

## January 2003 Update

Last night, I couldn't sleep. That is not so unusual, actually. Often, I lay awake thinking (and sometimes worrying!) about the Micah boys and their lives. I'm sure any parent of teenagers has experienced that kind of sleeplessness. Occasionally, I wake up with an urgent need to pray for one or more of our boys. Yet, last night, our boys slept peacefully in their bedrooms of the Micah Project, relatively crisis-free by adolescent standards. No, the face that would not leave my mind last night was not that of one of our boys. It was rather the face of a young street boy named Belsy.

In August 1999, before the Micah Project had opened, I wrote about Belsy in one of my updates. Today, as we celebrate the third anniversary of the Micah Project, I ask that you read an excerpt from that letter:

"Little Belsy is a ten-year old street boy who looks more like he is six. I first met him in a group home run by a local organization in which he was temporarily living. Belsy has big brown eyes and the kind of face that makes aunts and grandmothers pinch cheeks.

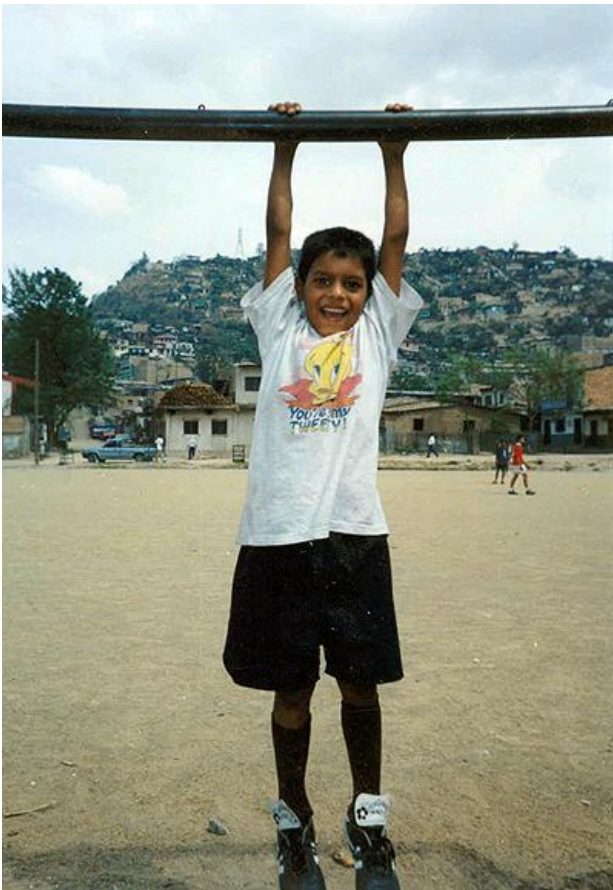


When I saw him last week, though, the innocence in his face was replaced by the war-weary look of a lifetime vagabond. I was eating in a chicken restaurant in downtown Tegucigalpa, after one of our nightly meetings with the Villa Linda Miller planning committee, when Belsy came up to the window. He was inhaling yellow glue, a toxic and highly addictive substance which gives the street kids a "high" and helps them forget their hunger pangs.

Belsy's eyes were half closed, and he wavered on his feet as he approached my window. As I ate, he held his hands out and did everything he could to get me to share my food. Finally, he stopped gesturing and simply stared at me through drug-deadened eyes as I finished my meal.

When I went out to talk to Belsy, I asked him why he left the group home he had been living in. He stopped, as if he were thinking about it, then in a haze said, "Give me twenty cents." I tried to get a further reaction out of this abandoned ten-year old, but "give me twenty cents" was as far as I could get.

I have a picture of Belsy that I took on a day-trip to a local park. He was hanging on a jungle gym and looking very much like every nine year old boy. As I continue working for Project Villa Linda Miller, I look at Belsy's picture often. I remember why I am working so hard: so that the kids of this community (Villa Linda Miller) will have a bright future and will not end up like Belsy, having to seek comfort in a bottle of industrial glue and food from the nearest willing passer-by." ~ August, 1999



It is with much grief that I re-read those words I wrote more than three years ago. For two weeks ago, in early January, 2003, Belsy was shot and killed on the same streets where he had lived the majority of his short life. The brutal murder of street kids is becoming a common occurrence in Honduras. Belsy was fourteen, and he never had a chance.

