

Airline Ambassadors

Helping Children in Need
At Home and Abroad

Making Holiday Wishes Come True At Home and Abroad

Jan. 2001 Holiday Update

On December 3rd, a team of veteran and rookie Airline Ambassadors began their journey to Bogota, Columbia to celebrate Christmas with the children at Hogares Luz Y Vida. We arrived in Bogota from points across America. We came as airline personnel, educators, a documentary videography and television journalist, a hair-stylist, a therapist, and a "mother" of 250 Vietnamese orphans. We came, united by our common desire to spend Christmas with Sister Valeriana and the children of Hogares Luz Y Vida bearing a shipment of 8,000 pounds of gifts.

Although this was our fourth Christmas celebration together, there was something different about this visit. Perhaps it was the bond that so quickly fused among the our mission team of eleven, coupled with the energy and common passion of the heart that fueled our visit. Perhaps it was the familiarity that exists between the children and us, and the security that they now feel with our annual return. We had not expected to find the unconditional and abundant love that flowed from the children in every way. With the children piled high on our laps as we sat on the orphanage floor, we exchanged songs and stories, hugs and kisses, laughter and tears. And, then very enthusiastically and candidly showed us that, one's disabilities are clearly not the limitation or definition of one's capabilities.

But then, we returned home, only to fall victim, once again to the struggles of re-entry. As the weeks pass, and the pictures in our mind are replaced with the photos of our cameras, we cling to our memories of their tiny hands, clutching our fingers, tugging for us to follow. We find our thoughts wandering back to them--do they think of, and long for us as much as we do them? And, as many dreams as we may have planted in their hearts,

we know they have planted more in ours; dreams that will resurrect a saddened heart, or trigger unexpected laughter; dreams that will cause us to soar through many adventures and carry us through many challenges. We have experienced the purest of love through these little angels, who not only fill an orphanage to overflowing, but our hearts as well. And, as such, we have found that we are even grateful for the sadness that we have at having to leave them, for this sadness reminds us of how wonderful it is to love. Once again, we have traveled thousands of miles away from all that is familiar to us, only to find our center--that part of ourselves that we hope how to learn how to live in more regularly.

-Colleen Morey, Mission Coordinator

**10 Holiday Missions
in 7 Countries!**



Michael dressed like a reindeer!



Holiday Orphanage Parties

AAI's humanitarian aid missions provide substantive aid to children in need. We coordinate 2 to 10 missions each month that supply medical and dental care, first aid supplies, baby supplies, clothing, school supplies, bedding, sports equipment and toys. These journeys of the heart are particularly special during the holiday season when missions provide a way to share joy and love with children at home and abroad.

December 4th: Guatemala

Over one week, ten volunteers visited ten different groups of children in Guatemala City, Antigua and nearby villages. When the team arrived, they started to organize for the first of many Christmas parties held at clinics, village meeting places, and schools. At most of the parties, one of the volunteers dressed as Santa and entered the party to the chanting of all the excited children. Then, the volunteers and local organizers would line up the children for games and fun activities and, finally, toys from Santa. It was truly



Rosie goes to Guatemala

special to witness how excited the children were to receive a special gift directly from the hands of Santa! The team repeated the parties twice a day. During the trip, the volunteers also delivered AIDS medicine to a clinic and gifts to two different groups of poor mothers, as well as going out at night and giving blankets to people sleeping in the streets of Antigua.

December 8th: Guatemala

The Guatemala City Marriott General Manager offered to host Miami-based AAI volunteers, giving a special holiday party at the hotel for the children living at the dump. The day before the party, AAI and Safe Passage members bathed and fitted the children in donated party clothes and shoes.



Santa and Julio

It was an amazing event to witness - 130 children from the garbage dump

escorted up the grand staircase to the Marriott ballroom for a festive meal. While children dined, VCRs played cartoons: Bugs Bunny in Spanish - the first cartoons ever seen by most of the children. Each child visited and took a photo with Santa, collected a gift and participated in eight games and activities.

December 11th: Mexico

December is always a special month for most children, but this is not usually the case for the handicapped children of Ensenada, the kindergarten children in La Mision or the beggar ladies of Tijuana, until AAI volunteers gave them the best Christmas of their young lives.

