

The Blue Baby

Have you ever seen a blue baby? The extraordinarily fragile creature, lying motionless in a hospital bed, deep in the mountainous jungles of Guatemala. In the hallway of a severely understaffed rural medical clinic, I came face-to-face with such a strange blue child, and my life was forever changed.

In February of 2023, my mother and I were given the opportunity to travel to Guatemala and volunteer with nonprofit organization Hospital De La Familia. After thirteen years in a Spanish Dual-Immersion program, a program that has exposed me to the beautiful diversity of Latin-American cultures, my biliteracy had landed me in the position of a volunteer medical translator. Every month hundreds of patients travel hundreds of miles to reach this clinic, seeking care from the American physicians that visit. My role here was simple, to bridge the language gap. To recount the story of the blue baby.

Upon the arrival of the blue baby, I watched as nurses careened through a cramped hallway, searching desperately for a breathing tube to revert the infant back to its natural color. I saw a father folded in prayer in front of the Virgin Mary painting, hung crookedly on a wall much too small for it. A brand-new grandmother wondered if that title, “grandmother”, would last through the night. A doctor’s hands on my shoulders pushed me towards the family, urging me to comprehend and translate their pain. There was no room for error; one slip of the tongue could mean life or death for the child. The pressure on my mind reminded me of Atlas carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders, realizing that the world of this family had fallen upon my shoulders. A simple question, “Que paso? / What happened?”, and a story unfolded.

The distressing story of the dying child resonated strongly with me, as I reflected upon the experience for days after. The death certificate would say “Cause of Death: Asphyxiation”, but I knew that the real reason was the lack of resources this family had access to. From that moment on my perspective was altered, as I began to truly recognize how my privilege allowed me to be in a position of helping this family. I met patients whose ailments would be considered daily annoyances in the United States, yet were amplified by the lack of healthcare resources in the rural community. Medical subjects like menstruation, breast cancer awareness, and visual impairment were wholly disregarded, as there was an inability to treat these issues even if they were acknowledged. This trip altered my outlook on my ability to help others, and how I can use my own resources to support others. I have always been a very environmentally-focused person, choosing to focus on the natural side of the issue rather than the human side. This trip highlighted the impact that poor environmental conditions have on human health, unveiling my own potential to help others. As I approach the next chapter of my life, and aim to study environmental science, I plan to take that degree and simultaneously work to protect our wonderful planet, while bettering the living situations of those who are less fortunate than

myself. When addressing the climate crisis, oftentimes people focus on either the human or natural side, but this experience has inspired me to consider how these sides overlap, and how I can truly make a difference.

When people ask me about this experience, I struggle to convey how impactful it was. The intensity of visiting a “third world” country is generally something most people can wrap their minds around, however my experience was transformational. I worked 10 hours a day with no experience, in a field that usually requires at least 8 years of high-level education, translating not only words, but emotions and empathy as well. Guatemala changed me forever. I did not “indulge” in the beautiful attractions and destinations Guatemala surely has to offer. I saw the unfiltered, raw, dirty, colorful, ancestral identity of Guatemala and its people. I lived in its authentically beautiful truth.