



Happily Ever After . . .

Every little girl who has ever read a fairy tale dreams of being a princess. The beautiful dress. The perfectly done hair. Jewelry, flowers. That one amazing evening when she looks like a vision, and everyone's eyes focus on her as she enters the room.

And then she ends up in an orphanage, and her fairy godmother forgot where she lives. Well, we all know fairy tales aren't real and neither are fairy godmothers. But God didn't forget about her for one second, and neither did SHIP.

When Valerie Markert and Marci Ramirez of VIP Bridals in Bryan, Texas, dropped off more than 30 gorgeous, brand new formal dresses at the SHIP Resale Shop, an idea was hatched. Let's have a Quinceañera for

the girls at the orphanage! What's a Quinceañera? It's a celebration of a girl's 15th birthday (almost like a mini-wedding), usually with a religious ceremony, dinner, and party.

We took the dresses to El Salvador and let each girl pick out her perfect dress. Friends in Texas donated fancy shoes. The SHIP Shop had recently acquired elegant necklaces and earrings, and each girl selected her matching jewels. And each girl received a beautiful silver ring, made possible by a gift from a SHIP friend and a really great deal from Chuck Konderla of Fifth C Fine Jewelry in Bryan.

Our volunteers decorated the big room for the celebration, arranged flowers, and made individual bouquets for each girl. All eight girls from the orphanage and one girl from our neighborhood received manicures and pedicures; and they had their tresses straightened, curled, and crimped. All nine girls were radiant.

Jhonny Benitez, orphanage director and Papi to most of the girls, conducted the ceremony, and Mami Elena presented them with rings. Robert Horton presented the ring to Ana, our neighborhood 15-year-old.



Astrid Zavaleta, President of SHIP's NGO in El Salvador, presided as mistress of ceremonies for the party afterwards. Those attending were served a delicious catered dinner; and of course, the kids' favorite was the popular chocolate fountain and the yummy cake. After a few spins on the "dance floor," the evening of celebration was complete, but in the memory of these nine young ladies, their fairy tale evening will live in their thoughts for years to come.

Praising God, for He Is Good!

During two weeks this summer, 34 volunteers from Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, New York, and Australia came to the orphanage. Without a doubt, God showed up! Beyond the physical labor, horse play, and loving on children that takes place, we were all affected and changed. The people we came to serve experienced the love of Jesus being shown by our volunteers, and some have come to know Him as their Savior.

Five "SHIP Trippers" contributed articles to this newsletter to share their thoughts about the work and how the trip affected them. You'll be blessed as you read how God worked in their lives as they became His hands and feet for a time in El Salvador.

Images of El Salvador

by David Archer

What a blessing for the 11-member team from Oak Hills Church to have been on mission in El Salvador for a week in July 2012! James says, "pure religion is to visit the widow and orphan in their time of need." I'm thankful to my long-time friends, Robert and Ann Horton, who opened up the opportunity for our team to do just that. There are many images planted in my mind of this most spiritual and life-changing mission trip. Allow me to share some of these images with you.



Our team's schedule was busy from day one with painting coops for the quail that provide eggs and income, working vegetable gardens, and playing soccer at the community youth center. The highlight of the day was the hours of work by our young men, led by Ted Nombrana, who wired and strung 1200 feet of electrical wire – the equivalent of four football fields in length – from the orphanage, down the mountainside, and through dense tropical foliage to bring electricity and light to a little widow's home where she lives with her son and three grandchildren. The number one wish that the 13-year-old granddaughter had was for a light at night to do her homework. Jesus said, "you are the light of the world," and on that day, this family received not only an electrical outlet in their home to provide light, but they saw

the hands of Jesus at work bringing His light into their home.

We spent the Lord's Day in rest, relaxation, and worship. The highlight was worship at the little open-air tabernacle church where many of the orphanage children attend and where Jhonny, the orphanage director, is pastor. Although the words spoken were in Spanish, the Holy Spirit was present for this time of worship and spoke to each team member in a special way. Our team sang a couple of praise songs, accompanied by our musicians. It was a wonderful way to worship our Savior as we sang

"Blessed Be Your Name." The English-speaking worship leader observed, "you can bless the Lord's name in any language," and we certainly did.

