

SMILES OF HOPE – FROM HONDURAS

By Judi Kraszewski, AWWA Water for People

Her name is Marta Ortiz. She is a 10-year-old who lives in the first house on the corner as you enter her community. Her house is basically one small room and in addition to her mother and father, Marta shares her home with four sisters and a brother. As soon as we arrived into El Cielito, Marta ran to welcome us and was right there as I opened the truck door. Our eyes met and we smiled at each other. Immediately I knew she would be my friend for the duration of our visit.

As people began to gather around the schoolhouse, discussions started with community members and our country coordinator Diana Betancourt. The children hovered around us, and I felt a sense of belonging. While taking pictures and more pictures of the community members, Marta was always nearby. Always smiling. Always watching me.

From across the school yard a voice suddenly asked me to take pictures of another group of children. It was then I met Daniel, a young man who now lives in New Jersey, but was there visiting his uncle. I asked Daniel if he would be my personal interpreter and help me with story interviews. Many community members began to climb the hill to the water tower, but I wanted to stay back and hear people's stories and capture the moments with photos.

I asked Daniel to ask Marta if we could meet in the school house. But suddenly she disappeared. Marta ran home to change into her Sunday best for her interview. I found out she is much like other 10-year-old girls with hopes and dreams. She likes school and Barbie dolls and reading, especially history books. She helps her mother sweep the floor and wash clothes. She doesn't remember much about Hurricane Mitch, except her mother said there was a lot of mud and they moved in with another family in another community after their home was destroyed.

There is one major difference in Marta's life since the community got a water system with Water For People's help. It used to be that Marta had to haul pails of water from another community to her home.

But since her family has a tapstand right outside their home, her life is much better. She is happy that now she has two extra hours each day to study and play. She likes to learn and she wants to become a teacher and maybe even return to her community to teach.

As we were getting ready to leave El Cielito, Marta asked to have her picture taken with me. What a honor! As we started to drive away Marta waved, still smiling. I believe she was filled with hope and determination about her future. Maybe that is why her community means Little Heaven.

“What do we live for if it is not to make life less difficult for each other?” - George Eliot



Marta and Judi