

May 7, 2008

Our experience in San Angelo during the "Eldorado Incident" was unique in that it was very different from what we expected, or from anything any of us had ever experienced. It was frightening to watch women and children being herded and separated like cattle with no regard for human rights or the needs of the group or individuals. How could this happen in America? How could this happen in Texas? If this had happened in another country, our government would have tried to prevent it! Old films of Concentration Camps came to mind.

The first night we were there, we worked to get air mattresses for pregnant women who were sleeping on army cots with no padding. That first week was spent being a friendly face to the women and children. It was a relief to them to be able to speak with someone who was not writing down and reporting everything they said, and who would try to help get their simple needs met. We developed trusting relationships with them and came to respect and admire them.

They needed decent food such as ~~fruits~~ fruits, vegetables, whole grain bread and meat instead of candy, cookies and processed foods. The sugar and additives were making the children sick because they had never eaten junk food. The boys and women and girls had to share a bathroom and there were no showers available for several days. Then a shower trailer was moved to the parking lot and they were allowed to go there to shower, always under guard by CPS or DPS.

CPS workers were everywhere and these people had no privacy. CPS intruded on their every activity and conversation, and even followed us around and made notes on everything we said. They noted everything we said even when we were outside of the shelters if they heard us.

We provided arts and crafts and school lesson for the children to the extent that CPS would allow us. There were very few things they were allowed to have as CPS had designated almost everything a "weapon". Obviously they did not know these people at all. Violence is not a part of their culture or belief. If they had been given a truck load of weapons they would not have used them.

These lovely women and children were gracious and kind always. They tried to cooperate with every request, even when terrified that they were going to be separated from their children. The mothers are incredibly loving and patient with the children. The children were well socialized and well behaved and interacted willingly and happily with us. All of the children were healthy when they were taken from their home, but when herded into extremely crowded quarters with an artificial environment (lighting on 24 hours a day, no fresh air, no sunlight, strange food, uncomfortable beds, surrounded by strangers watching their every move) they became ill. Chicken Pox ran rampant through the children, diarrhea, respiratory conditions and other illnesses created greater discomfort and even hospitalizations.

The women were lied to and denied access to their attorneys. They were told that they were going to be moved to another location so families that had been torn apart during the move from the ranch could be reunited, but when they got off of the bus at the new location the mothers of children age 12 and older were taken through a door and loaded on another bus to take them back to the ranch. They didn't even get to say goodbye to the children.

The children that were left behind were cared for by the mothers with younger children who remained.

Living conditions in the coliseum were not conducive to good health for anyone, and the presence of hostile CPS workers who spied on them constantly, kept them awake at night by shining lights in their faces and talking and laughing created enormous stress for the mothers and children. None of them slept well or enough.

On the awful day that they separated the mothers and children the level of cruelty and lack of respect for human rights was overwhelming. Crying, begging children were ripped away from their devastated mothers and the mothers were put on buses to either return to the ranch or to go to shelters. Most went to shelters because they were told they would be able to see their children if they did not return to the ranch. This, of course, was another lie.

Try to imagine all these children from age 1 year to 12 years, left in that coliseum with only CPS and DPS to care for them. The only others were the mothers whom CPS decided were under 18 and kept in their custody along with their children. The floor was literally slick with tears in places. A baby was left in a stroller without food and water for 24 hours and ended up in the hospital. A 4 year old boy was so terrified that he snuck away and hid and was only found after the coliseum and been emptied the next day.

I witnessed a small boy, maybe 3 years old, walking along the rows of cots with a little pillow saying "I need someone to rock me, I just want to be rocked, I want to find a rocking chair." Two CPS workers were following him and writing in their notebooks but not speaking to him or comforting him. Sally and I started toward him but his 8 year old brother came and picked him up saying, "I will take care of him." He took the child to a rocking chair and held him in his lap. That little boy will always be in my mind. How can a beautiful healthy child be taken from a healthy, loving home and forced into a situation like that, right here in America, right here in Texas?

It would take a book to tell about this "incident". There was so much that happened. This situation was a tragedy and surely illegal. Please pray for these mothers and children every day.