The re-roofing project that our crew completed is on a house that is just up the mountain from the orphanage. It houses a mother

and her three children. A big part of our team worked hard at roof removal, painting, electrical wiring, and installing a new sheet metal roof. A new shower room was being plumbed, and a concrete floor was added as well so bathing could be done in privacy.

Team members planted pineapples and corn as well as hoed gardens



for members of the community as well as the orphanage. Other team members cleared tropical vegetation and large trees down the side of the mountain to plant additional coffee plants and create a source of income for the orphanage.

The English class provided by SHIP in the youth center was taught by Sam Brown. A room of young El Salvadoran boys were learning English, which will provide them with a giant advantage to get out of poverty. Their reading material? The Roman's Road.

It was so very special when team members served the evening meals to the children in the orphanage. Hearing the laughter as we played games, sang songs, and visited with these beautiful children will be an image I carry in my memory for many years to come.

On this trip, we met Dora, a 27-year-old mother of three in the neighborhood who is undergoing chemotherapy. My heart was especially

drawn to her as we prayed together. Her home was one that was being painted. Her husband works for SHIP clearing the mountain and planting coffee trees. Although this was a hard task and he carried an additional heavy personal burden, he was always smiling and so friendly.



On our last night in El Salvador, we held an outdoor prayer meeting in the yard of the homes that we had worked on during the week. With chickens and ducks roaming freely beneath our feet, we worshipped the Lord with songs and then prayer. We said our tearful goodbyes to the children and families in the community that we had met, as well as to the children in the orphanage. In my 40 years of ministry, I have to

say that this prayer meeting with the families was as close to an “upper room” experience as I have ever had.

Not only did our team make an impact on some of the people of El Salvador, but El Salvador made an impact on our lives as well. The images of this beautiful country have sharp contrasts. It’s a place where Bird of Paradise plants are cut down like we would cut down weeds and where hundreds of parakeets fly free and sing from the banana and mango trees. Yet, it’s a place where poverty abounds and people live in shacks. It’s a place where the love of Jesus needs to be shared, and that was what we did during this mission trip.

The misconception of many is that a mission trip consists of using our voices to do street witnessing, preaching, and other events to tell people about Jesus. In reality, a mission trip is made up of using our hands, arms, and feet to do things that show Jesus to people. I’m thankful for the opportunity to have been a part of this trip and for what God is doing in El Salvador through His people.

David is the pastor of Oak Hills Church in Edmond, Oklahoma. This was his second mission trip to the orphanage.

Figuring It Out

by Jay Addison

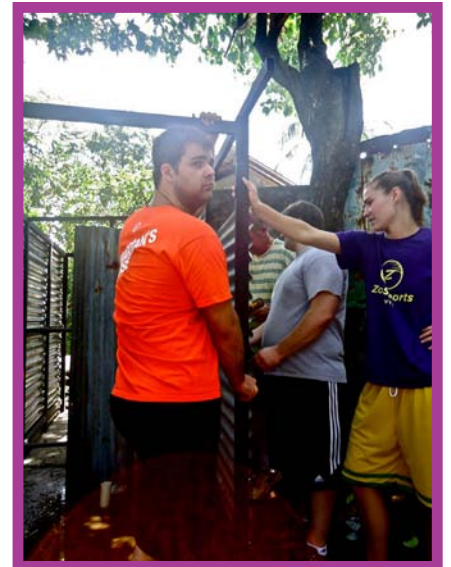
I spent the last month having a decidedly non-New York experience. I made the decision to run away from the sweltering heat and steadily building discontent of NYC and fly home (Colorado) for a couple weeks. A couple of weeks turned into three, with a mission trip tacked on the end. I loved every minute of it – partially because I didn’t have to worry about becoming a sweat-dripping, red-faced monster when I stepped out the door, but mostly because I didn’t have to worry, period. That’s such a fantastic, indescribable,

wonderful feeling. It’s also, unfortunately, not reality – at least not past the age of 18.

Now it’s true that God tells us not to worry, and I understand what He means; my eventual destination is secured, and I have a really big helper on my side. So, from the big perspective, life is pretty carefree. But life while we’re living it is full of, if not worry, then thinking. Choosing. Taking action. Making mistakes. Struggle is what life is made of. Perhaps we’ll get back to that in a bit.

