesus saying, "Let the little one come to me..." (Matthew 19:14)

Please join us in gratitude for the life of Alexis Emmanuel and pray for Cynthia who faces critical decisions about her own life as she grieves the loss of her son.

Alexis Emmanuel

July 14, 2012—September 23, 2012

