

## The 'Out Patients'

By  
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It's about 5pm in Manila Airport and I am waiting for Dr. Maano to meet me to fly onto Iloilo, which is two hours South from here. The purpose of this particular trip is to go to San Jose, Antique, for a Surgical Mission for children with cleft lips and palates.



Manila Airport

Dr. Maano has already been involved in quite a few Missions of these sorts, but for me it is my first, I was invited last year by Dr. Maano and Nurse Galas whilst at a Rotary meeting after one of their presentations. Considering my profession is in hospitality my instinctual answer was to say, "yes" and then try to work out how I was going to find the time to go!

It is 35 Degrees Celsius, at least, and there is nothing to do except ring home to find out how by business is running without me, only to discover the 'children' not playing very well together. Considering I was now on the other side of the equator there was nothing I

could actually do except listen calmly and let them know I agree with ALL of their decisions. If you knew me you would understand that this was a challenging task within itself.

Dr. Maano arrives with her hair cut short, wearing a long dress just so that I wouldn't recognise her. Here I was thinking that a 'mission' is out in the middle of nowhere with no phone reception, no toilets, no proper sleeping arrangements and food difficult to stomach. She is quick to inform me that this is not so. So why did I pack so light?

This is my first trip to the Philippines and was excited about the adventure and cultural experience I am about to endeavour on, even though after spending the first 18 years of my life living around the world the excitement of this anticipation is always a thrill.

On the flight Dr. Maano gives me a quick overview of the Filipino culture and roughly what I was in for, to some degree.

We land very late at night and are greeted by Dr. Bernie Tobianosa who is the Provincial Health Officer for Antique Province. To get to our destination of San Jose it involves a 2 ½ hour drive across the mountains which looked spectacular from the inside of my eyelids as I hadn't stopped travelling since 5am from Sydney, Australia.



Accommodation

Dr. Bernie drops us off at our hotel and we meet up with Nurse Galas go to our respective rooms to rest, for the next day we would be meeting the rest of the Medical Team. It is still hot.



Hospital

Day 1. We get up early and go to the 'hospital'. I say this because the 'hospital' is currently a building site as they have been doing renovations for a few months and it is a slow process in this country, although desperately needed. The walk there itself was interesting as I have never seen so many motorbikes (trikes) in my life as well as overhead power lines strung any which way with the odd one poking out from a pole that is at eye level and duct taped up (luckily enough).



Some of the Patients

When we arrived there were already 40 patients waiting outside ready to register as some of them had travelled from another island and needed to get back home. Nurse Galas went about her business, but organised a tour of the hospital to show me what conditions that the patients were accustomed to.

The walls are all cracked, there are beds in the hallways, there is generally at least two if not three patients to each bed but we were not here to help them. The nurses are all immaculately dressed and I discovered a lot do not get paid as they are in training. I thought to myself “why cannot we adopt this principal at home? Then my ‘children’ would have to get along...to get the job?”

After the tour we go and meet the Team from the Maharlika Charity Foundation, as they are representing the Smile Train organization that is coordinating **this** mission along with RAWCS. It does sound complicated but it is that simple.

Dr. Valdes heads the team and is assisted by Dr.’s Chui, Feliciano and Magpayo. The three assisting doctors were responsible for all of the operations performed except for two. The doctors donate their time to perform these operations and they have each done over 1000 surgical clefts. Its not often that you come across people that donate their time to perform such operations and thoroughly and genuinely enjoy what they do. They say to me, “Some people take holidays

overseas. We like to go on missions, it keeps life real.”

The Smile Train also provide the anaesthetists, nurses, dentist, paediatrician, technician as well as a social worker/coordinator.



Some of the Maharlika Foundation

With 40 patients waiting we had to get ourselves into action, well they did, I had to start taking photos and documenting the events. Most of the patients are under 11 years of age and the opportunity like this would not come around often, a chance to change your appearance and increase your confidence for free? The families’ support of the child and appreciation for the opportunity can be seen on their faces.



Admission Room

Prior to admission there is a lengthy process, from blood tests, x-rays and urine samples, only then can they be reviewed by Dr. Valdes as some of them are turned down for malnutrition, difficulty (as in age – the older they are, the harder it is to treat and heal) and some just need speech therapy (although the

likelihood of them receiving this therapy is low).

Then the Dr.’s decide what is to be done by way of operating procedure. After this the patient is assessed by the anaesthetist, cleared from them, then to the paediatrician and finally admitted to one of the beds, remembering there are three to a bed.

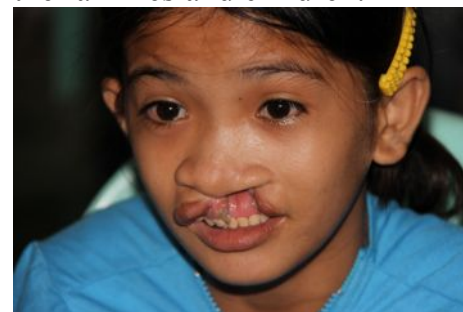
This process takes up most of the day, thankfully the Nuns looked after us for nourishment otherwise we could have suffered also.



Sister Feliza Tumangday with Nurse Galas, Dr. Chiu and Dr. Feliciano

Day 2. The operations begin...

I had no idea of what was involved or the miracles these Dr.’s could perform, as can be seen from the before and after photos words cannot describe the show of appreciation from the families and children.



One of the patients. Gene-love Salva

The day is hectic, there are more patients waiting to be assessed and others waiting to be operated on. Pre and post op rooms are full to bursting yet it was amazing to see this group systematically performing so

many tasks and remain so organised. Not only does the energy and enthusiasm of this team remain consistently high... so does the temperature.



Patients and families from Caluya Island

Day 3. Today proceeds in much the same fashion as yesterday, although it is the last day of assessments and admissions. Today I have uncovered a unique way to make a contribution and I decided to take in ice cream to all the children who had been operated on the day before. Helping was my motivation for this trip, and so far I had not felt that my contribution was sufficient.

Nurse Galas and myself went to local store and purchased ice cream, cups, plastic spoons and metal spoon so we could serve the ice cream. We went to the hospital and proceeded to the out patients ward, which was full, so we also went to the hallways and handed out the ice cream there.



The roundabout in San Jose

It was one of these hallways that my whole outlook in life changed for me. There was this little 3year old boy

sitting on his mothers' knee and she was feeding him ice cream, which he was not sure about but seemed to like it. When he had finished he reached out to me and I instinctively went to pick him up, but he took hold of my right hand, touched the back of it to his forehead and said, "Thank you." I am sure it was not for the ice cream and his mother then started to cry and she also said, "Thank you." In the Philippines this is a sign of respect to your elders. It was then I realised that what these Dr.'s had done was not just for one child but it would directly effect at least 50 other people- from mother to father to brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles and so on.



The difference was amazing

So after the four days of operations performing almost 65 operations, these fifteen or so people involved with the mission have changed not only the recipient's lives, but also the lives of thousands, and this is no small feat.



The whole team, with some of the patients.

Day 4. This is the last day, and it is bittersweet.

Everyone is happy, the Nuns have taken care of us, and it was my pleasure to once again take ice cream for the children who missed out the day before. It is also a sad day as you realise the mission is over. This team who came together so quickly have performed their miracles, because that is how it must seem to these children and their grateful families, and now they will go their separate ways again. I have to get back to my business and my quarrelsome 'children' ..... then I take another look around at all the children in the out patients .....three families to a bed.....