The children absolutely loved "their" day and were thrilled with the toys, blankets, school supplies and other gifts that were so tirelessly and graciously gathered for them. The kids are still talking about Santa, the parties and fun "los Americanos" who brought so much joy to them.



Santa's next stop - Mexico!

December 12th: Honduras

When a group of flight attendants volunteered to bring supplies, gifts and love to the children in an orphanage called Hogar Tierra Santa, they never expected to see hundreds of excited little hands reaching out to them immediately. When one of those little hands reached out to say hello to Cathleen, a beautiful little girl's face appeared from the excited crowd. "My name is Ingrid," she said looking up at her, "What's yours?" A little boy emerged as well as, taking her other hand, as they began to show the volunteer team their home.

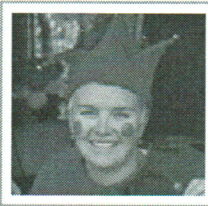
The kids put on a wonderful show for us and thanked us for the holiday party. When it came time to leave, Cathleen's new friend, Ingrid held out a little stuffed animal and said, "de recuerdo Cathleen" which means "for a memory Cathleen." It was a well-loved stuffed



Cathleen with Ingrid and her friends

bunny, a priceless gift from the heart of a small child. Cathleen thanked Ingrid and told her that she would keep it with her always.

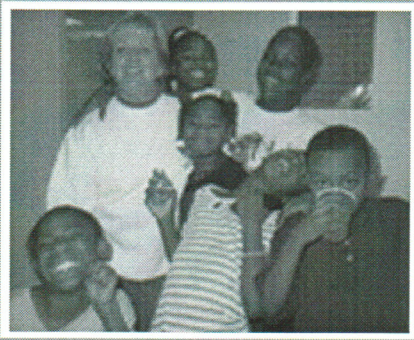
The team of volunteers also visited an HIV home for children. Amor y Vida houses 19 children, but is increasing to 30 by the time they move to their new facility in March. The group delivered gifts and lots of hugs, making this holiday mission so special for both the children and the volunteers.



*May the spirit of giving reign through the year,
Bringing love, laughter, hope and good cheer,
Gifts wrapped with charity, joy, peace, and grace,
Ribbioned with happiness, a tender embrace.*

December 15th: Dallas, TX

It was going to be a Christmas party without Santa this year for the children of the Jeffries Street Learning Center until Kip came to the rescue! Attired in a Santa suit and filled with the spirit of Christmas, "Santa came to town" bringing absolute joy and delight to 45 children. Many of these children live at or below poverty level. For some,



Elaine and kids having a happy holiday!

these gifts that were given would be among the very few that they would receive this year.

During the party, Kevin Christ and Elaine Osborn, fellow DFW members, helped organize the "Jeffries" kids to participate in pen pal exchanges with the children of Casa Hogar, an orphanage in Mexico. Airline Ambassador, Cameron Gray, visits the orphanage monthly and delivers these letters to the children.

December 15th: Daly City, CA



Johna celebrates with kids!

December 15th found three carloads of Airline Ambassador volunteers caravanning to Daly City to celebrate Christmas with 80 children who live in the Schoolhouse Station Complex, a low-income housing development that is part of the Mercy Housing System.

The evening began in the community room with children of all ages anxiously awaiting the party. Some well-received events were blowing, catching and EATING candy bubbles, dousing everyone with Silly String and dancing to music. What began as a quiet occurrence blossomed into a happy affair! The gift bags were filled with goodies, and teddy bears donated by the International Toy Bank made the biggest hit. The volunteers were touched by some wonderful children, but Domenic will always be prominent in their memory. As they said their last goodbyes and dispensed their final hugs, he asked in an awed voice, "Do you live at the North Pole with Santa Claus?" No doubt about it, AAI volunteers made a difference.

December 17th: Korea

Airline Ambassador volunteers were greeted at the airport in Korea with open arms. Patch Adams and his assistant, Beach Clown, from the Gesundheit! Institute joined in the exuberance with their antics making this an especially memorable holiday party. The 350 children at the Holt Orphanage, all with some disability, surrounded the group with constant hugs. They were transported into the children's world by sharing time, love and songs. Children joined in singing Christmas carols, dancing and sending balloons soaring through the air, brightening everyone's days. Once more, these volunteers discovered that the greatest gift we can give is our time. Beach Clown reminds us all, "I'm always so amazed at how very little it takes to leave a lasting memory behind -- no great skills are ever required...I only hope I have left behind as much as I am taking away with me."



