



Service trip in El Salvador
ESNA (El Salvador North America) Village Network

At the end of July I spent 2 weeks in El Salvador on a service/learning trip sponsored by ESNA Village Network, a small non profit devoted to improving the well being of villagers in El Salvador.

A friend who was leading the trip this year, invited me to go. It sounded interesting, worthwhile and the timing worked so I signed up. This small organization, ESNA Village Network, has been in operation for almost 20 years, going primarily to impoverished villages in El Salvador, listening to the needs of the local people and under the direction of the villagers, have installed water delivery systems, access to electricity, sanitation, built schools, homes, and supported medical clinics.

Our group was comprised of 7 women from Colorado. Our plan was to meet and work with the villagers to build 2 houses in 2 weeks, as well as learn some history of the country and experience it's diverse beauty. And we did all that and more! This trip was all of it; heartbreaking and hopeful, inspiring and tenderizing. Giving and being cared for.

As many who remember the civil wars that occurred in Central America in the 1970s & 80s, know, El Salvador has a painful history. In the 1980s the popular uprising for fair distribution of land and wealth, turned into a civil war, the US got involved, supplying arms and training to the military, which by many accounts prolonged the war, intensifying the bloodshed and suffering. Schools and hospitals were bombed. Whole villages were massacred in an effort to terrorize and destroy any guerrillas or guerrilla sympathizers. Much of the population was caught in the crossfire. The people of the village where we stayed were people to had fled an area of intense fighting during the war. Refugees in their own country.

The trip was one of contrasts. Bearing witness to the legacy of war, the first day we stayed in the capitol San Salvador and visited the church where Arch Bishop Oscar Romero was assassinated and where his mourners were massacred while attending his funeral. It was a very sobering start to the trip. The next day we arrived in the village of Las Trincheras and were welcomed with music, dances, banners and welcome songs! Shoveling sand, mixing cement in the morning for the floor of a new house, then being ushered into our air-conditioned minibus and taken to lunch, served in the church courtyard under big shade trees. The houses that we built were very modest; a cement floor, wood posts and beams, corrugated metal walls and roof. Enough to keep dry in a rain storm. We finished one that was partially built and completed another in the 2 weeks! ESNA also supplies beds, mattresses, pillows and a set of sheets. The family who worked on and received this house said that it was their “dream home”.