My family and I went on a mission trip to El Salvador and stayed at an orphanage for a week. We were there previously when we were on our six-month Central American extravaganza. It’s supported by a wonderful organization called SHIP, and it’s filled with the sweetest, kindest, most loving kids I’ve ever known. It’s hard for me to even think back on them right now without being overcome; these kids are amazing. During the week, we planted gardens, built showers, delivered quail coops, and took kids to a waterpark. It was a truly fantastic week.

It was also a week of much self-examination. I can’t speak highly enough of the people that were on the trip with me, both my family and the others who were there. Such fearlessness, such a complete lack of inhibition or conceitedness. It’s hard for me to explain clearly, so I guess I’ll put it this way: if I learned one thing from the week, it’s how much I’m stuck in my head and how often that makes me selfish. How often do I think of myself before others? How can I serve like that? All “spirituality” aside, how much do I limit myself in



that way, by overanalyzing instead of just jumping in and doing? How many people would meet me and get an impression even close to what I think of those kids? If they can afford to live with such love, surely I can, too.

I think somewhere in there, there’s an answer to the musings up at the top of this article; at the very least, there’s some wisdom. When all I think of is myself, I’m bound to get a little sick of the same thing over and over. If I overanalyze every situation, I’ll never be surprised. And if I can learn to see struggle, obstacle, and work as the stuff life is made of, the stuff that makes living being alive, then I might just start greeting life a little bit more like those kids.

So all of my problems are solved, yes? No, certainly not. I’m still an unemployed actor who feels more alone than ever in the most crowded city in America. Once I figure me out, I can move on to life’s other great unsolved mysteries, such as how to stay fit while eating what I want, is bigfoot real, and why can’t I ever keep track of a set of fingernail clippers.

On my last night at the orphanage, one of the kids slid a bracelet they made onto my wrist. I intend to wear it forever – or at least until it falls apart – just as a little reminder of how I want to live my life: with love.

Jay is an aspiring 20-year-old actor who lives in New York City. This was his second trip to the orphanage with his seven-member family.



Following God's Lead

by Cesar & Karla Calderon

We didn't really know what to expect on this mission trip. In fact, we'd never heard of SHIP until earlier this year when we felt led to explore the possibilities of serving in El Salvador while we were there to visit extended family this summer. When we found SHIP's website, we were interested in what they were doing and inquired about the possibility of going on a mission trip with them. As we left Australia with our 2 young daughters, we were filled with both excitement and concern – excited to see God's love at work at the orphanage and concerned about whether our daughters would cope with the changes in time, culture, and environment.



As it turns out, the trip made a huge impact on our lives. We were amazed by how SHIP strives for excellence in all that they do, from providing high-quality education for the children to constructing the best possible building facilities for them (including filtered drinking water). It was a privilege to see what is being accomplished there and experience God at work through His servants. The design of the home where the children live and the adjoining building struck me as being an excellent environment for the children to grow in. Being an architect, the design and construction method was one of the things that I (Karla) appreciated the most. It represented excellence in design and construction, excelling our expectations.

While I assisted in teaching the girls who live around the orphanage, my husband helped several men on the team to improve some neighborhood shelters. Although our stay was shorter than 5 days (delays with a sick child and the airline), we saw God's love poured out through passionate individuals to children and youth who are in need not only of physical things but of love and care. Without a doubt, we know that the seed being planted in the children at the orphanage and the neighborhood by those who



participate in SHIP mission trips will flourish and influence the lives and future of these precious people.

As a family, God made it clearer to us during

this trip as to how we view life and how the position God has placed us in is not only a privilege but an opportunity to help in His plans. We believe our short stay at the orphanage is the beginning of something bigger for our family for the long term.

We so appreciated how God used Robert and Ann Horton to inject us with their radiating love and compassion for the people they

serve in El Salvador and for how they strive for excellence in what they do for others there.

To all young families considering taking part in a mission trip, we say: go for it, and don't let your children be an excuse to stop you! It's true... the work you do may be somewhat restricted, and you may not be able to be involved 100% in helping with construction, but God can still use you in many ways that will assist the work there.

