

Big Dreams

A story of hope in the Highlands

The sun is just cresting over the Cuchumatanes Mountains as we climb up the steep serpentine road leading out of Nebaj. I am riding in the comfort of a private micro bus. Joining me this morning is Pastor Baltazar Toma Lopez and his daughter Luisa. The journey that brought me here is one of faith and an attempt at living life as an answer to prayer. This morning I feel exhausted, but satisfied. Ill-equipped, but trusting. And incredibly blessed.



Pastor Baltazar has become a friend. He is 36 years old, just a couple of years older than my daughter Amanda. When Baltazar was four years old, his father disappeared during the violent conflict which ravaged the Ixil region. During the war, community leaders were gathered up, often tortured, and eventually executed. Their bodies were disposed of in mass unknown gravesites. Baltazar told me this week that his father's remains had been found just five months ago, and his family was finally able to have a degree of closure.

Baltazar is now a prominent leader in the community and is the director of the Bible Institute, Jorai which WIND has supported since our founding. He also pastors a growing church in Cotzal. Luisa is his oldest child, and she turned fourteen in August. My earliest memory of Luisa was having the honor of pinning an honors sash on her graduation gown in 2012. She graduated from Colegio Horeb, the brightest of her class, and she won regional academic awards for her grades. For the past three years she has continued to excel in her education while attending the national basico school (middle school) in Cotzal.



Luisa dreams of becoming a doctor. She dreams of one day helping those in her community, caring for the suffering. She dreams of making her community a better place to live. However, her dreams were to be placed on hold, most likely to eventually dissipate like the fog in the mountains this morning. That is the norm for young girls growing up in Cotzal.



Luisa was serving soup during a luncheon for visiting pastors last week when I saw her again. I had not seen her since that graduation ceremony three years ago. We had a chance to chat during lunch. She told me of her dreams, of her continued academic success in basico and about her dreams being placed on hold. She would continue on to bachillariato (high school) in Cotzal, but that would place her on a track to become a teacher. The community is abundant with teachers – most of which are not working. For her to realize her dreams, she would need to leave Cotzal and study at a private school. And that, sadly, was beyond her reach. Schooling cost for the type of high school she wants to attend is Q250 per month, or

\$33, with school materials, computer and uniform in addition to that. “Someday,” she said distantly.

So here we sit, as unlikely as it seems, headed for Guatemala City. Baltazar and Luisa will tour a high school in the capital and visit with a brother of Baltazar’s who has offered Luisa a place to live and a seat at his table. I am committed to help her with her schooling if they decide this is the right next step toward fulfilling her dream. Paul Townsend, a longtime missionary who has served as a mentor, once told me that there are some which the Lord will encourage us to take the next step with; to place a bet on for the good of the community and His kingdom. Luisa would have been on his list, and now she is on mine.

The day has warmed. Both Baltazar and Luisa are asleep on the bench seat in front of me with heads bobbing as we navigate speed bumps and pot holes near Sacapulas. This journey I am on has already had many twists and turns. I am curious what we might discover about others, about ourselves as we look beyond the next curve. But for now, I am content to find joy in pursuit of our dreams.



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