I wasn't going to write you about Belsy, for fear that some might think that I am using his death for publicity's sake. But Belsy deserves a eulogy...his precious and brief life deserves to be remembered and cherished by as many people who would care to learn his name. Several of the Micah boys lived with Belsy in one of his many short sojourns in the various street kid centers before he escaped back to the streets and his precious glue. What they most

remember about him is his innocence. Here was a little boy who never hurt a soul.

It seems that everyone has a story about Belsy. Jeony, our Villa Linda Miller coordinator, remembers Belsy when he was in another project that Jeony worked for. Belsy would spend all day drawing pictures with crayons and colored pencils.

While he never learned how to write his name, he became a very good drawer. Our Miguel remembers Belsy from 1999, when they lived together for a few months in yet another organization. Yesterday, when I showed Miguel a picture that I had taken of Belsy, he just shook his head and replied: "Belsy never changed. The way he looked in this picture is the way he looked when he died. He was an innocent." Our group home coordinator Roger recalls a conversation that he had with Belsy just a few weeks ago. Belsy was sitting in a small park with a bottle of yellow glue. When he saw Roger he said, "Professor, take me to live in that place where you work!" How do you explain to a boy who has no home that there is no room for him in our home?

It is easy to get really angry about Belsy's death. It is easy to get angry at the newspapers that present his death as a statistic only, as if somehow his loss was less important simply because he was a child alone in this world. Yes, it is easy to point fingers and place blame. If only society...if only his family...if only the government...if only this-or-that relief organization...but the finger pointing stops dead when it comes down to "if only I..." If only I had taken him into the Micah Project. If only I had shown the love that no one else in the world was willing to give him. But I have found that the cycle of "if only" that we tend to go through when we experience tragedy tends to make us feel so helpless that we end up becoming just one more passive bystander in a lost world.

The energy that I could have put into anger and finger-pointing over these lost kids, I have instead tried to throw into the Micah Project and our boys. We have tried to create a place that is so loving, so God-centered, so hope-filled, and so inspiring in these boys lives that they will leave the streets and its hard lessons in the distant past and look only into their brilliant futures.

This energy is a gift that has been given to us by God, and we must use it to create hope in these boys' lives. I look at our Darwin, who spent six years on the streets and was a close friend of Belsy's. For years, Darwin had that same dead look in his eyes as Belsy had the night I saw him outside the chicken restaurant. Now, after a year and a half at the Micah Project, sixteen year old Darwin is beginning to understand hope. In fact, just the other day he humorously told me, "I'm not going to have a girlfriend for twenty years because I want to concentrate on my studies." Maybe Darwin is being overzealous with his time frame, but the point is clear: he has hope and a plan for his future for the first time in his life.

God has given us twelve boys, and it has been our joy to watch hope shine into all the corners and shadowy areas of their fragile young lives. Yet, the agony is still there when we watch innocents such as Belsy lose the chance to see hope in their lives. Oh, how I wish we could take in 200 kids and not just twelve! How I wish we would have had a place for Belsy. Yet I know too that when kids are grouped into two-hundred, they tend to become statistics all over again. 200 kids can be fed and housed; 12 kids can be truly disciplined. That is a lesson that we have learned from the Master of disciple-making himself. If hope is to shine through, we must be

intimately involved in every aspect of our boys' lives. That means staying focused on a few. It means throwing ourselves heart, mind and soul into the discipleship of our boys. It means sticking with them through thick-and-thin until they have discerned what God's will is for their lives and are ready to reach out in hope and faith to grasp that sovereign plan.

So many of you have actively participated in our boys lives since we first opened the doors to our home exactly three years ago. You have come to know them, you have prayed for them, provided for them...God has placed you in their lives as part of their sustaining hope. When I write to you about Belsy, it is not just so that you will grieve with me, although that is part of it. I sincerely desire that Belsy be grieved over, for isn't grief really an expression of love for someone who is lost to us? And if there is one thing that Belsy always deserved yet never received, it is love. But I also write so that you may clearly and exactly know what your participation in our boys' lives has prevented. I write so that you may see that our boys are living, breathing miracles, literally ripped from the jaws of death on the streets. Hope has prevented them from becoming one statistic more.

This year, I urge you to help us sustain hope in our boys' lives; to pray a joyous prayer for our boys, that each day they would be more filled with the hope that transforms them. Pray for Cristino, David, Darwin, Harvin, Edwin, Marvin, Olvin, Pedro, José, Miguel, Oscar and Danilo. Pray that God would raise them into leaders who would be used to bring people into his kingdom before they become victims of this present darkness. And pray that, when it is time for the Micah Project to grow, as it will be when we begin the Leadership House next year, that we will never lose our passion to serve each individual boy as a disciple-in-training.

