

Jan 12, 2009
Trip to Cerralvo, Mexico

This weekend was so wonderful. I am so glad we made that trip to Cerralvo with your dad. The first time we were planning to go, the doors were shut, but now I realize that it was important to wait so that your dad could also go. I do not believe it would have been the same without him being present.

I know now that the insight of love and the realization that you could be loved, came to be in Cerralvo with this wonderful Salinas family who loves you so much. The news of what you had done really shocked them and they felt very sad...it made them understand why so many times you go into such deep thought...but they never condemned you. They were never angry with you. They only know and dearly remember the "Ruri"(which is how they called you) that they lived with, the "Ruri" which they totally came to love and trust. Such was "Ruri" that they did not think twice in entrusting him with taking care of their furniture store and handling money when they were unable to be there. They fully trusted him with the care of their children. All the family refers to you as a very respectful, good and hard worker...a great friend (Ubaldo, the second to the oldest son of the Salinas family referred to you as "the greatest friend I have ever had." He said the only two TRUE friends he has ever had are you and Osvaldo, the other in the threesome of friends!)... But let me describe it all from the very beginning.

Several months back, we set on planning a trip to Cerralvo to talk with people that had known you there. After getting information from you, we began looking for the way of establishing contact with the Salinas family, who had become your adopted family there. But certain problems came up and we decided to not pursue this visit. Still there was the longing in my heart to at least make contact with the family, so, after finding out their phone number, I decided to call them. Alicia, Ubaldo's wife, + was the one that answered my phone call. Leery at first to trust me (as she did not know me), it took a good while of talking with her and several phone calls after to get her trust. She told me her father-in-law and the rest of the family would be so happy to be able to meet your father. This was an open door, so the planning moved forward and the date was set, but this time your dad would also be going.

Your dad, Juanjo (my husband) and I were off to Cerralvo on Friday, Jan 10, 2009, around 2:00 p.m. Your dad offered to help drive. He drove from Rosenberg to Harlingen. During the drive we had a good visit with your dad...got to know him a lot better, talked a lot about you, and your dad also got to know us better. We arrived in Harlingen around 7:30 p.m. In Harlingen we looked up the hotel where we would stay and went to the airport to pick Tanya up. We spent the night there. The next morning we started our trip again, around 10:00 a.m. From Harlingen we drove toward Roma, Texas, which was the border town we saw was the best and more direct to get to Cerralvo. In Roma, Texas Juanjo took over the wheel to drive the car into Mexico and on to Cerralvo. We crossed at the Miguel Aleman International bridge. We had no problem crossing the border. They did not ask us for any documents there, plus we got the green light, so they did not stop us to check our car. We continued on just a little way down to get our car permit re-activated, a few blocks further to get our car insurance for Mexico and were once again on our way. At the Km # 22 there was an immigration office. There they DID check our passports, but it was done really fast. No other questions asked. When we had gone a few kilometers Juanjo realized that your dad and Tanya, being foreigners, should have gotten a permit to enter Mexico, which they DID NOT!! So your dad and Tanya were "espaldas mojadas" (wet backs). That became a good joke between us. Thankfully, we did not encounter any problem with this omission.

The trip from the border to Cerralvo took us less than one hour (9 hours in total from Houston). The road, even though small, was in pretty good condition. We had no idea if it was going to be a straight road or if we would be driving up winding roads into the mountains! There were a few places where our car jumped slightly due to the uneven road. We were so happy when we saw the sign that said "CERRALVO".

