



Summer 2007

"Whoever receives one little one like this in my name, receives Me." Matthew 18: 5

To the many who have cared:

The writing of these letters is a task that I take very much to heart. It can take weeks for me to reach a decision as to what a letter will have to say. Such is the case with this letter. I've spend a considerable amount of time fretting over what it would ultimately be about, and as recently as early this morning it had not yet begun to take form. Then I read Matthew 18:5 and I knew at once that the letter's theme had been delivered into my waiting and somewhat anxious hands.

I have never written a letter which continued a story begun in a previous letter. There are so many stories to tell in this line of work that it seems to continue one only serves to take away from the telling of another. But the recent spring letter which told of Marvin and Bryan, drew such a strong response and moved many who read it that I felt a follow-up letter was necessary. (To review the spring letter see www.onlyachild.org.)

Marvin and I have continued to share the responsibility of raising Bryan. Marvin remains that main provider of all of Bryan's physical needs. He sees to it that Bryan is always well fed, well dressed and well groomed. But it has been more difficult for Marvin to meet Bryan's emotional needs. Perhaps this is because Marvin's alcoholic father was mostly absent when he was a child. Marvin and I have spoken about his struggle to share his heart with his son. And Marvin has worked in earnest to be more affectionate with Bryan. To his credit, he has improved considerably. Still it is not easy for him. Knowing this, I have made it a priority to be available to Bryan in ways that are difficult for his dad. I do so not only to care for Bryan, but also to offer Marvin the kind of example he did not get as a child. I try, I hope to show Marvin that it is not only acceptable, but desirable for a father to love his son without reserve. Given that I'm devoted to Bryan, this comes rather naturally to me.

At first my open displays of affection to Bryan made Marvin somewhat uneasy. But he has become more comfortable seeing us together, and today he seems perfectly okay with it. In fact, I think Marvin has come to admire this aspect of our relationship. Often when Bryan and I are together, I notice a smiling Marvin watching us closely, studying us perhaps, even learning from us. I have witnessed a less guarded Marvin of late, spending time with Bryan and enjoying his company in ways that he had not before. Seeing them together this way never ceases to make me happy, both for Bryan and for Marvin.

Marvin's studies take up a good amount of his time. He spends most evenings immersed in his school work. Therefore I am often with Bryan before and after dinner. I help him with his homework when he has it, we play a good amount to be sure, but we are often busy with household chores. Bryan sees himself as my helper. Presenting him with a task that requires the use of a screwdriver or a pair of pliers simply delights him. He likes to work with his hands.

Our shelter has a small front lawn. On a recent evening just before dusk, Bryan and I were cutting the grass. Actually I was cutting the grass while Bryan divided his time between raking and looking for bugs. Just before finishing, Bryan set down the rake and came over to talk with me. His school had held a field trip that day. They had gone to the local zoo. Earlier in the afternoon, I had asked him how it had gone. Bryan replied that it had been fine and left it at that. But at the moment, for whatever reason, Bryan was ready to discuss his trip to the zoo. I set aside the shears and faced Bryan so that he could see that he had my full attention. This was important to Bryan and I wanted him to know that if it mattered to him, it mattered to me.

Bryan began by letting me know how much he enjoyed the bus ride. This surprised me not in the least as he is fascinated by anything with wheels. He told me of the animals of course, giving special attention to the elephants and the monkeys for they had caught his fancy. Yet oddly enough, he mostly wanted to talk about his lunch. It had been the parents' responsibility to send lunch with the children. Marvin and I had chosen the menu together, and I had prepared it, a fact unknown to Bryan. It included some juice and chips, coconut macaroons and a ham and cheese sandwich. Bryan enjoyed all of his lunch for he is not in the least a fussy eater. But he especially liked the ham and cheese sandwich and talked about it at length. When at last it seemed he had exhausted the subject, he fell silent, something he does not often do when we are together. I waited to see what he was considering. He broke the silence with a question. "Have you ever had a ham and cheese sandwich, George?"

"Yes," I responded, "yes I have."

"Did you like it?" he was quick to follow up.

It was clear that Bryan wanted me to like it as much as he had. A ham and cheese sandwich is a rather ordinary lunch to us in the U.S. But to the average Guatemalan, both ham and cheese are expensive and not easily affordable given their average income. Therefore in the eyes of a child from Bryan's world, a ham and cheese sandwich is a genuine treat. For him it was something special. I understood that Bryan's eagerness to know that I liked ham and cheese as much as he did was based on his desire to share with me the pleasure that it had given him. He wanted us to have this in common so that the bond it created would somehow draw us closer. I still enjoy a ham and cheese sandwich making it easy for me to answer his question honestly. "Yes," I assured him, "I thought it was delicious." "So did I," he smiled obviously pleased, "I thought it was delicious too."

I was utterly moved by this simple conversation. The casual observer might have thought that our discussion regarding the merits of a ham and cheese sandwich was the only thing that mattered. And perhaps it was so. There's no denying that to Bryan it was a discussion of utmost importance. He wanted to share that with me and he did,

innocently, as earnest as earnest can be, trusting that I would honor and respect his confidence. Seeing his trust for the precious commodity that it was, I did nothing to betray it.

It was a beautiful moment, uniquely ours, full of tenderness and warmth. Still I thought that such moments are rather common, all in all, imagining that parents and children shared them on a daily basis all around the world. I have come to see such moments as life's great gifts. The lessons learned from them are incomparable for their truths are eternal. They sear themselves into one's soul and claim a special place in one's thoughts. Gently tucked away in our hearts, they are carefully protected, often recalled with great fondness, never to be forgotten.

One morning Marvin asked me to take Bryan to school. I happily did so. I met the school's director upon returning to my car. We had not seen each other since Marvin and I had first enrolled Bryan fourteen months earlier. Still she remembered me, for she immediately began to talk about Bryan. She commented on how much he had improved since coming to live with us. Bryan's dramatic change had clearly impressed her, given the relatively short time he had been with us. Riding home from Bryan's school, I recalled reading Matthew 18:5. My *chance* meeting with the school's director confirmed that this was the letter I needed to write.

It has been a little more than a year since Only A Child rescued Bryan from the street and received him into our family. It can also be said that I have welcomed him into my life also. During that time, Bryan has given his heart to me. He has loved me honestly, without fear or reserve. His love has no ulterior motives, no hidden agendas. It is not selfish or dishonest. Bryan loves me because he can. It is in his nature to do so. He loves me because he has not learned to doubt that he should. Neither I nor the world has given him a reason to guard or ration his love. Bryan's love remains the love of a child, pure and lasting and true. Knowing this, I have given my heart to him without holding anything back. In return my heart has been filled with all the love that I have for him. And in the process, I have also created a greater place for God in my heart. As a result, I have come to know God's own heart better.

I have come to ask Bryan a simple question whenever it seems appropriate. The question never changes. In Spanish it consists of five words, "Sabes que te quiero mucho?" "Do you know that I love you a lot?" "Si!" he always responds quickly not waiting a second. "Que bueno," I assure him, "Porque es la verdad." "That's good, because it's true." I want Bryan to be sure of this. And it seems that he is. May it always be so.

As always, thank you for continuing to believe in this program and all of its work. Today, thanks to our efforts, not only Bryan but also Marvin and all of his companions at Only A Child know that someone cares. They know that you care. They trust that they are loved. The best of summers to each and all. God bless.

Sincerely,

George