

They say one short week can change your life. For me, one week solidified and reaffirmed a choice I made several years ago when I stood at a crossroads in my career and my faith.

I graduated college with a bachelor degree in computer science. I got a great paying job with generous benefits straight out of school working in IT at a mid-sized financial institution. I lived in sunny southern California, within walking distance of the beach. I drove a BMW. In 2008, I walked away from it all. On several mission trips over the years to Mexico, China and Peru, I saw poverty and hopelessness firsthand. These individuals didn't need a website, or complex statistical financial analysis, or a customer information database; they needed food, clean water, eyeglasses, and basic medical care. I chose to return to school for a degree in optometry as a way to help meet this need; I specifically chose Pacific University because of the commitment and passion that I sensed in the faculty for this work. Rooted deep in my faith, I had a dream of someday forming my own non-profit and using optometry to help those less fortunate.

I spent two years in leadership with the AMIGOS Eye Care program at Pacific University, using my IT background to create the program's first website, www.amigoseyecare.com, and using my banking experience to help reorganize the program's finances. The more I worked with the organization, the more I realized that of all the trips available, if I could participate on only one trip during my studies at Pacific University, it would have to be with Dr. Pike and Enfoque Ixcán. The story of Dr Pike's encounter with a poor farmer in Guatemala, and his subsequent formation of Enfoque Ixcán fascinated me. I learned that not only does Enfoque Ixcán provide eyeglasses through the AMIGOS Eye Care program at Pacific University, but also provides cataract and other eye surgeries for those in need. After three long years of study, I needed to reaffirm the passion in my heart that led me to change careers in the first place. So, this past spring at the urging of my loving wife and parents, I set aside my longstanding concerns of travel finances and time away from my then 9-month old son, and signed up to go to Guatemala in August. It was one of the best decisions I have ever made.

The first day in country, during a long bus ride, I had the honor of peppering Dr. Pike with questions on how he came to form Enfoque Ixcán and his passion for the people of northern Guatemala, their poverty and recent history of political upheaval. I asked about logistics and in-country travel. I asked about contacting and working with local eye surgeons and provincial government health officials. I was touched by his genuine generosity and servant heart. I couldn't wait to get started.

During our first day in clinic, I helped determine the ocular health and the glasses prescription of more patients than I could count. I diagnosed and confirmed the presence of cataracts in several patients and helped refer them for surgery. During the frenzy of the clinic day, it was hard to process the appreciation and thanks I received from all the patients, many of them elderly and with little to their name. However, later that night as I lay in bed surrounded by purple mosquito netting, I was touched deeply by the memory of their smiles and gratitude.

The next day, we drove to the rural outskirts of town to provide vision screenings to children at a local school, who in many ways represented the poorest of the poor. The children were all waiting for us as we arrived, cheering in unison with smiles the size of watermelon slices as our bus drove up to the

school. We spent the entire morning evaluating the children, teachers and parents. After lunch, before we could begin packing our gear to drive to another area school, we were surprised when the eager children and teachers from the second school actually came to us! That afternoon I diagnosed a small 8-year-old boy with dense cataracts, essentially blind, his father beside himself with grief. We gave him a surgical referral to a local clinic, to be paid for through Enfoque Ixcán; I saw hope restored in the father's eyes as he thanked us profusely. I was hooked. This is what I want to spend my life doing. This was my dream, the reaffirmation I so desperately needed.

My trip to Guatemala this summer relit my passion to help those less fortunate than myself. Enfoque Ixcán provided a model of how providing basic eye care in conjunction with the work of local health officials and surgeons can dramatically change lives. I witnessed how a simple pair of eyeglasses can help an elderly man continue to work and provide the only income for his family. I saw hope restored in the eyes of a longsuffering father. It is unclear where I will serve in the future, in Guatemala or elsewhere, but what my time in Guatemala confirmed in my heart this summer, is that I will indeed serve. I will indeed serve.

Chris Nisbet

Pacific University College of Optometry | Class of 2013

AMIGOS Eye Care Web Developer | www.amigoseyecare.com