Alicia, Ubaldo's wife, had given me the address of the Salinas family, which I misplaced, but I did remember that she told me that if I did not find the house, ask anyone around there for "Don Homero, el abonero" (Don Homero sells furniture with payment plan installments) and they would tell us how to get to their house. So we stopped at a gasoline station at the entrance of the small town, and sure enough, they immediately directed us to their house. We got to the store, got out, and walked in. The Salinas family has two furniture stores. This happened to be the one run by the oldest son. A young man greeted us. We told him who we were. I asked him if he was Ubaldo. I only knew about Sindylu and Ubaldo as they were the ones that had already sent me a note via email to send on to you when I made my first contact with them. He answered he was not, he was Homero Jr. A young lady with blue eyes came running down the stairs, really excited to see us. I asked her if she was Alicia, to which she responded she was Silvia. But she was REALLY excited! She is so nice. Her son, Yair, a young boy with beautiful big brown eyes, was playing some game on the TV, and a little baby (2 year old Jesus, whom you did not get to meet...of course) was there also. Silvia and Humberto immediately began telling your dad how you spent many a time in their house and all that you had done for them. They told us you had arrived to their house a little after their son had accidentally set fire to their house and you helped them paint it again. You had also helped put down the slab in their barbecue area, and had set up a swing set for their sons. As he listened to all of this, your dad broke down crying. In their excitement they totally forgot the store being open and took us upstairs to their living quarters. One of the helpers at the store also left. I asked Homero if it was safe to leave the store with the door open and no one to take care of it. He did not seem to care. Once upstairs, Silvia and Homero began showing us around, as they kept talking about you. They showed us your room, the walls you painted, the swing set and the barbecue area that you helped build. Your dad took many, many pictures of all. It was funny, because when your dad wanted a picture of Silvia, Homero and the kids and told them he would be sending it to you, Homero, who's hair was unruly, said he needed to comb his hair first. I asked him if you had known him with his hair combed or the way it was now. He said you knew him the way he was now...so I told him "Then, that is the way you should come out in the picture!" I just laughed, but he agreed not to comb his hair. There were several times when we all shed tears as we talked and they showed us around. Silvia and Homero shed plenty of tears as they talked about you. Silvia had made a pie and a cake for your dad in honor to his coming. Silvia also told us that we did not need to go to a hotel, we could stay with them. She offered for your dad to stay in the room that had been yours. They have not changed a thing since you left...waiting for your return! Upon your dad's petition to me, I thanked them for the offer, but informed them that your dad had expressed that it would be too painful for him to stay in the room where you had slept, and would prefer to stay at the hotel. At first she said they were offering this to us with all their heart, and it was not necessary for us to go to the hotel, but after a while, reluctantly she understood and accepted our decision. After a while, another little 11 year old boy came upstairs. He is kind of small for his age, and a little pale. Silvia made the comment that he had been born prematurely. Silvia told me that when he heard "Ruri's" dad was here, and saw you were not, he asked her: "¿Dónde está Ruri? El me prometió que iba a volver!" (Where is Ruri? He promised me that he would come back!) This was Homero III. He was sad to see you were not around. Silvia told us that he was the last one of the children to see you, because he went with his dad to the bus station when you left, and he hung on to your neck and did not want to let you go. You promised him that you would be back. Silvia told us how you did not really want to leave them, and how they begged you to stay and not take the job in Monterrey. They told us about the 48 hours interview, and how they told them that it was to help you, but when they sent them a CD of the aired program, they noticed it had been edited and super-imposed, changing their words and putting in words they had never said. They were mad, because all they had said were good things about you. Many a time Silvia repeated to your dad: "You will see, Mr. Kent, God is going to do a miracle. Your son will be let free and he will come back to us as he promised. God is great."

Don Homero and Lupita (the father and mother of the Salinas Family) had already been informed of our arrival. We had been talking for a long time at Homero Jr.'s house. We had planned to go eat to a restaurant and invited Homero and Silvia. They asked what we would like to eat. I told them "Anything that will not make them (pointing to your dad and Tanya) sick!" But at that time, Lupita called, and insisted she had already prepared something for us to eat. So the furniture store was closed down and we went on over to Don Homero and Lupita's house. They all greeted us so nicely, just as Homero Jr. and Silvia had. When Don Homero got a hug from your dad, you could see he was holding back from crying. Later on, as your dad gave them your message of how much you loved them, and your dad permitted himself to cry...tears began running down Don Homero's cheeks non-stop. Sindylu, their daughter and the youngest of the family, a dear friend of yours, was just kind of standing back watching and listening as we continued talking about them and you. Lupita mentioned to me that when Sindylu found out that you were detained, she wanted to go to Houston to see you, but her mother asked her how could she if you, Thomas, had never made an attempt to contact her. I then told them that it was because you did not know what their feelings for you were after the 48 hour mystery interview, but I also explained how difficult it was to get in to visit you. They constantly insisted in wanting to know how you were doing. After a while Ubaldo and Osvaldo, your two great friends, arrived. They had a picture they showed your dad. It was exactly the picture you had asked your dad to take a picture of! They told us how you three were inseparable.

