

## The Tale of Two Doctors - A Story of Dedication and Decision

Each year during Holy Week, the New Jersey Area of the Order of Malta mounts a medical brigade – the Henry B. King Medical Brigade – which travels to the most remote areas of Honduras, bringing medical care to people who otherwise would never see a physician or a dentist. The medical brigade numbers about 45 and consists of physicians, dentists, pharmacists, nurses, the splendid young men and women of our New Jersey Area auxiliary and other volunteers. The following is a story about last year's brigade.

\*\*\*\*\*

For fifteen years Dr. Michael Cahill and Deidre Day have been spending their Easter vacations in the mountains of Honduras. At first glance it would be hard to see what this 69 years old experienced pediatrician with a curmudgeon reputation has in common with the thin, red headed, eye twinkling 30 year old that would attract each of them to spend their annual vacation budgets to do exactly the same thing. The only answer is a dedication to their healing profession and a love affair with the gentle people who call the impoverished villages of Northern Honduras home.

Dr. Cahill, a Bronx born Irishman and father of six children was educated in New York City but has made the children of the Jersey Shore his world. He has practiced in Spring Lake, New Jersey. He is a no nonsense doctor who is short on bedside manner and large on the basics and who doesn't know how to relax.

When Henry King, the father of 17 children most of whom Dr. Cahill cared for, lured the pediatrician to join him on a medical brigade in 1991 in the country where King's 16 and 17th children were born, Cahill couldn't resist. Vacations weren't a part of Cahill's world, and the chance to practice his craft in a place as far away from the well manicured, ocean front homes of Spring Lake appealed to him. A daily communicant, Cahill found the work in Honduras compelling, the need enormous and the gratification enough to lure him back at his own expense every year since.

This spring, Cahill was there in honor of his friend Henry King for whom the 2006 brigade was named after King's death in April 2005. Cahill is a bit more hunched than in the early 1990s but no less demanding of his sister who travels with him each year and of the students who work side by side with him as he examines babies and toddlers for six hours each day in unrelenting heat. Cahill, wearing a baseball hat and scrubs has only a bit of Spanish in his repertoire, enough to say Proxima! Next! Next!

Cahill's style of pediatrics is to listen to heartbeats, to check ears and throats and to move on. He offers every child the chance to have something serious detected, the opportunity to receive vitamins and parasite medicine, but he is less interested in the exotic disease that would need extra care – for those children he asks that they be taken to a hospital. In the years of doing this primitive clinic work, Cahill has found a way to involve the kids and observe the most important problem he can detect and treat – the respiratory ailments.

Armed with scores of pinwheels, Cahill offers every scared little kid a blow on the pinwheel as he discovers the strength of their lungs. Smiles radiate across the patients' faces and laughter erupts among their siblings as the pinwheel entertains them all and gives Cahill the information he needs. One look at the face of worried mothers during their moments with Cahill indicates the pediatrician has discovered a modern methodology for this on-the-road practice of medicine – mothers' worries melt knowing someone is giving their children the care they have walked miles to get.

Asking why this is the only vacation Cahill takes in a year is a question that just doesn't seem to fit. Cahill's prescription for a full life doesn't seem to involve time off; its main ingredient involves dedication.

Deidre Day was 15 and a neighbor of Henry and Pat King's when the question posed to Cahill was also posed to her. Would you like to spend Easter Vacation in Honduras? Day babysat for the Kings two boys, Andrew and Tim who were born in Honduras, and a Jersey Shore girl with a dream for travel, it was a question she couldn't resist. That Easter trip changed her life - or at least put her on a path that would shape it.

Deidre was studying Spanish so traveling with the doctors and nurses offered her a chance to practice the language and to see the culture of this small Central American country. But it had the unexpected consequence of exposing Deidre to the work of medicine and with each spring's trip, the teenager's love of travel and adventure developed into a desire to become a doctor. She went to the University of Scranton, a Jesuit liberal arts school, and never lost the desire for practicing medicine. Even the enormous cost of medical education did not deter her; she found a way through government support and loans to finance the years of medical school and postgraduate training.

This year she came with her residency just about complete – and her pediatric skills at a high level. At hospital in Wilmington Delaware where she completed her pediatric residency, the cases are complicated and the practice very high tech. But Deidre knew the brand of medicine she would practice for two weeks would take warmth, care and a few tricks. In her suitcase were dozens and dozens of stickers – sure fired win over the children. Like, Cahill, Deidre listened to chests and checked eyes, ears and throats – but she was also searching for the exotic, anxious to know about some of the complicated medical cases that persist in the mountains. She documented with her camera the children's smiles and as well some of the botched breaks and odd situations brought to her blue-checkered cotton clothed bench that served as her examine table.

Deidre has been coming to these villages on and off for 15 years. She began as a teenager who was moved, and has become a physician that personifies dedication. Her long term boyfriend surprised her with an engagement ring just before she traveled to Honduras and other than a Spring 2007 wedding, her future is still uncharted. She understands the demands of a practice and the promise of a new family may make yearly treks to

Honduras undoable. But for Deidre, Honduras shaped the woman she has become, helped create the doctor she will be, and it is a place to which she knows she will return.