



Spring 2024

To the many who have cared,

Living life is a work in progress, perhaps never more so than at the onset of adulthood. Life consists of a series of stages connected by transitions which usher in the beginning of a new way of being. Although all such transitions bring their own age-and time-related challenges, setbacks, and heartache, those which accompany the moving beyond of adolescence while trying on adulthood can be especially difficult to manage.

I offer the examples of two young men. Each of them was, until recently, a resident of our home. Each of them found themselves confronting life changing circumstances, leaving them to face decisions which would impact the direction their lives would take, once the decision had been made. Each of their situations was unique and managed in its own way. What the young men shared in common, however, was a willingness to confront the problems before them with maturity, wisdom and a level of grace under pressure which belied their years and did them proud.

Antonio came to live at Only A Child in November of 2021. He was 18 years old, had recently graduated from high school and wanted to continue his studies at university level. His parents lacked the resources to provide Antonio with a college education, leading him to request that we grant him a space within our program. Antonio spent much of 2022 studying to prepare for the series of entrance exams required by the University of San Carlos (USAC), before earning a place within the institution. The entrance exams are held in November and those who pass them qualify to begin studies in mid-January of the following year.

Antonio was successful and chose a major in education, wanting to one day be a teacher. Things were not to progress as planned, however. While away earlier in the year visiting with family, Antonio had gotten a young woman pregnant. He had known her for years. They were neighbors and had grown up together. They had a history and were friends. Antonio informed me in private, while also giving me notice that he would be taking leave of the program, to begin his life with the woman in preparation for the arrival of their son. I supported him in his decision, confirming it was the right one, and we prepared for his departure.

Shortly after, Antonio's father called our psychologist, Luisalfredo, surprising us with an unforeseen proposal. He asked if Antonio might continue to live and study within the program, while promising that he and his wife would take in and watch over Antonio's future wife and her child, their grandson, once he was born. They knew the woman's parents and had discussed the situation with them, and earned their consent. Luisalfredo and I met by Zoom with Antonio, the young woman and his parents, and we decided to give the arrangement a trial run. Luisalfredo was to maintain regular contact with the young woman and Antonio's parents. The plan worked well and we agreed to continue with it on an extended basis.

Antonio took a heavy course load, intending to advance his studies as much as possible during a two year period, at the end of which time, he would return home to permanently live with his family. He would, at that time, find work and continue with his studies on the weekend.

Antonio completed his first year of studies, while obtaining excellent grades. He and his house mates spent the Christmas and New Year holidays with family, before returning to Only A Child at the end of the first week of January. Antonio seemed in good spirits, but I was troubled with

a nagging doubt that something was amiss. Then one day, Antonio asked if we might speak in private.

It was then that he informed me of his intention to prematurely return to his family. Antonio explained that he had returned home in December to encounter his family struggling financially and, in his words, “had found the cupboard bare.” His father had struggled to consistently find work and his mother, who had supported her husband with odd jobs, had developed a serious lung related illness which prevented her from working. Antonio felt compelled to take leave of his comfortable life at Only A Child to return home and assist his family in their time of need. Saddened but sure that Antonio had chosen what was best, I congratulated him on the integrity of his decision and wished him well.

Maudiel joined Only A Child in December of 2022. Like Antonio, he had recently graduated from high school, came from a modest background, and sought Only A Child’s support with his desire to pursue a university education. Also like Antonio, Maudiel spent the better part of his first year with us studying to take the entrance exams at USAC, scheduled for November, 2023. His time spent in preparation paid off, as Maudiel passed the exams with his first try, a rare and commendable accomplishment for someone who had grown up studying in Guatemala’s widely criticized public school system.

Maudiel had chosen to study architecture and greatly anticipated the commencement of the school year in mid-January. Little by little, however, his enthusiasm waned. It is not unusual for the first year at university to be very demanding, and I decided to give Maudiel time to adapt to his new routine while encouraging him along the way.

Maudiel is, by nature, a reserved and private person, and it can be difficult to read how he is at any given time, leaving me to occasionally ask him how he was getting along. His response was always the same, “well,” leaving me to conclude I had little reason to worry. I was, therefore, in no way prepared to receive the news that he had decided to leave the program.

We spoke in private. I learned that Maudiel had felt overwhelmed studying architecture. I asked him how he had aced the entrance exams on his first try, only to find himself incapable of following the material presented in his classes. He responded by saying that the entrance exam, reputed to be extremely demanding, did not reflect what he would be expected to know as a student of architecture. He felt that his public school education had, in no way, prepared him for his chosen field of study. The setback left him thoroughly disheartened and defeated. As a member of our Board of Directors, a retired teacher of many years, stated upon learning of Maudiel’s plight, “There is nothing worse than realizing you are in over your head, with no realistic way to remedy it.”

All of our many efforts to persuade him not to give up ultimately proved to be in vain. It appeared at first that Maudiel might change his mind and carry on with his studies, but then he reversed his decision once again and concluded that it would be best for him to return to his family.

It was only then that we would learn that the situation and Maudiel’s decision were compounded by the fact that his younger brother had contracted Hemorrhagic Dengue Fever, a dangerous and life threatening form of the disease. The brother had required several months of hospitalization. Maudiel’s family had taken on considerable debt as a consequence, leaving him to feel compelled to return home, find work and help his family pay down the debt. Gratefully, the brother has returned home and is well.

Before leaving Only A Child, Maudiel confided to us that the police department in his home town will be receiving new recruits in April. He plans to apply for a position, and should he be

accepted, hopes to eventually take advantage of a program within the department which offers support to those officers who wish to advance their careers by studying law at USAC.

The departures of Antonio and Maudiel did not mark the first time when we lost fine young men to family related hardship. Although they were unable to follow through with their original plans to complete a university education during their tenure at Only A Child, they not only departed from our program for sound and selfless reasons but, moreover, fully intended to continue to pursue their studies once resettled with their families.

Despite the relative shortness of their stays, I would never conclude that Antonio's and Maudiel's time with us was wasted. I have come to believe that the spiritual and moral education which our residents receive while living in our home is at least of equal importance as the academic learning they acquire as students at USAC. It will serve them well long after their departure from our program, by continuing to contribute to their development as caring, honorable and moral husbands, fathers and men.

While recently reading the Bible's book of Joshua, I encountered a sidebar highlighting Joshua and his life. I came upon a passage which I found particularly compelling. It stated, "We are all part of an unbroken chain of God's work in the world. Are you watching the lives of those who revere God, learning from them? Can those who are watching you see how important God is in your life?" I have long considered the act of mentoring our young men to be the most rewarding aspect of my work, far more meaningful than the administrative tasks which demand much of my time.

This year, our annual spring fundraiser will be held on Sunday, April 14, at 1:30 PM. Please note that the time is 30 minutes earlier than in past years. The location has also changed to The American Legion Nonantum Post 440, located at 295 California Street in Newton MA. There is handicap access, including both a ramp and elevator to provide easy entrance to the hall. There is also ample parking with multiple handicap spaces. I hope to see you there.

I ask that, even if you will be unable to join us, you please support the event as generously as possible. Our funding has dropped since the beginning of this fiscal year. Thank you for your response to the Christmas letter. Nevertheless, our deficit has grown to a worrisome level. Please consider making a donation in the coming months to help us maintain our program for our young men's futures.

Thank you for your concern. May God bless.

*George*

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