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*"We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage."*

-Matthew 2: 2

Dear Friends,

Most of us associate the Feast of the Epiphany with a star. The word means "manifestation" or "showing forth". On this day, Three Wise Men followed a star over long distances to a child –Jesus – the manifestation of God with us.

Speaking of stars, I remember being in Hollywood, California, visiting my niece there a few years back. I decided to take a walk down Hollywood Boulevard to see the famed sidewalk of the stars. As I walked down the Hollywood Walk of Fame, with bronze star plaques embedded in pink and charcoal terrazzo squares with names of celebrities in the middle I wondered, *"Whose names would be written on God's sidewalk of the stars?"* I think that very likely there would be children, like the young girl I knew in Santiago Ixcán. Her name is Magnolia.



Over the years, I watched the lanky Magnolia blossom into a thin, graceful pre-teen. One day, when she was still quite young, she and about ten other children, descended like a flock of hungry little birds onto the cement patio in front of my house. Their mouths open, they seemed to be pleading for *dibujos*--the pages I had torn from coloring books and had brought back with me from the U.S.

My home and the mission house at the time, called The Little Flower, were nestled in the center of town not far from the elementary school and the village market. Children often came to see me, excited to color *dibujos*. I am still amazed at their excitement about such little things– no video games or X-boxes here!



When Magnolia came, however, her hands were always full, always. The flowers she would gather from her yard or from beside the pathway to The Little Flower, she would transform into gift. She would smile, basking in my litany of “Ooooooohhs” and “Ahhhhhhs,” and “*que bonitas*” and “*muchas gracias*,” as I received her precious offering. Promptly transferred to a vase or jar, the flowers would then adorn my kitchen table or a small altar. There they would stand like a sign, posted after everyone had left, announcing, “Magnolia was here.” My day would be brightened and my heart lifted.

When I moved from the Little Flower mission house in the center of town, to the outskirts of my present home, Saint James Mission House, she still would pop in on occasion, walking the thirty-minutes or so from her house to mine and stopping in as she passed from the *parcela*, the acres of land where her family grows corn or beans, or from picking cardamom. She would exchange a flower bouquet for a glass of lemonade or a coloring page.

Flowers were Magnolia’s thing.

A few months ago, during my annual visit to the U.S., I called Javier, my friend and co-worker in Santiago Ixcán. After the usual check-in of how he and his family were doing, I questioned Javier, “Has anything unusual happened in Santiago Ixcán?” “You haven’t heard?” he responded almost in a whisper. The tone of his voice told me something was wrong. “Heard what?” I paused. “Ana’s daughter died.” “What! Ana’s daughter?” Ana had only one daughter, her firstborn, my friend, the beautiful young girl who would bring me flowers. “Magnolia? Dead?!” I held the phone in disbelief, my eyes filling with tears. “What happened?” I asked, my voice breaking.

Magnolia’s sixth grade class during recess had been playing soccer at a field on the outskirts of town. She had been chasing the ball, kicked it, and then for no apparent reason, she fell to the ground, unconscious! The teachers tried to revive her but Magnolia’s limp body lay there like a rag doll.

Draped in the arms of her teacher, an entourage of shaken children trailing behind, they rushed to the nearest house about a quarter of a mile from the soccer field and called for help. One of the locals with a four wheel drive pickup arrived and whisked Magnolia and her teacher to Kaibil Balam, 10 minutes away, hoping to consult with a registered nurse there rather than the less experienced auxiliary nurses in Santiago Ixcán. Unfortunately, the nurse was not in his office so they returned to Santiago to the community health clinic in the center of town.

Ana, Magnolia’s mother, had been notified by cell phone, and was frantically waiting. The auxiliary nurse at the clinic started IV fluids; Magnolia’s warm brown skin had already begun to turn clammy and blue, but her heart was still beating. “Get her to Playa!” the teacher and on-lookers determined. Magnolia, in her mother’s arms, with her teacher, the auxiliary nurse, and two uncles (her father was working in the fields and unable to be reached) sped in the four-wheel drive pickup toward Playa Grande and the hospital two hours away!



They never arrived. All too soon, the budding flower had been plucked from the dark earthen soil in the garden of our lives. En route, an hour out of Santiago Ixcán, Magnolia died.

I can still see Magnolia's face in my mind's eye; I cannot believe she is gone. I remember a few days before I left for the U.S., I had returned to St. James Mission House after an errand, and once again I found a bouquet of semi-wilted, wild flowers with their stems tied together by a vine, lying on the long table directly under an open window. Magnolia. I never saw her again before I left Guatemala. I realize now that those lovely but wilted wild flowers were her *despedida*, her farewell.



Magnolia blossom

Magnolia, I now realize, was one of my God stars.

We all have God stars in our lives. God stars are those people who have a special way of manifesting God's love and presence to us often in simple, unassuming ways--like the young mother with cancer who suffered valiantly teaching all those around her how to die, and therefore, how to live, or the elderly grandmother who prayed the rosary constantly for her family, or the retired, childless woman who taught Sunday school. These are the bright lights that have gone on before us. These are the people that, in my village they say have come, "to prepare the way," to be God stars for us.



In Hollywood's walk of fame right below each name is a small, round emblem that illustrates the celebrity's category. It displays one of five symbols: a motion picture camera for movie stars & directors, a television set for those in the television industry, a phonograph record for singers, songwriters, and recording artists, a radio microphone for radio luminaries, and the twin theatrical masks of comedy & tragedy for live stage performers.

In God's walk of humility, the categories below the names of the Epiphany cast might include a symbol for forgiveness, prayer, love of children, and flowers.

Catherine Doherty once wrote, "You know something? If we go out and follow that star, we ourselves will become a star. And others will follow us to that Immense Star that is Christ." (Donkey Bells, page 108).

May we follow our God stars to become one ourselves.

Paz y Bien,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kathy".

Kathy Snider

## Mission Update

Kathy spent two weeks at St. Scholastica Monastery in Duluth, MN and two weeks at Pacem In Terris (poustinia) in Isanti, MN to pray and write. She has begun to write the mission stories of her life with the people in the Ixcán. Her healing process has been slow but steady and will be returning to Guatemala on January 25<sup>th</sup>. Thank you for your prayers for her continued healing and return to Guatemala.

In this New Year of 2012 may you experience the grace and power of Christ's birth in and through your lives and in those you love. We are deeply grateful for all the ways that you support Ixcán Ministries. On behalf of the people of the Ixcán, Guatemala we extend a "Muchas Gracias" and "Dios les bendiga" – Thank-You and God bless you!



### OUR MISSION STATEMENT

Ixcán Ministries provides a prayerful, pastoral presence through lay missionaries living in solidarity with the poor of the remote Ixcán jungle of Guatemala to learn from as well as to assist both spiritually and materially the people with whom life and ministry are shared. The organization strives to be a bridge between two cultures and nations allowing for the exchange of varying gifts between the rich and poor for the ultimate purpose of empowerment and transformation of lives and society.

Ixcán Ministries is a 501(c) 3 organization. Your contributions are tax deductible. You may contact us at:		
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