

October 31, 2007
By Steve Henrichon

Peru - This is why we are here!!!

We watched a video last night. Since we were not here to experience the earthquake for ourselves, we will never know exactly what the people have been through. We can see the aftermath and listen to their stories but we will never know what it was like to stagger out of your house and trip over dead bodies in the street. ..or to lose a loved one and have to identify them out of a row of corpses in the town center... or to realize that your baby daughter is no where to be found and chances are that her body is underneath the mountain of concrete rubble from atop which you are frantically screaming her name.



The video we watched was taken while the earthquake was still happening. Glass shattering everywhere... screams... camera violently shaking. It is nighttime and the cameraman runs outside. His video camera is equipped with a light so it serves an invaluable purpose other than capturing the moment. Dust is everywhere and for a while, the camera light only illuminates a cloud of dust. You can only hear the horrific sounds all around. Massive pandemonium ensues as every other building in the city has collapsed. People running and screaming in every direction. Car alarms sounding all around. The cameraman stumbles upon a face in the rubble. People are buried under there. As the cameraman frantically rips concrete away with his free hand, he sees that somehow one person is moving their head. The other bodies lying amongst the rubble are certainly dead. He starts digging rubble...and digging...and eventually the injured person starts moaning "ayudame...ayudame..." It is night and unknowing people are mistakenly stepping on top of the buried person. It is difficult for the passerbyers to walk over the rubble without stepping on bodies. Another scene of the home video takes us to the church. The church was full of people that evening and a small few of them were lucky enough to escape before the entire church came crumbling down. Now, hopeful family members scampered over the heap of rubble praying for any signs of life. Names being called out. A distraught mother simply wailing "Hijo!!! Hijo!!! Hijo!!! Donde estás!!!" Son!!! Son!!! Son!!! Where are you????? More footage from the following day zooms in on corpses wedged amongst the rubble of collapsed houses; a row of the first 20 corpses of the first 170 dragged from the fallen church; crying families recounting the growing list of family members who have died in the tragedy.



A simple video does not even begin to describe what these people have been through...but at least it helped to put everything in a little more perspective for us. This is why we are down here. Every person and child we have been working with... whether they are smiling or not... has surely seen more than their fair share of mutilated corpses. Children have experienced horrific trauma that will stay with them. Most families have lost loved ones. The people are resilient, however, and their lives are returning to normalcy. They are friendly and cheerful but I imagine it is easier that way... and that they are not quick to recount, divulge, or dwell on the recent catastrophe. As we work in Pisco, it is essential for us to always remain cognoscente of every individual's personal experience even if they keep that experience is buried within.



October 23, 2007

Good Friends – We have met many good friends along the way. Our work down here would not be possible without help from our friends.

Peru - Tent Clinic in the works – The decision has been made to start offering health services out of a tent while we scout the area for possible buildings suitable for our clinic. The tents are to be set up in the Plaza de Armas (town center) in front of ACER's office. The medicine will be locked in the office and Dr. David will be able to see patients in the tents. It may be a lengthy process before we can secure a building for our clinic so we might as well get the clinic up and running in a temporary capacity in the meantime so the people can begin receiving healthcare. Our tasks for the next few days involve finding a pharmacy to buy medicine in bulk, and a medical supply distributor from which to purchase basic medical equipment. There are only a few suitable buildings in San Clemente for sale/rent. There is one site that looks perfect. A businessman by the name of Señor Chuay is currently in the process of purchasing the location and he may be interested in renting the spot to us. The property in question is actually a piece of commercial real estate. It is very secure, we would be able to park a truck/ambulance inside the grounds, it has a house on the grounds, etc.

In order to ensure San Clemente is the right locale, it is important to remove any doubt in our minds by at least considering other areas such as San Andres, Chincha, Pisco Centro, etc. The geography of the area looks like this. The Panamericana Del Sur is a 2-lane highway that runs north to south along the entire coast of Peru. Like highway route 101 in California, some parts of the highway are right on the coast, and some parts are more inland. After traveling south along the highway for two hours, you first reach Cañete which the furthest town north affected by the earthquake. One hour later, you reach Chincha. Another 45 minutes, you reach La Cruce, and then one more hour south to Ica. La Cruce (cross) is called such because it is the intersection for the road to Pisco and the Panamericana Del Sur. La Cruce is a few kilometers in land. You drive towards the coast and a few minutes later, you are in downtown Pisco. The part of Pisco right along the coast is called Pisco Playa and adjacently south to Pisco Playa/Centro is San Andres. To get to San Clemente, you travel back to La Cruce and jump on the highway going north for a few kilometers. San Clemente is inland... situated on the East side of the highway and stretches towards the Andes. Although San Clemente is part of Pisco, it is a bit removed from the center of town. We took a tour of San Andres. The damage was significantly more than San Clemente. We met with the Director at the UN. He told us a bit about San Andres and San Clemente... and gave us some damage reports on both. Almost all the buildings in San Andres were affected by the earthquake and 65% in San Clemente were affected... still an astronomical number. The difference is that the buildings in San Andres are mostly concrete whereas in San Clemente, they are mostly all made from adobe which crumbles very easily. If all the buildings in San Andres were made of adobe, they would have all collapsed. The UN Director personally thought it would be a good idea to work in San Clemente because it was a growing community. If it is a long term solution we were implementing, then San Clemente would be the best candidate for a clinic. They are badly in need. The people from San Andres do have a small clinic and they can also visit one of the two hospitals in Pisco Centro. Then Dr David, the "Good Doctor," paid us a visit and offered his advice. He actually lives in Pisco. He currently lives in a tent with his wife because he lost his home in the earthquake. He too said San Clemente was the best choice. In San Clemente, our clinic would be the people's only option... and it would be a long term solution in a community that is growing fast. In addition, San Clemente is the gateway to Huancavelica. Huancavelica is a mountain state to the east. The road to Huancavelica passes right through San Clemente. The people from Huancavelica are extremely poor and they do not have any healthcare at all. Although it is a 3 hour trip to Huancavelica by car, people have been trying to walk down to San Clemente to receive medical care and they have been dying along the street. Our clinic in San Clemente would have an outreach program to help the people in Huancavelica and escort them to our clinic for treatment. So... the clinic in San Clemente could have a profound impact in the surrounding areas. It is now official. We will be working in San Clemente. Our goal is to build a clinic in an area with the most need.

Although Chincha is in big need of help, it will be best for us to focus our efforts closer to Pisco. Chincha is an hour from Pisco. The epicenter of the earthquake was in Pisco and the damage is significantly worse. The people from Chincha were badly in need of help even before the earthquake...as were the people from Pisco, San Andres, San Clemente, La Via...the list goes on. Wherever we put the clinic, it will be a much-needed addition to the community. Everybody needs help! So, we need to consider many factors: Motivation from a local partner organization, long-term potential, existing health infrastructure, emotional/physical trauma from earthquake, conveniently situated for maximum exposure and outreach.

