



Spring 2025

To the many who have cared,

Only A Child's beginnings were modest, its mission at first a work in progress. The work initially took the form of a simple outreach program, functioning in the streets of Guatemala City, responding to the basic needs of roughly 20 children living in the city's Concordia Park.

The program evolved slowly but steadily in the coming years. The focus remained unchanged; to help sustain and comfort children raising themselves with a minimum of adult intervention. This model was re-envisioned in late 1999, when several of the older children confided to me that they wished to leave the streets, while asking if I could help them fulfill their desire. I understood at once that it was time for us to refocus our mission.

I began to look for a property to provide a residence for the children. The initial search focused on an area within a 10 to 12 block radius of Concordia Park. I visited several locations and most of them suited our needs reasonably well. But every time I revealed our intentions to the owner, I was politely turned away as the owner was unwilling to risk using the property to house children of the street.

I was returning home one afternoon after one such rejection. I was still dependent on public transportation as we lacked the funds to purchase a vehicle at that time. Disheartened, I decided to get off of the bus before my regular stop and walk the rest of the way to my apartment. As I stepped onto the pavement, a small but insistent voice inside my head declared, "This is where you should look for your house." I understood where I had been instructed to redirect my search. I looked to the right and made a mental note of the names of the neighborhoods in that area. Oddly at peace, I then made my way home.

The following morning, I purchased a newspaper and opened it to the classified section. My eyes were immediately drawn to one particular listing on the first page. It was for a property located in one of the neighborhoods where I had been instructed to search. I circled it and several other listings, but gave priority to the one that had first captured my attention. I spoke with the listing's owner and we agreed to meet that Saturday morning.

The owner was a single woman, a retired nurse named Gloria. She greeted me warmly and showed me the house. It was a good fit for our intended purposes, leaving me cautiously optimistic at the prospect of it becoming our home. Gloria asked if I intended to rent the house for my personal use. I paused briefly while thinking, 'well here we go,' then proceeded to explain our intended purpose for renting the property.

Gloria grew silent, then looked to the sky as if in search of guidance. I held my breath. A long moment later, she lowered her head and spoke. "You know, I am Christian and have been very blessed throughout my life. For several months now, I have believed that God was compelling me to share my blessings by using my house to provide a home for children in need." She smiled before continuing. "In truth, I envisioned children younger than yours, but I've no doubt that God has delivered you here today. So yes, I will rent my house to you.

The transition from outreach to maintaining a residence was challenging, but as ours had been a learn-as-you-go ministry, we adapted and grew in our capacity to care for those who called Only A Child home. Over time our funding increased and we expanded the services we offered to our residents. We opened a carpentry shop to teach them a trade. We developed a back-to-school program to allow them to fulfill their dreams of furthering their education.

By 2006, we had outgrown our original home and began the search for a larger one to replace it. With a minimum of time and effort we found it. As was the case with Gloria, the owners identified as being Christian and confided that they believed it to be God's will that their house should become our home. It still serves not only as our home, but also as the heart and soul of this ministry. For it is there that we gather for countless reasons and occasions, to be together and share each other's company.

To date, we have housed 77 children and youths. More recently, our residents have come from impoverished, rural backgrounds. Nevertheless, they come to us with the same hopes and intentions of their homeless, urban counterparts - to better themselves by furthering their education with Only A Child's assistance. Our mission remains unchanged; to offer opportunities for betterment to those previously denied them.

Of those who have come to live with us, relatively few lasted for just days. Another small percentage stayed for several months. The vast majority, however, remained under our roof for years. For those who transitioned from adolescence to adulthood under our care, the time has been transformational. Nearly 25 of our residents have graduated from high school. Ten of them have gone on to study at university level. Two from the latter group, Marvin and Rudy have earned associate degrees. Two more, Giovany and Erick, completed their undergraduate studies in November and plan to pursue a Master's degree. Two others still, Bryan and Agustín, will complete all undergraduate requirements this year, and also plan to pursue their Master's degrees.

Equally important, our longtime residents develop into responsible, caring and honorable young men during their tenure at Only A Child. Considerable time and effort is given towards providing them with a moral education of the highest order. We attend church as a *family*. Bible passages are shared each night before dinner. Formal Bible Studies are given by our staff psychologist Luis Alfredo, one Sunday a month. Christian devotions are read and discussed over dinner as well, two to three times a week. Relative and timely themes are also discussed, often times while focusing on the ethics and morality of the themes being considered. Such efforts clearly bear fruit, as people spending time in the company of our youths regularly comment on what fine young men they've turned out to be.

Assisting our residents in their effort to become the person they wish to be has been extremely rewarding for me. The demands of running a home can be unrelenting and are often times exhausting. The rewards of witnessing firsthand the success stories of our residents more than compensates for the fatigue I routinely face. We moved into Gloria's house on February 1, 2000, which means that we recently celebrated our 25th anniversary of maintaining a home. During that time, we have provided shelter to dozens of children youths turning to us in need of a helping hand. In doing so, some of those lives, specifically those who came to us from the street, have likely been saved. As many of their former contemporaries died in the street years ago.

Rigoberto, who along with his wife Sandra live in our home with our youths, developed an eye infection in January. Rigoberto suffers with diabetes, which further complicated the situation. Despite seeking medical assistance almost immediately, the infection quickly worsened leaving Rigoberto without vision in that eye.

By early-February, Rigoberto was incapacitated, unable to exert himself except when absolutely necessary. Extensive intervention, including surgery on two occasions, failed to improve the situation. By month's end, it was feared Rigoberto would lose the eye. Desperate, Rigoberto and Sandra sought a second opinion with a highly respected ophthalmologist. The treatment was revised and has met with success. The eye has gradually improved and it is now believed that it can be saved. It remains uncertain, however, as to what degree Rigoberto will regain vision in the infected eye.

As I write this letter in mid-March, Rigoberto's mobility remains significantly limited, leaving him unable to return to work. It remains uncertain as to when he will be able to do so. Given that much of Rigoberto's responsibility involves maintaining the proper function and stability of our home, while guaranteeing the well-being and safety of its residents, it would be irresponsible if not dangerous for me to leave Guatemala any time soon.

The inability to know with certainty when I will next be able to return stateside has made it impossible to promote our annual spring fundraiser - scheduled for April 6 - in a timely manner. It was difficult to confirm my ability to be present at that time. Efforts to reschedule the event in late April or early May proved unsuccessful. Hosting the fundraiser requires the involvement of many people. Members of our Board of Directors, friends and family contribute towards running the event. Assembling the needed number of them together on any of the alternative dates, to ensure the fundraiser's proper function and success, proved to be impossible. Therefore, I and our Board of Directors have reluctantly concluded that it was necessary to cancel this years spring gathering.

The fundraiser generates between 10 and 15% of our annual funding. The loss of this revenue will undoubtedly prove to be costly for us. Many of you chose to donate to Only A Child at this time of year, in support of the event. I therefore ask that you continue to support our work as generously as you can in response to this special appeal. I ask that you please support our fundraiser as you intentionally and normally would, should it still be held.

Despite the possible loss of significant income resulting from the need to cancel the spring fundraiser, I do not regret the decision. Guaranteeing the safety of our home's residents has remained a priority from the moment we first opened our doors, 25 years ago. My leaving at this time would have left our home and its residents vulnerable and at risk. Simply put, there is nothing in this world that could justify doing so.

I will regret being unable to see all of you who attend our annual gathering. Spending time with you never fails to make all of the effort that goes into planning and hosting the event worthwhile. To all who continue to support our work, I extend a most heartfelt thank you.

May God bless.

George

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