After a while, and while we waited to sit down to eat, Silvia, who had already told us that Sindylu had a great musical talent and had recorded 2 CDs, one with music and letters she had composed, told Sindylu that we would like to hear her sing some of the songs she had composed. She hooked up her electric keyboard, her microphone, and told your dad she had written the song she was going to sing when you left. She sang very beautifully and composed. I translated the words to your dad as she sang...and the feeling in the words of the song made your dad think that those words described exactly the same way he feels about you not being with him anymore. We went on to eat what Lupita prepared for us (frijoles de la olla, carne guisada and arroz rojo (cooked beans, stewed meat and red rice)...DELICIOUS!!) While we ate, we continued talking. They told us how, when you arrived, all you wanted to eat were hamburgers, and how they finally told you, you should stop eating "basura" (trash) and eat something that was actually good for you, and how little by little you began loving the food they gave you. How you would often go to Lupita's house for breakfast and for supper. How when you left, you told them you were going to miss the frrrrrijoles and chorrizo (the "r" in Spanish is always difficult for an American to say). They were imitating the way you used to say these words. When we finished eating, your dad asked if they would be willing for us to videotape and record as we talked, explaining what was said might help you in your appeals. Each one took turns sharing anecdotes about you. But each one, as they talked, always stressed "Ruri is good...he is not bad! He was always so humble; he always went wherever we invited him. He never declined our invitations." They mentioned how difficult it is for Don Homero to trust a person, especially when it comes to putting his business and handling of money into someone else's hands, but he gave you his total trust in this. He would leave you alone in charge of the store. Silvia told us how her kids would love to play Nintendo with you and how they loved you. She said you would go and pick them up to school. They told us how Sindylu had pulled you to church and taught you to play the guitar. They were amazed at how fast you picked up Spanish. Other anecdotes told were about your trips in the back of the truck; your odysseys in your little van that was falling apart (remembering this made them smile). Yair, Silvia's middle son, wrote a note to you while we were at Homero Jr. and Silvia's house. We asked him if he would read it while we recorded. Everyone was very quiet listening to him read. When I looked up...there was not one single dry face!! We all had tears streaming down our faces. The love and the hurt in the letter of an innocent child, who was probably only 4 or 5 years old when you left, written to you, made us all cry.

Don Homero also participated in sharing his anecdotes: The time you had to pull several pails (you had told him it seemed about 1,000!) of sand with a rope from the outside of the house to the top of the roof when you were helping make Homero Jr.'s terrace; the saying that remained with you and which you frequently repeated: "Ay que caray...como dijo Don Chucho!" (Oh wow...as Don Chucho said).

Silvia mentioned that, even though they were aware of what you had done, their love for you had not changed. She said it was simply a very dark moment in your life, and EVERYONE has the right to a second opportunity.

Noticing that it was getting late and the sun would be going down soon, your dad asked if we could drive to the places you had asked him to take pictures of. Silvia, Yair and Sindylu went with us to show us around. We went to the plazas (the big plaza and the little plaza), to the park where you and Sindylu had gone to a spiritual youth retreat, to another beautiful park, which I believe was named Canoas where there are some really big and old trees and some ruins. I believe of all the places, this is the one I liked the most. We went to the houses where you had lived. One of the houses, we were told, had no electricity when you lived there. The other was a little room with an outhouse. This was the first place you stayed at upon your arrival to Cerralvo. We went to the beer factory whose outer walls had huge simulated beer cans (very colorful!) From there we went on to the little catholic church and the big catholic church. This was the place where you first saw Sindylu, at a "quinceañera" mass. She was singing at that mass. Sindylu and Silvia wanted us to go to the Presa (the dam), which, they told us, was another place where you enjoyed going often, and Don Homero had wanted us to see La Quinta. Don Homero told us that you once told him that of all of his properties, this was the one you liked the most. Don Homero had thought of letting you live here instead of in the old run-down, no electricity place. But then you left...and never came back! We were not able to go to any of these places because it was already getting dark. During our rounds, Silvia told us another anecdote: "Your best false Birthday party ever" – It was June and you told everyone it was your birthday (your actual birthday is in December!) and they prepared a big birthday party!!