As I close, I ask of you one other thing. I ask it not for myself and not for the Micah Project and not for our boys. I ask it for a little boy who should have had a better chance at life. I ask that you would remember Belsy.

Sincerely,

Michael Miller

## February 2003 Update

It is amazing how sometimes we, as Christians, in our fervor to do good things for God, rush ahead of His will and end up doing things our way. One of the biggest temptations for those of us who work at the Micah Project as missionaries is that, in our zeal to do the Lord's work in Honduras, we forget to seek out His will. Every time we leave the Micah House we encounter people who are killing themselves with drugs and alcohol, others who are barely surviving because of the base poverty in which they find themselves, and still others who, quite simply, need to know the love of God. It is so tempting to jump into the thick of things and reach out to everyone who needs our help!

It is especially hard when innocent children like Belsy are dying violent deaths in the streets. As I mentioned in our January report, Belsy was a young street boy who was caught in the crossfire of a gun battle in the market section of Tegucigalpa. As we grieve for Belsy, our desire to work with street kids has grown. Yet, for the past couple of years, we had been frustrated in "our" desires to get involved in the lives of the street kids. We used to have many informal encounters with the street kids. We knew which kids slept in front of the downtown Pizza Hut, which ones lived in the park in front of the Honduran National Congress, and those that lived by the National soccer stadium. Yet even those encounters have ended since January 2002, when violence in this city threatened to escalate out of control and the Honduran army began patrolling the streets. Since that time the street kids, especially the older ones, have become invisible, using their intimate knowledge of the back alleyways to avoid attention that, these days, could get them killed.

How then can we reach out in ministry to the kids on the streets? Just when we couldn't find an answer to that question, God answered it for us. In two very clear ways in February, God called us into a deeper ministry with street kids.

The first occurred one night when we were returning to the Micah House after a late meal with some guests from the United States. Driving by the national stadium, we heard someone shout "Michael!" As we pulled our van to a stop on the deserted nighttime streets, a lanky street boy named "Pirocco" came running up (we are using his street nickname for privacy). I've known Pirocco since 1998 when he was temporarily living in a group home with some of the other boys who now live in the Micah house. But Pirocco's story is the same as so many other street kids; after a few months of stability and growth, the drugs called him back to the streets, where he has been ever since.

For almost six years, Pirocco was best friends with the Micah Project's Darwin. Darwin and Pirocco were infamous for their money-making scams on the streets. One of their most successful schemes was taking a bus out to one of the middle class neighborhoods, where they would go door-to-door asking for old clothes. Once back downtown, they would sell the clothes and use the money for drugs. When we

asked one of the older street boys what Darwin and Pirocco were like when they were together, he just shook his head in mock exasperation and said, "They were terrible, terrible!"



(Darwin hugs his street buddy named Pirocco)

The night that Pirocco approached our van was the first time we have seen him in many months. As he stood talking with Darwin, I couldn't help but notice the difference between the two boys. Although Darwin still struggles occasionally with the effects of his long term drug use, his robust frame and shining eyes seemed out of place there on the streets when compared with Pirocco's emaciated body, drug-hazed expression, and street-wary stance (for a picture of Darwin and Pirocco together, see our "Street Kids in Honduras" section).

Wavering from the effects of the yellow glue he was inhaling, Pirocco asked us to buy him something to eat. As we talked, a whole group of street boys and girls approached us; suddenly there were almost thirty boys and girls surrounding our van. Many of them were well known to us; kids that we used to see all over the downtown area. We learned first hand from them that only at night do they feel safe to emerge back onto the streets. It was hard to tell from their deadened eyes, but it seemed that there was a new desperation in the group now that they were not welcome on the daytime streets of Tegucigalpa.

After talking with them for awhile, we drove off to look for a late night place to buy food and returned to the stadium street with seven whole chickens and thirty bean

tacos. As the kids flocked around our van door, the food disappeared in seconds into ravenous hands and mouths. Several of the kids asked us to take them with us to our program. Painfully, we told them that we did not have the space, but we promised to return soon.

Handing out food to street kids is not going to change their lives, but that night was nevertheless a beginning point for our ministry with them. The next day, three street kids showed up at the Micah House, including Pirocco. Erin, our missionary from Chicago, sat him down and taught him to write his name. Later, when I walked onto our patio, there was Darwin, his ex-partner-in-crime, teaching him how to write the alphabet! Erin has begun meeting with Pirocco every Monday in a downtown park to begin to teach him basic lessons. So far, he has shown up early to his class for three weeks running! Today, he brought another street boy along with him. I imagine Erin will have an entire school in the streets before long!

