

Desert Blooms
July 2007

Dear Sisters and Friends,

In February we told you about Oscar, the father of one of our special girls, who has suffered with Lou Gehrig's disease. Since then we have watched him grow progressively weaker and in recent months he has been completely bedfast. Under the best of circumstances this condition requires total care and very difficult decisions about nutrition, hydration, and end-of-life issues. For this poor man in Mexico there was no possibility of eventually supporting his breathing with a respirator. So we provided comfort measures to Oscar and as much support to the family as we were able.

We visited them at least twice a week, taking the two little girls to the clinic on Tuesdays and Thursdays to give Oscar and his wife, Lucy, a break. We bought a suction machine, egg crate padding for the plywood bed, a vaporizer, and medications. We made sure that they had groceries. And each visit was an encounter with the suffering Christ.

It was inspiring and heart-wrenching to witness the care Lucy provided. No hospice nurse could have done better. She immediately grasped the importance of helping Oscar maintain as much control of his life as possible. She learned not only the basics of nursing care but became extraordinarily creative in preparing the foods he wanted - in pureed form. Everything from pancakes to "Big Macs" went into the blender! She patiently fed him even when half of the food rolled back out as his swallowing muscles weakened. For months, communication was by an alphabet board made from a manila folder. Following Oscar's eye movements, the only muscles that did not fail, Lucy spelled out all of his questions and requests and recorded them in a spiral notebook.

Last Saturday Oscar told Lucy that he couldn't breathe. She took him to the government hospital where the doctors recommended that he be put on a ventilator. Lucy said, "No." They looked at Oscar. With the little movement he had he indicated, "No." He closed his eyes. Lucy stayed. Eventually she was asked to leave the room while the doctors worked with her husband. Finally one of them came out and said, "The man is finished."

Our final service for Oscar was to pay for his funeral. On Sunday and Monday we went to the house where he was laid outside in a coffin too short for his tall frame. It was the same place where Sister Carol and Laurette had given him a massage that warm February Saturday. May he rest in peace.

"The strife is o'er, the battle done...Alleluia!"