

Mission Trip Impact **Alabaré (I Will Praise)** by Bobbi Kinne

As part of our mission trip preparation we learned some Spanish praise and worship songs including one called Alabaré. The melody is upbeat and cheerful, the words are simple "I will praise, I will praise, I will praise my God" and everybody in Mexico seemed to know it, sort of like Amazing Grace here in the US. We sang it in the mornings when we gathered for prayer. We sang it at our evening prayer services at the ranchos. We sang it on home visits. We even sang it in the van during our drive back to Oxford!

I took my flute on the mission trip and played Alabaré for the women we visited. The other song I played for them is based on Isaiah 39. They would smile as they listened to full-time missionary Alyse read the Bible verse in Spanish before I played—"I will never forget you, my people. I have carved you on the palm of my hand. I will never forget you, I will not leave you orphaned, I will never forget my own." Then they would nod their heads, still smiling, and agree that God had not forgotten them. Their situations made me sad.

One day we took a *dispensa* to a woman with no legs. She was injured as a child and both legs became infected and had to be amputated. She was fortunate enough to meet a man willing to marry her in spite of the burden of her physical problems. On their wedding day, he took her to church in a wheelbarrow. During our visit she sat on a rug in the corner of her home, next to a floor level stove that she could use to cook for her husband. She told us how good God has been to her. We sang Alabaré. Then we went to visit a woman who has no nose - just a hole in the middle of her face about the size of a nickel. She got an infection as a child which didn't kill her, but completely ate away her nose. No one had wanted to marry her. But still she told us how good God has been to her. We sang Alabaré.

That evening someone asked me how the home visits had gone. I answered that I was becoming sort of numb—I thought these women's situations were horrible, but they thought God had been good to them. I told the rest of the mission team, "Today I met a woman with no legs. She told me that God has been good to her. Then I met a woman with no nose. She told me God has been good to her. I'm pretty sure that tomorrow they will take me to meet a woman with no body - just a head and that she will tell me how good God has been to her!" As soon as the words were out of my mouth I remembered that, actually, I've already met that woman.....

She lived in an infirmary in Jamaica. My husband John and I led St Mary's mission trips to Jamaica in 2007 & 2008 and besides working on construction projects we visited an orphanage, a veteran's home and the infirmary, a government-run hospital for very poor people. 50 or so women lived in one wing of the infirmary. Many of them were bedridden with physical problems, but mostly they were mentally disabled. Their beds were crowded into two large rooms. Everything was dirty and smelled bad. Their clothes were old and torn. They had sores, hardly any teeth and they drooled. There was no staff in sight. Think of the worst insane asylum you've seen in the movies. The mission company we were working with took visiting missionaries to the infirmary because no one else ever visited. We had cookies to pass out. After a few minutes I couldn't see what good our visit was doing - these poor women seemed truly forsaken.

When I entered one of the bedrooms a woman in the corner jerked her arm up in the air awkwardly to get my attention. I waved back but turned away. I could see that she was nothing but skin and bones and that her body was rocking uncontrollably from side to side. I didn't want to go over to her. I assumed she needed something, but that I wasn't going to be able to do what ever it was or even find anyone to help her. I tried to talk to other women in the room, but they just snatched the packets of cookies from me and turned away. Every time I turned in her direction the woman in the corner was watching me. So eventually I gathered my nerve and made my way over to where she lay twitching on her mattress. I forced a big smile onto my face and tried not to show how upset and revolted I was. Slowly and distinctly as if speaking to a simpleton I said, "Hi, my name is Bobbi. How are you today?" She smiled and in an intelligent and educated voice she answered, "Hello Bobbi. My name is Harriet and I am *much* better now that there are visitors!"

Soon all the student missionaries were gathered around Harriet's bed. It was a relief to have someone sane to talk to. She told us her life story. I don't remember any of the details except that several years earlier she had been stricken with the severe neurological problem that robbed her of voluntary movement. And so there she lay, an intelligent and sane mind trapped in a useless body and surrounded by insane and dirty women. I was horrified.

Eventually the conversation slowed and one of our students, in a cheerful voice, asked, "So Harriet, what do you like to do?" I was astonished! It seemed to me you'd have to think for a week to come up with a stupider question. Could there possibly be a question that more clearly demonstrated that the asker, young and healthy and with a shining future ahead of her, had *no idea what this woman's life was like?* I was embarrassed by the young woman's insensitivity. But Harriet thought for a moment then answered, "I like to sing. And I like to pray. Jesus loves me you know."

Again, I was embarrassed but this time on my own behalf! Could there possibly be an attitude that more clearly demonstrated that I had *no idea what this woman's life was worth!* Jesus loves her, and she knew it even though I hadn't seen it. Alabaré—I will praise. Not just when it is easy, but when it is hard too. I was amazed.

I ask everyone who reads this to pray for Harriet, for those who are in need of visitors and for missionaries. And don't forget these words: "*I was sick and you visited me....*" Everyone is called to gospel action and you don't have to go to Jamaica or Mexico to do it. After meeting Harriet I go to Oxford's nursing homes several times a week. Join me, or come along and sing with the St. Mary's music people who go to the Liberty Nursing Center next to the TRI pool at 7pm on the first Monday of the month. It's not even scary.