

[Doug & Connie Mealey](#)

## **Message body**

El Salvador Sunday 3/26/17

Connie's Note: This was written Sunday night but someone forgot to "Send" the email. When I mentioned we had not received anything by mid-morning today, we still had to wait until they got back to the hotel and the computer to "Send" it, so here it is.

Dear Parents, Rotarians, and Sponsors,

My name is Joey Peterson and I am a sophomore from Houghton Lake, Michigan. The experience has been great so far! I am meeting lots of great students and natives. I have noticed that things here are very different from that of the United States. Just riding in a school bus through narrow streets in the mountains, I have noticed that the people here lack help and resources. There are homes that are giant and beautiful while feet away lay makeshift homes with walls made from bamboo. Although we may be more fortunate than those in El Salvador, I have also noticed that the people here are willing to do anything to help their family and friends in a positive fashion. Thank you for all of those who have given us Interactors an opportunity of a lifetime to help those in need! ~Joey

My name is Hyunjik (Kevin) Kim and I am a sophomore from Mona Shores High School in Muskegon, Michigan. Absolutely every single minute of this trip has definitely been worth all of the time we have invested in fundraising and organizing various different events. From this trip, I have been able to enjoy new experiences and meet people of all walks of life. At the worksite, I have been blessed to work with some of the finest people from all around the world. Even some of the locals here and the kids are absolutely wonderful, and they help us build the houses everyday. Earlier today, we were sanding and mortaring the houses and putting in the final touches. Some of the kids helped and just supported us every single step, even though it wasn't their house. All of the kids here are so precious and thankful for what they have even though they don't have much. My only wish is that we had more supplies and equipment to utilize at the worksite so we could speed up the process of building the houses. Since we are so limited on tools and other various resources, we are ultimately only able to build fewer houses. Hopefully, we can achieve our goal of finishing five houses before our time runs out. I only wish we could do even more for the people of Talnique. ~Kevin

My name is Grace Bushway and I am a senior at Fall Mountain Regional High School in Langdon, New Hampshire. Since I was a sophomore Interactor, this trip was something that I have aspired to be a part of. An older cousin of mine came many years ago with Doug, as well as good friends since then, and they came home with tales about their experiences. Thus far, our trip has done nothing but exceed my expectations. One of the main reasons this trip is so wonderful is the people that you meet. Every day there is an army of children running up and down the dusty roads of Talnique, each one cheerful, friendly, and ready to get to know us students to whatever capacity they can, despite the language barrier. Today there was a bit of down time, as our house is heading down the home stretch, and many of us got to play with the kids. Tic-tac-toe, tag, or even dancing are all commonplace. When it was time to get back to work, they all join us, digging their hands right into the mortar mixture and helping us fill all of the gaps. The best thing for our work groups though is when we get to meet the family whose house we are building. My family came out to meet us this afternoon. They are a family of three: Jose, Liseth, and their daughter Alison. Jose has been helping us for a few days already. Meeting them made this whole week seem even more worthwhile. It gave substance to the idea that we are actually helping people down here, making a difference in their lives. To me, that alone is enough to convince me to try to come back again as soon as I can. I hope you all have a wonderful evening! ~Grace

Doug here: Think of lovely warm weather with a strong breeze. Sounds nice right? Now add unpaved roads with dirt the consistency of flour, the color of tan. With the breeze, you get the inside of your ears, your nostrils, and every part of your body covered in dust. When you shower and shower well, AND dry off with the towel, your towel is tan colored when it was white when you started out.

One person has come down with a sore throat. (No name given.) She is drinking hot honey and lemon and seems to enjoy it. No fever, just a throat that makes her speak as if she was a base singer.

Sunday breakfast: pancakes and all the rest of what we normally have.

Sunday supper: spaghetti, salad, rolls, beverage. GREAT spaghetti sauce.

Saturday night we had quite a few local Interactors present and they taught our students how to play Wink Tackle. That game lasted hours, but everyone had a wonderful time!

I am blown away with the fact that when it is bedtime, no one complains, and when it is time to get up, no one complains. What a great group of hard working students!.

We have taken away the telephones/cameras at night and give them back when we leave the hotel in the morning so they can get some good shots in. The first few nights the kids were on their cell phones talking to everyone they knew at home. It was mentioned before the trip that they could not do this. Since this is not what we want them to be doing, we decided to request that they turn them in. Much to my great surprise, there was no grumbling about this procedure. Everyone understood the rationale for this and agreed. What a difference in the students, because now they are very interested in playing, talking, singing, etc. with each other and the adults. So if anyone of you back home are wondering why you haven't heard from your son or daughter, now you know!

This morning

(Sunday) we climbed to the top of an active volcano. Everyone I am sure was thankful that it wasn't active today. The crafters and veggie vendors were out in full force, so everyone had a chance to see some new items that were up for sale.

Well I need to get off of this computer for tonight and get people squared away. The first-time advisors of Ada, Cascade, Allendale and Houghton Lake are having a great time. I am so appreciative of them being with us, as they now see what their Rotary Interactors are capable of doing. We are learning a whole lot from each other, making new friends, and seeing a part of our world that is showing them things that are quite different.

