



## MATT AND APRIL SYKES

November 2017

Dear Friends and Family,

It is awesome to look back to July 2015 when I (Matt) moved to Puerto Rico to live and serve here full-time. Little did I know that in just over two years, I would not only take over for my boss, but I would also get married! Just a few weeks ago, on October 20, I went before the Grace Ministries International board and was approved as a missionary. The next day, I married my wife, April, a GMI missionary. April and I are now living in Barrio Singapur, Juana Díaz, at the same location where April runs the after-school center, Club Maravilla. For those of you who do not know what I do, my title is Mission Adventure Teams Director (MAT Director). That means I help mission teams serve at Camp Caribe and in the community so that others can come to know Christ and/or grow in their faith. This can happen either directly from the team working face-to-face with the community or indirectly by supporting the ministry of Camp Caribe through physical projects to better the camp. While April and I have two distinct ministries, we have the privilege of serving God together. April often helps me host mission teams, and many mission teams take part in the ministry at club. I also help April with club whenever possible. We both attend Iglesia Bíblica de Juana Díaz and are looking for ways to get more involved in the church as well as for the church to get more involved at Club Maravilla.

As I'm sure all of you know, Puerto Rico was recently impacted by Hurricane María. Camp Caribe was affected by rain, wind, and storm surge. We lost many metal awnings, as well as most

of the roof to our chapel. Nearly all the buildings were flooded, with a water line around 8 inches from the ground. In the barrio, some water made it into the after-school center, but not into our house. We also had several trees fall. One fell on the roof of our house and cracked the roof, one fell on an add-on that was recently done to club, and some large branches fell and covered our car. Fortunately, it does not appear that the branches did any damage to the car, but it did get bad water damage and we do not think it is salvageable. Since the storm, we have worked on cleanup both at camp and at club.

At camp, we have hauled debris, squeegeed water, cleaned layers of mud from buildings, killed mold with bleach, cut trees, and much more. At club, some of the supplies were ruined by water damage and had to be thrown away. We have worked to clear trees to get club safe enough to reopen. We reopened before April and I left for the States for our wedding. While we were gone, we had a few volunteers keep it open at least two days a week. In this first week since we have been back, we were able to have club open for three afternoons. Honestly, we feel a little bit overwhelmed between trying to get camp back up and running, club, and still identifying ways we can help the community in the wake of the storm, all while adjusting to married life and living in a house with no power.

One huge blessing is that this past Saturday, a little less than a week since we returned to Puerto Rico, a generator was donated to us by Samaritan's Purse. One way we are hoping to bless



*Above: Debris behind the residences at Camp Caribe*



*Below: Hurricane damage in the chapel of Camp Caribe*



*Above: The girls at club receiving their first Bible lesson after the hurricane*



*Below: The Sykes' primary vehicle covered in tree branches*



*Above: Damage at Club Maravilla*



*Above: Water from the hurricane and damage to the grounds of Camp Caribe*



*Right: Matt and April Sykes after church at Iglesia Biblica de Juana Diaz*



*Right: Matt and April during their wedding ceremony*



*Above: Matt and April share their first dance as a married couple*

others is that we are offering families of kids at club to come here and wash their clothes. Our house has also become a small distribution center. We have been sending some needed items home to the families of kids at club, such as laundry detergent, dish soap, bleach, flashlights, and canned food. We are still in the process of assessing the needs of the community so that we can best serve them.

We are thankful that we will be hosting several mission teams over the next couple of months that will be helping at camp, club, and in the community. First of all, Grace Bible College is sending a team over Thanksgiving that will be focusing primarily on helping clean up at camp. The first week of December, Jeremy Clark, the Director of Grace Ministries International (GMI) will be leading a very skilled GMI team from different parts of the country to help out wherever they are needed at camp and in the community. Finally, right before Christmas, we will be hosting a team of guys from Union University, who will be working at camp and in the community as well.

One way you can be praying for us is that April feels like she has basically had to start over with club. Prior to the hurricane, she was having record attendance, with as many as 50 kids on a single day. After the hurricane, not only have the numbers gone down, but they are almost all new kids. While we are excited about the opportunity to minister to new kids, it takes a bit of time to gain trust and build relationships with them, so it is very challenging to see some of the kids we have known for a long time stop coming for various reasons. At least a handful of the kids left for the States, and we do not know how long it will be before they come back. Some parents are keeping their kids at home and not letting them go out.

Another way you can be praying for us is that we would get a steady stream of volunteers to help at club. I am not always able to be there because of work, and April does not have many regular helpers. Our pastor at Iglesia Biblica de Juana Diaz,

Miguel Ortiz, has made announcements at church and April has asked individuals to help, but so far, the only regular volunteer from our church is a high school student named Ángel. We also have a lady named Agnes who is a physicist from Hungary that gives age-appropriate physics lessons. She is not a Christian, which offers us an opportunity to pray for her and share Christ with her and her family. The other regular volunteer we have is Sheri Gillhespy, the wife of Ken, the Maintenance Director at Camp Caribe. She has been in charge of cooking classes and has helped out with Bible-themed crafts. We are very thankful for our volunteers, but we need more help!

Finally, pray that we would be able to learn more about the immediate physical needs of families here in the barrio, and that we would be able to meet those, thus creating an opportunity to address their spiritual needs.

Thanks again for all your prayers during this time of crisis in Puerto Rico. Please remember to be in prayer for:

- Our marriage, and that we would grow closer together as we grow closer to Jesus Christ.
- Our community and friends who are still recovering after the storm.
- The ministry of Camp Caribe and all of the mission teams coming down to help get camp back up and running.
- Club Maravilla—that it would be a beacon of hope for kids and their families, that April and Matt would continue to build relationships with new and returning kids, and for more volunteers to come on a regular basis.
- For wisdom for Matt and April in assessing and responding to needs in the community.

Your fellow servants,

Matt & April Sykes