A second opportunity to work with street kids was provided us last month by Sister Martha, a feisty and compassionate nun who runs the home schooling program through which our boys study. She told us about a municipal soup kitchen that wanted to do more with the kids that arrived there than simply hand out food. Sister Martha agreed to donate the curriculum and materials to begin educating the kids, but they needed teachers to teach it! Thus, three weeks ago, our boys, along with a few teens that we have been discipling from Villa Linda Miller, arrived at an abandoned factory, where thirty young street kids were awaiting! Since then, our boys have worked with the street kids daily, doing simple games and Bible songs, and preparing the kids to begin their first grade curriculum.

When I think about all that has happened in the last month, I am amazed both at God's perfect wisdom and at our habitual stubbornness thinking of this as OUR ministry, rather than HIS. He has brought us into contact with the street kids once again in his perfect timing. Not only is our staff ready and willing to take on this challenge, but our boys, after working with kids all last year at Villa Linda Miller, are also equipped to undertake this ministry. And that is truly a miracle: ex-street kids being used by God to reach out to those still on the streets.

To "wait upon the Lord" is a hard lesson to learn sometimes. Every time we have waited upon His will, however, he has brought people and ministry in our lives at just the right time, and for His glory rather than ours. It is a great comfort to me that the Apostle Paul says, "but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (II Corinthians 4:7). What a joy to know that he uses us, fallen, imperfect and breakable as we are, to be His light in a dark world!

As we watch the Micah boys develop day-by-day into fine Christian men, as we see our ministry in Villa Linda Miller touch the lives of hundreds of people, and as we wait expectantly to see where God will take this new ministry with the street kids, we praise Him for loving each and every one of these people and drawing them

closer to Him. Please pray that we would have the wisdom, courage, and love needed to reach out to the people that God places in our path in His good timing!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller



## April 2003 Update

Dear friends,

Our home-schooling program offers a blessed routine for the thirteen Micah boys and the five neighborhood boys who join us every day. After the chaos of street life, the comfort of routine is like a security blanket in which the boys can wrap themselves. Our five hours of school are the most intimate time we have with the boys. The phone goes unanswered, the front door stays closed; it is just us and the boys every morning. It is a time, to quote the lyrics of Fernando Ortega, when the worried world stays far away and small. During our hours of class, the violence and strife that you hear about on the streets of Honduras is as distant from our boys as it is from you.

We do not use these golden hours to rush through our official home-schooling curriculum so that we can get on with the rest of our day. Especially for me, who teaches the older boys, our mornings in classes represent the precious and ever-dwindling time we have left to help form and prepare these boys. Going beyond "reading, writing and 'rithmetic," we strive to use our classes to open their eyes to the world that God has created and to begin to paint a picture of how they can be leaders in it. I have a self-imposed goal as a teacher: to inspire my students on a daily basis. Whether it be discussing the symbolism in a masterful novel or creating a debate over a certain topic, I want my students to lose themselves in the world of knowledge for at least a little while everyday.



(Above: Edwin and Oscar work on an agricultural experiment in our home-schooling program.)

Recently, our five tenth-graders, Olvin, David, Marvin, Tino and Harvin have been reading Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn. You might ask what a 19th century novel about a sleepy Mississippi river town has to do with modern urban life in Honduras. But as we began to read about Huck's drunk and violent father, his subsequent escape from society, and his long journey to figure out his place in that society, suddenly this masterful novel seems to be speaking directly to our boys.

There is a part in Huckleberry Finn in which this young boy has floated down the Mississippi to a small town, in which he observes the death of a drunk street man at the hands of one of the wealthy shop-owners who was tired of the drunken antics of his victim. As Huck observes the entire town pushing and shoving in order to gawk at the body, suddenly, in a mob action, the town members decide to lynch the shop-owner who killed the drunk. When they arrive at his house in the unthinking frenzy of a mob, however, he stops them with these words:

"The pitifulest thing out is a mob...they don't fight with courage that's born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass, and from their officers. But a mob without any man at the head of it is beneath pitifulness."

A few days after reading this section, there was a minor traffic accident in front of the Micah house in the evening. One of the parties involved was drunk and a fairly loud argument ensued. The drivers decided to wait for the police to arrive, which took almost two hours. While they waited people began to crowd around the two drivers. Soon, there were almost sixty people crowded around, gawking at the accident, laughing and talking and enjoying this evening's entertainment.