I am very fortunate to be able to be a part this Rotary Interact experience. Even though I have been associated with Rotary 35 years and Interact 20+ years now, I will never be able to say that I have seen or heard it all. I learn sooooo much from these future leaders of our world. Thank you to everyone who helped to make this possible.

Doug Mealey

District 6290

Rotary Interact Coordinator

El Salvador- Monday 3/27/17 Received 11:00pm

Hola!

My name is Lauren MacLachlan and I attend Fall Mountain High School as a 12th grader in Langdon, New Hampshire. I am in Rotary Interact, sponsored by the local Charlestown NH Rotary Club. Today we went and visited a local school, Martina Durand. The school was grades K-9 and although the kids knew some English, it was very limited, especially in the younger children. This didn't affect our fun however! Once the music started playing, everyone was out in the courtyard, running around and dancing. I was paired up with a little girl named Gabriella for most of the time. She is 5 years old and loves the color purple. I had picked her up and was giving her a piggyback ride until she climbed up onto my shoulders. We ran around the courtyard playing tag, yelling "Mika!" when you get someone. At the end of our time at the school, Gabriella gave me a Sleeping Beauty sticker, which she stuck on my shirt. I am so glad to have been given the opportunity to meet and play with these kids. ~Lauren

Hi my name is Maddie LaLomia. I am a senior at Maryvale Preparatory School in Maryland. I am a cousin to Francis, a Rotary leader, and Eric and they asked me to come on this trip with them. I am so happy that I got to go on this trip. I have made so many new friends and have seen a totally different culture. After we went to the school, we walked down the street to a park. There was a big, white gazebo in the center of the park and it was surrounded by street vendors selling clothes, food, medicine, etc. One of the most interesting vendors that I saw was the seafood vendor. They had all types of seafood out in open baskets, exposed to everything outside. Something that really struck me was when Francis told us that after the women in the school graduated, they would typically end up selling goods at the market or join a gang. I thought this was crazy because there options are so limited. Most of the vendors were women and there were many children sitting with their mothers, helping them sell goods. It's amazing to see how different a culture they live. (I am not the one who found the gecko.) ~Maddie L.

My name is Ryleigh Emelander and I am a senior at Allendale High School in Michigan. I have been in my school's Rotary Interact group ever since I was in 9th grade. After we spent some time at the park today, we went to a place called Devil's Doorway. It's located in the mountains and the view was amazing. After a little hike up the mountain, we had the opportunity to zip line across to another cliff. I was nervous at first but now I can say that it was definitely one of my most favorite moments of the trip so far. It was fast, but still slow enough so I could look out and see the gorgeous view. While zip lining across, you could look to the side and see everything. However, when you looked down, all you could see was pollution. It was sad for me to see. It was such a beautiful location but the trash kind of ruined it. Maybe for future trips we could help clean up the trash since there is so much of it. This trip has been one of the best experiences of my life so far and I am so happy I could come to El Salvador. I loved being able to play with the little kids and building houses is a lot more fun than I thought it would be. ~Ryleigh

My name is Ashley Lee and I am senior at Houghton Lake High School located in Houghton Lake, Michigan. I have been in Rotary Interact for almost 2 years and they have been my best 2 years being a part of this club! Fundraising my way to be on my first Interact service trip to El Salvador, I cannot believe the experience I have had so far. From the houses to the kids, each day seems to have eye-opening moments. The very first day we arrived to Talnique, I will never forget the moment when Doug explained to everyone on the bus, "All of the houses we are going to pass were built from previous Interact trips." When we first entered the village, the houses looked more like huts covered in dust without much protection. But when we passed the houses previously built by Rotary Interactors, I was astonished. The houses were big and bright, and I felt like uplifting the music turned on in the background to make the moment feel more magical. There were families standing outside some of these houses, and the kids were waving to us, as if it was a way to say, "Hi again, old friends." Each day going up the mountain, passing by these houses, makes me realize what we are here for. The entire service trip has been more than what words can explain; the only way I can think of describing this trip is to tell you to come here and experience it yourself! ~Ashley

Doug here: Today was completely different as you probably understand by now. Today was known as "Culture Day" and we didn't work this day. The weather has been beautiful today. We have had a nice breeze and lots of clouds. We went to Santa Tecla (just west of San Salvador) to go to the school and then went through some of the local food markets to just see. It is strange to see live chickens next to the bra department. The smell of urine and dead fish permeated the whole area to bring a feeling of heaven only knows what. Everyone is doing well. We returned the cell phones today for picture taking, and collected them back to prevent some students from contacting their friends back home. It is our goal to have the students interact with each other rather than just sit in their rooms to talk to friends. Phones will be passed out for tomorrow for more picture taking and then we will collect them for the evening. The group is still getting along and everyone seems to be having a great time. I am asking each student that I pass if they have gotten anything out of this trip and if it was worth it. They have overwhelmingly said they have learned sooo much about the culture and the people here, and they have appreciated the opportunity to work for, with and in the community of Talnique. ~Doug