Water for Juanita

Written & Photographed
by
Carol Hale

Introduction

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western hemisphere, and Honduras is the second poorest. This true story takes place in a small village in Honduras. Thousands of children live in plain homes made of homemade adobe bricks (or just sticks) high up in the mountains. The houses have only dirt floors with no electricity and no bathrooms.

Honduras is lush - full of vegetation, with plenty of sunshine, warm temperatures, and water tumbling from streams. However, the water is often contaminated with germs that can make even a healthy child sick. How does the water get infected with parasites? Farther up the stream, cows will use the river as a bathroom. Sometimes waste is also poured into the streams.

This is the story of people helped by a man from Alabama named Joel Aycock. He graduated from college and moved to Honduras. It is his life's ambition to help make dirty water clean by installing bio-sand water filters in as many homes as possible. His organization - His Hands Mission International - creates a simple solution that is saving lives not only in Honduras but now also in other countries such as Belize and Nicaragua.
www.HisHands.ws

Joel Aycock of Alabama makes filters out of concrete to clean dirty water so it is safe to drink.

Glossary

agua (AH-gwuh) Spanish for “water”

amigos (uh-MEE-goes) Spanish for “friends”

bacteria (back-TEER-ee-uh) germs

gracias (GRAH-see-us) Spanish for “thank you”

gringo (GRING-go) Spanish for “American” (or Westerner)

Juanita (Wan-EE-tuh) Spanish girl’s name

limpia (limp-EE-uh) Spanish for “clean”

machete (muh-SHET-ee) a large ax used to cut weeds

mi amor (me uh-MORE) Spanish for “my love”

olé (oh-LAY) Spanish for “hooray”

si (SEE) Spanish for “yes”

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“Juanita, fetch me some agua (water) from the creek,” Mama said.

Usually, this was one of Juanita’s favorite chores. She loved to listen to the water tumbling over the rocks. When she closed her eyes, it sounded like music.

Most days in Honduras are hot. The cool water always felt refreshing when Juanita splashed it on her face. It dripped down her beautiful, brown cheeks.

But today, Juanita was just too tired to fetch water. She stood up, but felt dizzy and had to sit back down. She hadn’t even had the energy to go to school for the past two weeks.

“It’s okay, Juanita,” Mama said. Mama set her little brother down and came over. Juanita tried to turn away and hide her stomach. Mama gently tugged on the thin blanket. Juanita’s growing belly stood out past her tight shirt.

“Worms!” Mama said and hugged her close.

Juanita had tears in her eyes as she said, “Mama, they crawl around inside my belly. I want to run away from myself.”

Mama said, “In one more month, the potatoes will be ready to harvest. Then I will sell them so we can have the money to bring you to the clinic in El Paraíso.”

“But we need that money to repair our hut which is old and falling apart!” Juanita cried. She wished she could wash away the worry lines on Mama’s face.

Just then Papa came in from working in the fields. He set down his machete. Usually he took his muddy boots off at the door but today he was too excited. He said in a loud and fast voice, “Some men just returned from El Paraíso with wonderful news. Our village Manguito has been selected to receive water filters. From now on, we won’t get sick from our dirty water!”

Juanita was confused. The water she brought home from the creek looked clean, except for some sand and a little dirt on

the bottom. Papa explained that cells too tiny to see often infect the water, making it dangerous to drink. The worms she was suffering with started as bacteria so small, the germs were invisible.

“So that’s why I’ve been sick!?” Juanita sat up but then lay back down again.

“Yes, mi amor (my love). But that is about to change!” Just as Papa said this, they heard men shouting and a truck’s motor grinding loudly as it made its way up the steep, muddy, bumpy road. Juanita crawled out of bed and watched three gringos (Americans) get out of the truck. She had only seen men with light skin once before. Juanita’s big, brown eyes got huge when she saw red hair on one of the men.

The gringos were joined by men in her village shaking hands and laughing. The men worked together unloading a big, heavy, gray thing. It was made of concrete. They struggled as they carried it behind her house where the washbasin and stove stood outside. It reminded Juanita of a baby elephant that she saw in a book at school.

Juanita wondered how that ugly, gray thing could be so magical as to change their lives. The men poured large rocks, smaller rocks, and sand into the filter. The gringo in red hair named Joel taught Mama and Papa how the bio-sand filter worked.

“The water in the top layer of the bio-sand filter stops many of the germs,” Joel explained. “The grains of sand and rocks trap the rest of the dangerous bacteria in your agua.”

Juanita thought his Spanish sounded funny, just like his red hair was funny. She covered her giggle with her hand.

Joel showed the family how water from the creek could be used in the filter. He took a pitcher of dirty water and poured it in. The water flowed through layers of sand and rocks inside the filter. In less than a minute, the water trickled out of the gray hood - drip, drip, drip - into a glass cup. As each person inspected it, they shouted, “Olé! Agua limpia!” which means, “Hooray! Clean water!”

The man with red hair filled a cup of pure water and brought it to Juanita. She looked at her mama, who said, “Sí, drink it.”

The water looked as crystal clear as a sky without clouds. This time her teeth didn’t crunch on gritty sand. The water tasted sweet and fresh. Juanita licked her lips, and the men all said, “Olé!” again.

“Children in the United States saved their money and sent it to us. We used that money to make this filter for you,” Joel said. Juanita’s teacher had showed her class on a big map where the United States was.

“Gracias,” said Juanita. She smiled shyly because she couldn’t think of anything else to say.

Each of the fifteen homes in Manguito got its own filter. For several weeks, Juanita drank clean water. Juanita’s body finally became well enough to fight off the bad bacteria. She felt so strong that she could splash in the creek again. Mama said, “You are better now. It is time to go back to school.”

“Sí, Mama,” said Juanita. She missed her amigos (friends) at school.

When Juanita returned to her one-room school house, she saw that many of the children were running around playing soccer with a ball made from banana leaves. She discovered that the other students who had stomach illnesses were also back in class. In fact, her whole village was happy and healthy.

“Who would guess that some gray filters and love sent from children faraway could make such a difference in our village?” Juanita said.

All of the children shouted back, “Olé!”

The end

Author Carol Hale
travels to Honduras and
other lands to bring stories
about needy children to
students in the USA.
www.mosbb.org

These little girls suffer from a stomach virus. You can see that their bellies are large. They are full of worms, which they most likely got from drinking contaminated water. Below is a typical Honduran mountain home.

Joel Aycock travels back and forth from Honduras to the USA. Here he is teaching a group of school children how the bio-sand water filter works using a clear, plastic filter. In the photo above, Joel's son JJ drinks water from a concrete water filter.

We rejoice in the healing work going on in Honduras, Belize, Nicaragua, and other lands in bringing bio-sand water filters. What will you do to help those who are in need?