We drove back to Don Homero and Lupita's house to continue talking. When we returned, Alicia, Ubaldo's wife, and the one I had been making contact with over the phone in Houston, was at the house with her one year old baby, Yasiel, and a friend of Sindylu whom they told me also knew you.

Ubaldo began spilling out, one after another, anecdotes and stories about you: How you told them you came from New York; he told me to remind you about the time he said he was going to buy you some "tangas rosas" (pink thongs); about the day you asked him if he would kill for money and how he had answered that no life was worth taking for any kind of money, to which you became very closed in your thoughts. He also said that when you would go into that mood, which happened frequently, he would give you a shove and begin picking on you to bring you out of it. How you always had so varied topics to talk about and they never got bored or tired of listening to you. How you could not stand people just sitting around...you always invented something to do. How Sindylu would always be playing her musical instruments and you would ask her to set them aside so you all could go somewhere. One of the anecdotes that really impacted us was something that happened on your June birthday party. He told us that both of you became very drunk, and when the party ended, both went to your "house". In your drunkenness you began talking some in Spanish, but mostly in English, and, by the little he could understand, it seemed you were talking about someone who had died. He tried to give you a hug and you pushed him away, but, he said, he was stronger than you at that moment so you were unable to push him off. He did not let go of you until you finally broke down crying and hugged him back. There was a point where you kept telling Ubaldo that life was trash, not worth living, and after repeating this

over and over for a good while, Ubaldo got tired of it and told you to go ahead and take your life if it was so bad (of course, he was only trying to snap you out of it). He went on to his house. All the next day you were nowhere to be found. He was so scared that you had put his "suggestion" into action. You appeared the day after, much to Ubaldo's relief!! All of the Salinas family loves you...every single one of them...but I DID see a very strong and special friendship towards you in Ubaldo. Even though Humberto Jr. mentioned he also spent a lot of time with you, he mostly kept quiet and listened. Ubaldo told us that you were the type of friend whose friendship lasts forever...and more so...you are his brother. Don Homero and Lupita also said that you were a son to them. The words they used to describe you were: very respectful, very nice, a hard worker, very humble, very intelligent. NEVER A BAD WORD AGAINST YOU!!! Ubaldo asked your dad if you had ever ridden a bike, because you had told them you did not know how. He laughed when your dad told him you were an excellent rider, and told him about the thousands of miles you had ridden! Ubaldo told us you had bought yourself a bike later on.

They were really surprised to know that the rod in your arm had broken when you were doing push-ups on the Row because, they said, Ubaldo had taken you to the hospital in Cerralvo because your arm was constantly hurting and they had it checked out. They took an X-ray and the doctors commented on the good job that had been done with the surgery. They mentioned that you did a lot of muscle building exercises there and were able to pick up lots heavier weight than any of them!

We spent the night at the hotel where you suggested we stay: Hotel Plaza, which is right in front of the big plaza. Your dad and Tanya did not sleep very good that night because their rooms were on the side of the hotel that faces the street and they got all the partying that goes on at the plaza on the weekends, which, they said, went on until 3:00 a.m.!!

The next morning we went down to the small hotel cafeteria for breakfast. Once your dad ordered what he wanted to eat, he suddenly disappeared on us. He walked outside. When he came back, he told us that he just stood watching the plaza and walking the streets, imagining you walking around there, as Sindylu and Silvia had told us that you would walk down these streets.

It was time to go back to the USA. We stopped by Don Homero and Lupita's house to say bye. Your dad left a copy of the book he wrote for each couple in the family. We called Homero Jr. and Silvia to say bye to them and let them know we would not be dropping by their house before leaving. Sindylu did not come down (maybe she was still asleep) and Ubaldo and Alicia had gone out of town. Don Homero and Lupita told your dad: "Please give our dear friend a big hug!" They told your dad that they would love to have him come to their house some time again.

We were on our way back to USA. The return to the border line seemed shorter. It was also a good trip and a non-eventful one. They did not put your dad and Tanya into prison, nor were they caught by immigration officials for being wetbacks in Mexico!

This trip was really a wonderful trip for all of us, and such a trip for healing not only of your dad's heart but it resulted in a healing experience for the Salinas family as well.

Letter written to Thomas from Dorothy