Dr. Patch Adams clowns with Korean orphans

January 6th: AIRPLANE to El Salvador!

57 Airline Ambassadors, including volunteer pilots and flight attendants, filled an American Airlines 757 with over 30,000 pounds of food, clothing, medical and school supplies, but mostly toys and gifts for over 1,000 children in El Salvador. In two days, the team members gave parties at nine different orphanages, playing, singing and sharing time with some wonderful children.

The Kiwanis Clubs of El Salvador hosted the entire team and the First Lady provided transport and entertainment as well. Six Youth Ambassadors and Brino the Clown added a special touch to the holiday festivities.

A special thanks to Cathy Pyke for arranging for the entire airplane and to Gloria Reid and Kathy Savage for coordinating this mission.



Cazzie with orphans in El Salvador

Hours after the team left, a 7.6 earthquake hit San Salvador. See back page story.

A Kid Like Me

by AAI Youth Participant,
Amanda Miller (7th Grader)

I didn't know there are people who live a life
different from mine:
 who live in darkness
 who shiver at night
 who walk to school without shoes
 who don't know they have choices to make.
Their clothes hang in tatters
 their houses are shacks.
Hunger is at their doorstep
 and sickness a shadow.
 Yet they are no different from me.

Airline Ambassadors International is a non-profit organization dedicated to helping children in need. It is made up of more than 2500, airline personnel and others, who volunteer as "Ambassadors of Goodwill" in their home communities and abroad. They hand-deliver humanitarian aid, escort children in need, assist at special events and involve youth in humanitarian projects. Through service and compassion they are raising awareness around the world.

To join Airline Ambassadors or to learn more visit our website at www.airlineamb.org or call 650-347-3500.

Hours after the Airline Ambassador holiday volunteers left El Salvador, the country was struck by a devastating earthquake, affecting one million people and leaving 80,000 homeless. AAI members have helped with major relief efforts since that time. Thank you to Missions Unlimited with 16,000 pounds of plastic housing, to American Airlines for donating an A300 aircraft to carry thousands of pounds of humanitarian aid gathered by the Salvadoran community in the U.S. Thank you to combined efforts of LDS Charities, Orphans of the World and Kiwanis International.

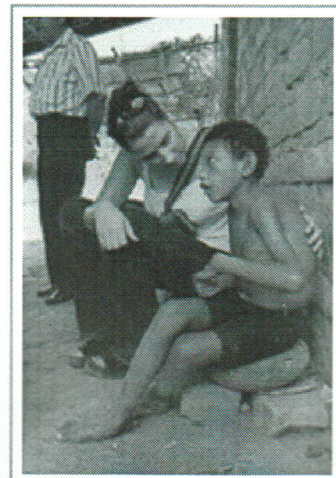
A Valentine Story of Hope

Just before leaving El Salvador, a few remaining volunteers made one last visit to a family in a mud hut village outside of San Salvador. There they met Sandra Avalo, a single mother, whose husband left her with three disabled children. Sandra sleeps on the dirt floor of their hut, allowing her three children to sleep in comfort on the bed.

She awakens every morning at 5am, walks a mile barefoot, to pick bright yellow Nance berries. She sells them on the street to support and feed her family. She must carry her oldest son, Dannes, everywhere, the hope of a wheelchair not even a dream. Her middle child, Wilbur, a top student at the local school, was injured by a falling tree. He still works hard at school, having learned to write with his left hand. He too walks to school barefoot, but remains undaunted. Her youngest daughter, Lupita, is blind.

Never imagining, that shortly after leaving this family with the hope of a return visit, the area would be devastated by an earthquake. One of the volunteers spoke fervently of this family, prayed for their safety, and couldn't believe that a small ray of hope offered to this family might have been completely destroyed.

Now it is three weeks later and AAI volunteers are returning with a medical team and even more supplies. The Avalo family will receive an unbelievable Valentine...a new wheelchair for Dannes, school supplies and shoes for Wilbur and a soft, furry stuffed animal and hand-made quilt for Lupita, along with a medical evaluation for all!



Michaela and Dannes



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