

Thank you, Kathy, and Thank you for the Mission of Love

The day was warm, with a nice cool breeze, volcanoes in the distance, and smiles on everyone's faces; Today is the day that I return home from Guatemala. Over the past week, I have been on a trip with my father, Kathy, and many other volunteers from the United States, Mexico, and Guatemala to help the people out in Tecpan, Guatemala, and the children at the House of God around Guatemala City. For about six years, I have worked with Kathy Price to collect donations, sort, clean, organize, and load the same donations up for the needy. Day after day, week after week, and year after year, it has been my pleasure and honor to help Kathy and all the people supported by the Mission of Love.

My experience with the Mission began back when I was working part-time for a local business in Medina, OH. At the time, my boss heard I was interested in doing volunteer work, so she requested that I help with some local charity work she was doing out in Ravenna and as she expected, I was happy to help. At the time I did not know what to expect, how much to do, nor if I could even assist with the tasks at hand, but I was willing to do what I could with what I had. Upon arrival, I met Kathleen Price, a sweet and generous soul who is now one of my lifelong friends. When the crew I was with and I arrived, Kathy told us about her mission, the people she helped, and the work she needed to do. While performing the tasks, I asked if she had more people who helped her out there and she told me that sometimes she did, but most days it was just her in the warehouse. With no power, heat, and running water, I was amazed by the amount of work that Kathy had and continues to do all by herself. As my father later put it, "Kathy is a Force of Nature,"; No matter what happens or what she faces, Kathleen Price will get the job done. Ever since that day, I gave Kathy my contact and told her if she ever needed assistance, I would do my best to assist her, and six years later here I am.

Since day one, my goal has been to do as much good as I can and with that goal in mind, this year Kathy invited me out on a mission to help the people in need from the Lakota Nation in South Dakota. For me, this experience changed my life as I not only got to fly on a plane for the first time in my life, but I also got to see an entirely different side of life in the United States. Between the hardships of conflicting laws and community, the standard opportunity of being able to go to the store, get a job, and have a standard American experience was hours away for the Lakota people. Many were able to find happiness with their friends, family, and fellow tribesmen, but a lot of issues remained with limited access to clean water, mobile communication, and all forms of standard services being outside of the tribal lands limits any who are struggling. Flooding, harsh weather, and scarcity hit the communities out there hard. Being there with my dad, Kathy, and one of the other volunteers, Tiffany, we were able to help the people by giving them fresh clothes, building supplies, furniture, and some extra hands to help with repairing/building new homes and places to keep their belongings safe. While there we got to see the vast, endless skies, the deep canyons, and the warmth of the tribe, bearing witness to a meeting held by their elders. The trip was an unforgettable experience, and I am so thankful to everyone I met and was with along the way.

Since South Dakota, my father and I have worked with Kathy to prepare for our latest mission to the country of Guatemala. It was only on Saturday, December 2nd around 10 pm that I arrived back from our journey down south. The land was beautiful with healthy crops, lively streets, and many wonderful views of the volcanoes. While there, our goal was to bring joy, food, and medical assistance to the families and children who were in need and that is what we did. With the supplies and goodwill, my dad and I, Kathy, as well as other volunteers I only recently met this past week, Kim, Silvia, and Saul, all came by air to help Jonathan, a hardworking and kind young man who has been leading the Mission of Love in Guatemala for a few years now assist the people. Seeing those children smile, laugh, and giggle with their families as they got to try ice cream, cake, sandwiches, and play with some toys was such a

delight. Handing out food to the starving, guiding those in need of glasses for their eye exams, and assisting those with hearing problems to get their ears checked out put into view how lucky we are and how little we need in life to be happy. Many have starved and more have struggled day by day to make enough for food and the clothing on their backs, and yet everyone I witness carried a warm smile on their faces. It did not matter if they were near or far, everyone was family. Every day, we saw hundreds of people, some came in with their families for medical exams while others we saw passing by, but all still had a smile on their faces. Night and day, you could hear the music of people playing off in the distance, see friends going out for a walk, and family spending time together. The world is harsh, and many of us struggle to get by, but sometimes it takes that struggle to realize that family is all we need to find our way. During our final night in Tecpan, my dad put it perfectly when he said that Kathy is like a spark, and we are all the sticks in the flame. For here at the mission, none of this would have happened if not for Kathy as she was that spark that gave us all warmth, and from here the warmth we share grows.

Thank you, Kathy, for introducing me to your world and the homes and families of some of those whom we have reached with the Mission. There are too many words for me to say how thankful I am to you for the years of service you have provided for the people and for the years of friendship we have shared.

Thank you, Jonathan, for your kind soul, your hard work, and your dedication to all the people you have helped. You have taken on a huge responsibility while going through hardship after hardship. You are a strong and admirable soul whom I respect. Thank you, my friend.

Thank you, Julio, for being a fantastic driver, guide, and friend out in Guatemala. You have been through so much and yet you continued to press on with a smile on your face every day and every time you saw us. You always did what you could to help, with an open heart, and the warmth of kindness.

Thank you to everyone in Guatemala who I met over there and I wish the best to all of you and all the people in need as I will continue to dedicate my time to help you in any way that I can.

Thank you, Albert Red Bear and Chief Henry Red Cloud, for being strong and amazing pillars of your community and for treating my father and me with the respect and kindness you did. We were happy to help and were honored to hear your stories, meet your families, and help in the ways we could.

Thank you to everyone in the Lakota Nation as it was my pleasure and honor to bear witness and meet each of you that I have met so far. I hope for the best for all of you out there and I hope to continue helping you in the future.

Once again, thank you Kathy for the amazing journey that you have brought me on for the past six years and for the years to come.

Sincerely,

Ashton Kemp

