Corazón de niña

My name is Crystal. I am fourteen years old and I would like to tell you about an amazing blessing that I experienced this summer. My younger sister, older brother and I decided to go on an adventure. We wanted to travel to El Salvador this summer with our first grade teacher, Maestra Krista. In order to get to El Salvador we had to ask our community, friends and family for their support. My mom, brother and sister and I sold raffle tickets, put up flyers, washed cars, wrote letters, sold tamales and sold hundreds of cookies to raise the money for the trip. At first it was just going to be my brother, Christian and I on the trip because of the expense, but we decided that it would be a great experience for our little sister, Celeste whose twelve. At first she was nervous and was a bit afraid to leave our mom, but we really wanted her to come and she finally agreed! After all, she had been helping sell cookies many times too!

Our group had 20 people and we were bringing down 28 suitcases full of shoes, school supplies, clothes, books, art supplies, sports equipment and other donations. We all met together and measured all of our suitcases so they weighed as close to 50 pounds as possible, but not an ounce over. After our packing day, our aunt came to our house to give us five beautiful dolls for donations. There wasn’t any room in our suitcases! They were stuffed, almost bursting at the seams and weighed just what was allowed on the plane. We were torn, because we really wanted to take the dolls. Eventually we unpacked some of the clothes and found a spot for the dolls in our luggage. Soon we were on the plane leaving San Francisco on our way to our adventure.

Our group arrived in San Salvador at the hostel we were going to stay at for a few days. We unpacked a bit and put the dolls in the closet. We visited museums, listened to people’s stories and learned a little about the history of El Salvador. Each day we went to a school called El Conocaste to do activities in the classrooms and play with the children, but we didn’t bring the dolls. I wanted to make connections with the children, to bond with them so that I could know if they really needed a doll in their life. I wanted to see who needed the love of a doll, who needed to experience a bit of childhood that they may not have. Each day Celeste asked me several times, “Who should we give the dolls to?” She also asked Maestra Krista, “Who should we give the dolls to?” It was hard to know how to answer her. We were just getting to know the children. In the evening when we got back to the hotel she would ask me, “Who should we give the dolls to?” As we got ready for bed, Celeste would ask, “Who should we give the dolls to?” I said, “I don’t know. Ask Maestra Krista.” First thing the next morning Celeste would ask Maestra Krista, “Who should we give the dolls to?” Maestra Krista would answer, “I’m not sure. We’ll see. We’ll find the perfect person, don’t worry.” The next day she would start all over again, “Who should we give the dolls to?” Maestra Krista recommended that Celeste carry a doll in her backpack so she could be prepared when we found the right girl.

On the second to last day we brought out bubbles for the pre-schoolers to play with. We got to know a four-year-old girl named Margarita, everybody grew in love with her. The principal came up to us and told us how Margarita and her mother sell windshield wipers on the streets and we felt sorry for Margarita. On the last day Maestra Krista and everyone else decided that Margarita was the perfect girl to give a doll to. Celeste was given the honor to present Margarita with a doll. Margarita was so happy, she ran around the school showing off her doll to the big kids and saying “ Look at my doll!”. We left El Conacaste with “Good byes” and “ I will never forget you”.

The next day we were introduced to the community Las Trincheras. We fell in love with all the kids and teenagers all over again. We helped paint the new day care for the community, and we went into the classes and did activities with them. With the littler kids, we made bead bracelets and painted with our hands and with the older kids, we taught them how do make lanyards and we painted with them as well and of course, played soccer with all the children of the community. But unfortunately, our last day with the children of the community came.

We still hadn’t noticed a small note attached to the largest and most beautiful doll until the last day. We thought it was a certificate of ownership for the doll, but decided to read the note. The note was written for the new owner of the doll, from my aunt. My aunt wrote about the history about her first doll. Her teacher gave her a beautiful doll, named Esmeralda, when she was in third grade because she passed the third grade finals. She loved her doll so much; she took care of her very well. She only took Esmeralda out of the box to play with her and when she was done, she put her right back in there, it looked like she was brand new because she didn’t want her to ever be touched by dust, have her hair messed up or her dress wrinkled. She never knew that dark days would come when she would loose her treasured doll. When her first niece was born, her mother took Esmeralda away from her, without asking, just remarking “You’re too old to have a doll” and walked away. That broke her heart and she cried and cried, because she loved her doll so much, she never thought that they would steal her away from her hands just like that. One day, she went to visit her niece and was shocked to see Esmeralda all used up and teared up, dirty and taken badly cared of. When she was old enough, my aunt searched and searched for an Esmeralda like the one she had, but she never found one. My aunt became an adult with a collection of dolls all placed in a glass cabinet to keep them from harm. Once she heard we were off to El Salvador and the conditions in which the people lived, she decided it was time to find new homes for the dolls to children who really needed it. It was hard for her to say good-bye, but she let the dolls go.

Our last day in the community came and Celeste asked Maestra Krista, “Who should we give the doll to?” Maestra Krista asked the local city council representative named Haydee who she would recommend Haydee said, “I know who would love and cherish the doll.” My sister and I looked at each other in anticipation. “My mom.”

We looked at each other again and as Haydee walked away I whispered to Maestra, “We are a bit doubtful, why her? We were thinking of a child.” Maestra Krista told my sister and I a little about their history, their life. We found Haydee and Maestra Krista asked Haydee to explain why she thought her mom would be the best person to receive the doll. Haydee told us that her mom had never had a toy. She said, “My mom’s only toy was a machete. She was cutting firewood from the time she was little. That is how she was able to have money for food and that is how she was able to feed her children too. She grew up in the mountains moving around all of the time and never knew what a doll was.” Haydee shared that during the war of the 1980s in El Salvador one of her brothers was taken by the army at a young age and taught to fight and kill. Her other son was taken by the guerilla leaders. Haydee’s mom had a son fighting on both sides of the army. Haydee told storied of hiding under the bed with all of her siblings and her mother when soldiers came to their homestead. We teary eyes, she told of her mothers pain and fear for those years. Her respect and deep love for her mom swelled in her eyes and overflowed. Haydee talked about how her grandfather was shot and killed and how her brother got shot in the shoulder and leg. We learned that now that her children are all grown, they have built a house for her. She is very happy with her first home, but she still wanders in the mountains at the age of 72 and she worries her children out in the woods by herself. Haydee told us that a few years ago, someone gave her a muñeco (a boy doll). She told us that her mom sews clothing for the doll, rocks it, talks to it and sleeps with it wrapped up in her arms every night. She said, “Every time we drive by a store and see a girl doll in the window, my mom says, ‘one day I will have a muñeca of my own!’” As soon as we hear these stories, we all knew who would love and cherish our aunt’s doll.

We walked down to her mother’s house ready to give the muñeca away. She was so happy to see us. We told her how the muñeca came from my aunt and her past as a child. We also gave her a letter that was written by my aunt to the owner of the new doll, as it was hers. She was so happy that she went into her house to bring out her baby boy doll to introduce him to her new doll. I gave her the muñeca, knowing it was in good hands. She rocked her muñecos from side to side, very happy to have her very first muñeca in her life. We cried because we were all happy to see her have the childhood that she never had. As we climbed onto the plane to come home we now had a new deeper understanding of the world. Knowing that our world is not like everyone else’s world and recognizing the very moment that you have developed this new way of seeing the world is an amazing experience.