

Slowing Down to Hear

By Belize team members as told to Jennifer Klitzke

“Are you the people who pray?” a Belizean woman asked the team from Open Door...

She stopped by the team’s quarters after dinner that night. Then she asked, “Will you pray for my sick grandma?”

The team followed the young woman to her grandma’s tiny, wooden shack. A handmade table kept modest items off the dirt floor: cassava bread in a bowl, a toothbrush grandma used to brush her two remaining teeth, and a flickering candle that cast dancing shadows of the team onto the mosquito netting that covered grandma’s bed.

Behind the netting was a gravely ill, older woman. History was written deep within the wrinkles of her age-worn face. She’s a woman of many children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren – 150 in all. A year before, this grandma became a child of God at the age of 92.

Grandma softly groaned with delight along with the team as they sang. They laid hands on her and prayed, and the Spirit of God filled the room.

Ill Peterson and Jim Skelly were team leaders that year. “It felt like we ushered this 92-year-old child of God into Heaven,” one of the team members said to Jim.

Hopkins Village, Belize is a humble fishing village where miracles happen. “We don’t bring Jesus to Belize,” Jim said. “We join Jesus in the work He is already doing there.”

Jim has been traveling to Belize since the first Open Door mission trip in 1992. A year before this trip, he was broken from a recent divorce and found grace and

healing in Jesus. Jim was excited to take his new found faith to Belize.

The people of Hopkins Village opened wide their hearts and arms to Jim. He felt unconditionally loved and accepted the minute he arrived.

Fourteen years and nineteen mission trips later, the Belizeans have become like family to Jim and vice versa. Every time the villagers see him, they literally come running. When Jim pictures Belize, he sees big loving smiles and the faces of friends with Pastor Herdie and his wife right in front.

Three years ago Jim’s former wife, Cheryl, joined the mission team to Belize. Jim and Cheryl discovered a side of each other that drew them back to the marriage altar. Two years ago, Concio, an elderly Belizean man, escorted Cheryl down the aisle. Pastor Herdie married Jim and Cheryl surrounded by a roomful of teary-eyed villagers. This broken marriage was now restored – one more miracle written in the chapters of Hopkins Village, Belize.

That day a prominent villager stood outside the doorway of the church. Looking at Jim, he said to Pastor Steve Hanson, “There is the most beloved man in this village.”

Reagan’s story

Reagan Kramer is another mission team member and remembers when she came to Belize for the first time in 2001. She asked herself, “Why am I here and what will I do?” As soon as she heard about Raheem, a young boy with brittle-bone disease, her heart knew why she was there.

Reagan said, “Belize has been life transforming. I have grown in my faith, learned to let go of control, and I feel closer to God as a result.”

Last February, Raheem was stricken with double pneumonia and began to give up on life.

It looked so grim that a coffin was even ordered.

As soon as Reagan heard the news about Raheem’s failing health, she rallied a group of her friends, and they fervently prayed until they received word that he had miraculously pulled through.

A couple days later Reagan flew to Hopkins Village with the team. She spent her time by Raheem’s side and taught him how to make beaded jewelry. Since then, he’s become quite the entrepreneur. In two days, he made \$200 – the same amount his dad makes in two weeks working full time!

Now Raheem is saving his money to buy a computer. He may not be able to physically leave his bed, but a computer will let him travel anywhere in the world.

More like a marriage

In 1991, Haiti was becoming a dangerous place to visit. It was time to find an additional mission destination; a place that was affordable, easy to get to, and English-speaking.

Steve Hanson, Global Impact Pastor sent Cossette (Dussault) Parriott, one of the Global Impact leaders, to scout Belize. Then she discovered Hopkins Village – a small Caribbean fishing village filled with friendly English-speaking people and beautiful, sandy beaches. It was an answer to prayer.

Pastor Steve and Cossette wondered what would a mission trip be like where the agenda is not to have an agenda? What would it be like to host a mission trip that is filled with prayer and praise, led of God, and being present with people? What if it is a place where we worship God for several hours each day and wait for what God brings to us?

Life at Hopkins Village is like a time warp compared to the multitasking, materialistic, fast-paced American lifestyle. Life slows WAY down. The people don’t have much, but what they do have cannot be bought: genuine happiness, joy, generous hearts and a simplistic lifestyle.

According to Pastor Steve, Belize is more than a mission destination – it’s more like an interracial marriage. When he first fell in love with the Belizean people, he said, “I felt like we were cheating on Haiti by dating Belize.”

Over the years, Open Door and

Listen to long-time, short-term Belize missionaries, Jim Skelly, Reagan Kramer, and Pastor Steve Hanson as they describe missions in a new light. A mission trip to Belize is about partnering with the native people and seeing where God is already working. An approach like this can be carried everywhere we go: into a third-world country, the inner-city, or into our very own neighborhood...



Guataloupe & Pastor Steve Hanson



Village Store

Hopkins Village have gone from a dating relationship to a marriage. Pastor Steve said, “With each mission trip, the relationships grow even stronger.”

Pastor Steve refers to Belize as a short-term, long-term mission trip. Open Door has grown up with the people of Hopkins Village. “When a new comer joins a Belize mission team for the first time, they become part of a fourteen year relationship,” he said.

