The earliest day of The Clinic was established to treat patients with special needs from a school in Nogales, Sonora. I was invited to join Amanda Ast, Gloria Bogulas, and Lois Acton to consult on three children. Our office was the Nun’s bedroom at a Nogales orphanage. Three single beds were our examining tables over which we climbed to get to the second and third bed. We returned a month later and started to schedule some treatment which required additional volunteers. Mary Lou Frankel set up our record system. Dan Leal was our prosthetist, and Phil Tygiel managed physical therapy.

The initial cases were simple. We supplied a pair of long leg braces on an intelligent thirteen-year-old who had never walked. We did a heel cord release on a child with cerebral palsy who was a toe walker. Our results were immediate “miracles.” Our success was assured. Trust was established.

The Clinic grew rapidly, and we outgrew the orphanage. We had Patricia Martinez who managed the army of volunteers. Francisco Valencia (age14) was a reliable translator and later as an orthopedic specialist became our medical director.

St. Andrews Episcopal Church allowed us to expand to include all of the support specialties. The support from the Shriners hospitals allowed the complexity and volume of the surgical cases which we now are able to do.

I am thankful to the Board of Directors, Patricia Martinez, and all the volunteers for making the early vision develop into what we all share today.

In the early days of The Clinic, the doctors and therapists from Tucson would meet in the morning for breakfast and then all hop into a van supplied by Jim Click Ford to go down to Nogales, Sonora. We’d go to an orphanage where there were swarms of mothers and children waiting for us. We set up a mat in the middle of the waiting area and that became the physical therapy room. We worked there with the children with everyone sitting around and watching as they waited their turn.

It was a fun atmosphere most of the time with everyone encouraging and hopeful. When a child laughed, everyone laughed. When a child walked for the first time, everyone cheered. Of course, it wasn’t always that easy. Occasionally one child would start to cry and then all the children would start to cry making for a challenging therapeutic environment.

There were so many wonderful people who made this all happen. Mark Frankel, MD, was the guiding force who brought all the health care professionals together. Dan Leal brought braces and good cheer. The women who volunteered made things run smoothly and did their best to translate for us. They weren’t professional translators and sometimes ended up talking to the doctors and therapists in Spanish and the patients and their families in English. Somehow, we all managed to understand each other.

I still remember the first after-clinic luncheon. We all went to the Valencias’ home where a woman in the kitchen was busy preparing fresh tortillas and some kind of meat for tacos. We were told it was tortuga, and it tasted great. No one told us until later that tortuga was Spanish for turtle.

There was a young boy there that day who was helping out with translating and serving food. He was a great help. Many years later he returned to The Clinic as the head of orthopedic surgery. He was Francisco Valencia.