SHIP looked after us beyond our wildest expectations. Thank you for the opportunity!

Cesar and Karla were born in El Salvador and lived there for a portion of their lives. They now live in Australia with their two daughters, Kayley (11) and Talya (2).



Changing Perspective

by Laura Fernandez

El Salvador – for the second time. In many ways, it was the same as the first time. We were there to work, and there was plenty of work to do. Always a stack of dirty dishes waiting to be washed, plants to be planted and tended, and various kinds of construction work. Also, there were always children eager to have our attention for play or for English classes.

But one big difference for me was that this time I had more opportunities to go outside the razor-wired walls of the orphanage compound. In addition to church and the waterpark, I got to go to the grocery store, which was a big deal to me because I love to check out grocery stores in other places to see what they have that my store doesn't. It turned out that it wasn't that different from American grocery stores, but I did think it was interesting that a box of bobby pins was kept behind a locked counter and was taken to the register for us to pick up when we paid for the rest of our things.

But the most important venture was visiting the neighborhood next

to the orphanage. Just stepping outside the orphanage gates took me to a different world. Inside the gates, everything was clean and safe and relatively comfortable and convenient. Outside, I had to watch



my step to avoid trash or animal poop and to keep from slipping on a steep section of someone's "yard." There was no grass around the houses, only mud and rocks and of

course trash – rotting fruit, bottles, and broken odds and ends. The outhouses stank, and everything just seemed horribly dirty. But someone in our group observed that the people who live in these conditions manage to keep themselves clean.

I was quite impressed with Kayley, the 11-year-old from Australia, who seemed to just make herself at home, sitting down on a rock to eat a piece of fruit with one of the neighbor women. She wasn't worried about getting dirty or thinking about

how different it was from her own neighborhood.

I felt that I could adjust to living permanently in the orphanage. I could do without air conditioning and hot showers (both of which we had in our building), but I didn't think I could stand to live in the houses where the children

I taught and played with lived. It would be asking too much.

But how much did Jesus have to lower his standard of living to live on earth? He could have waited until indoor plumbing, air conditioning, and cars were invented, but even that would have meant a more drastic change than the one I would have to make. The world He came from gives a whole new meaning to clean, comfortable, and convenient – way beyond what we are used to. Its beauty far surpasses any scenic views on earth. Yet we often fail to understand how dreary, dirty, tiresome, and frustrating the world must have been for Him; however, like Kayley, He made Himself at home to deal with our even drearier, dirtier, more tiresome, and more frustrating hearts and souls. How could He stand to stay for over 30 years in a place where the physical conditions must have seemed horrifying, and the spiritual problems even more so – and all the while people were either missing the point or rejecting Him all together.

And now He calls His people to do the same – to go out of our physical comfort zone and into one that is decidedly uncomfortable. And our reason has to be the same as His: love.

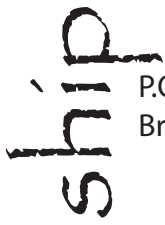
Laura, who is fluent in Spanish, is a teacher and lives in Garden City, Kansas.

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Would you like to receive e-mail updates and prayer requests regarding the work in El Salvador? We will never provide your address to anyone outside of SHIP. To be included, send your e-mail address to: contact@shipinternational.org.





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James 1:27 *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”*

Lessons Learned

This summer, 22 middle and high school youth from First Baptist Church in Navasota, Texas, spent a weekend learning hands-on lessons about gratitude while raising \$1000 for the orphanage. Arriving at their church with only a blanket, toothbrush, and the clothes they were wearing, they lived as if they were homeless, sleeping in makeshift cardboard and plastic shanties they built. During the day, they worked odd jobs to earn fake money for life’s basic needs, such as buying other clothes, toothpaste,

soap, or a cold shower. Sitting on concrete outside of their makeshift “homes,” they made crafts to sell at a garage sale. In an interview with the local newspaper, *The Navasota Examiner*, Youth Pastor Brad Clark said that he hoped the children learn “that we are a very blessed people and God takes great care of us. And we need to not only appreciate it, but also pass it on. And be aware that most of the world doesn’t have it quite as well as we do; we truly do live

in the greatest nation of the world.” Thank you, FBC youth for raising money for the orphanage and being living examples in your community!