New team members are automatically accepted into the fold and unconditionally loved by the Belizean people. “They will meet you and call you friend because of the ongoing marriage we have with Hopkins Village,” Pastor Steve said.



Reagan Kramer & Raheem Ariola



Cossette Parriott



Concio,
Belizean local



Pastor Herdie



CJ Barr & Belizean youth

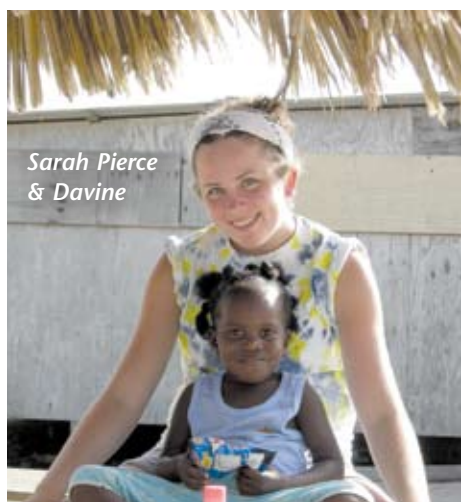


built. Wisdom and encouragement spurred on Pastor Herdie to persevere during times of crisis and need. Three native-tongue Garifana gospel CDs were produced. All this without an agenda.

The foundation that was formed fourteen years ago still remains: spending hours in prayer and praise, noticing where God is already working and waiting for His leading, and being present with people.

Each year a new group of short-term missionaries joins this long-time mission. Will you be part of the next chapter? Maybe you'll spend time with Raheem and his family, Pastor Herdie and his wife, Concio, Pauline, and Guadalupe. Be part of the unexpected miracles that pop up through prayer and worship at a place where time slows WAY down and where the agenda is not to have one. ∞

Join us for an informational meeting on Nov 14. The next Belize mission trip will be held Feb 19-Mar 2.



Sarah Pierce & Davine

After fourteen years of slowing down to hear God, He has accomplished more than we could have ever asked. The lame walked... when a six-year-old child received an artificial leg, a special pair of shoes were crafted for a mentally disabled woman, and medical treatment provided relief for a man with a severely infected foot. A dead marriage was resurrected... when a husband and wife reconciled after ten years apart. A life was transformed... when the village drunk was "born again" and became a respected elder within the community. Homes were built for the homeless. A church building was constructed. A special-needs home and school for three children with brittle-bone disease were

Stories from the Youth

Back home, I get things done FAST and don't often think about the journey. In Belize, life slows WAY down. The people are relaxed and enjoy each breath of life.

I enjoyed walking with my friends and splashing in potholes filled with rainwater, the smell of mango trees, and the sounds of clucking chickens and barking dogs.

Being with our Belizean friends taught me that God's plans may or may not include mine, but they are more fulfilling than anything I could dream up myself.

—Travis Johanson



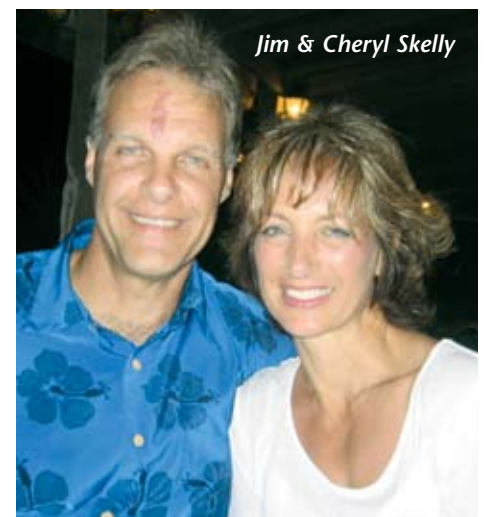
The rising sun called me out of bed the first morning in Belize. Ominous storm clouds sent rain showers during our breakfast of fried jacks. Our adventure began when we headed to the Ariolas' home. I couldn't wait to meet the amazing family I'd heard so much about.

The beaming smiles of Raheem, Cindy, and Destiny welcomed us when we entered their room. Most people in their condition would find it hard to be joyful, yet smiles spread across their faces. I loved them instantly, but couldn't erase the fear that overwhelmed me. The brittle-bone disease made them so fragile. Vicky, their mom, set them in strollers for us. We wheeled the threesome around while Raheem pointed the way to the ocean where we gazed at the waves of God's masterpiece.

My friend asked if I would push the stroller. Anxiety consumed me. I cautiously pushed the stroller along the bumpy road. The sudden jolts could so easily injure them. I wasn't sure what to do, but then I gazed down at Raheem and Cindy. Their huge grins, high spirits, and goofy comments were gifts from God and melted away all my fear. Before we left, Cindy gently held my hand and I realized that God knows what He's doing, even when I don't. —Sarah Pierce

While on the Youth mission trip to Belize, Pastor Scott Groff invited us to close our eyes and imagine that we were meeting God on the beach for the first time. He asked, "What would you say to Him?" I sat on the beach and wrote a letter to God about how He has touched my life even though the road has been tough. Then I realized the load of baggage I had been carrying. It was time to leave the struggles with God. I buried the letter in the sand and made a cross-shape out of coconuts. This was a real symbol to me that I had given it all to God.

—Bre Fleagle



Jim & Cheryl Skelly