Later in the evening, I walked into our library and saw Miguel staring out the window at the mass of people. I asked him if he was gawking at the accident and he replied, "No, I'm looking at all the people crowded around to stare at the accident. They're just like the mob in Huckleberry Finn, aren't they?"

That spark of insight is why we pour so much of ourselves into educating the boys: we want them to be able to stand apart from the unthinking mob in order to make clear-minded decisions about their lives and their role as sons in God's kingdom. For a young Honduran male, following the crowd too often means dropping out of school, joining a gang and glorifying the violence that is the Honduran street. Young Hondurans are surrounded by example of people who have destroyed their lives by following that crowd. Giving our boys the thinking tools and the vision necessary to step above that life and see it for what it's worth will enable them to become the leaders that can begin to transform that "pitiful" crowd.

The decisions that our boys are making convince me that our focus on education and discipleship is beginning to have a profound influence in their lives. Last Friday night, The Honduran National Symphony Orchestra had a free concert in the central plaza cathedral. Since a musician has been coming to the Micah House every Friday to give the boys music classes, we decided to invite them to go with us. While most teens would be hesitant to give up their Friday night for a classical concert, a few of our boys chose to go with us. During the concert, they sneaked up to the front to get a closer look at the different instruments. They enjoyed the concert and pumped us with questions and observations afterwards.

While the concert shows that the boys are on a quest for knowledge, even more importantly, they are beginning to put their knowledge into practice. A couple of weeks ago, we invited ten boys from Villa Linda Miller to spend the weekend with the Micah boys. The boys that came, many of whom are not Christians, know the Micah boys enough to know that they are unique. We spent all Saturday with them at a beautiful park in the mountains, playing soccer and swimming. Then, they spent the night with us at the Micah house. During that time, Jeony, our ministry coordinator, began to plant a vision in these ten boys' hearts that they, too could be leaders in their community. Several of our boys' shared what it means to be a leader of character and strength. By the end of the weekend, it was obvious that many of the boys from Villa Linda Miller saw something in the Micah boys that they, too, wanted for themselves.

Many people are seeing this difference in the Micah boys. Just last week, an orphanage called two of the Micah boys, Marvin and Harvin, so that they would go and share their testimony with the eighty boys at the orphanage. They ended up spending over two hours talking about their lives and answering questions that the boys from the orphanage asked. When they were leaving, they were invited back to speak next month! It is their chance to pass on to others what God is teaching them.

Mark Twain once said "One gets large impressions in boyhood, sometimes, which he has to fight against all his life." Our boys were definitely filled with some pretty dark impressions by the daily nightmares of street life. But it is our hope and prayer that the picture we are painting for them at the Micah Project will create an even larger impression: that of a loving Lord and Savior who wants to use each one of His sons and daughters to advance His kingdom. It may be ten or fifteen years before we truly know if all of the passion we have placed in raising them and educating truly helped them to live extraordinary lives as Kingdom servants. But it is already clear that the education they are receiving and the goals they are setting for their lives set them apart.

I am convinced that your prayers are a hedge around our boys, allowing them to keep focused on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Our boys are works

of art in progress; the prayers and support with which you cheer them onward are vital so that this good work may be completed in their lives.

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

P.S. We have begun a capital funds campaign in order to purchase a home for the new phase of the Micah Project, the Leadership House. The Leadership House will provide a place for our older boys to live while they finish their college education. It is the last step in this process of forming Christian leaders! Your support for the Leadership House is much appreciated! Please view our website at [www.micahcentral.org](http://www.micahcentral.org) to learn more about the Leadership House.

## June 2003 Update

Dear friends,

Lately at the Micah House, I have been learning something of the bittersweet joy that a father feels when his son or daughter turns eighteen. The little guys that I met several years ago and who have formed part of the Micah family for three years are quickly becoming men. When Danilo turned eighteen on May 9, he was the fifth Micah boy to do so!

Occasionally, I feel like pushing the pause button on time and letting our boys stay young for a couple more years. I guess there are two reasons for this. The first is that our boys, because of their years on the streets, got to live very little of their childhood. Having to dig through the trash to find your daily bread as Darwin often did or shining shoes to feed your five younger siblings like Jose was forced to do tend to initiate kids into a harsh world of adult responsibility. Their years at the Micah house have really been their only chance to be children--and now, how quickly they are men and ready to head back out into the world again! Secondly, most parents have eighteen years to "train a child in the way he should go." We have only had three years with the boys! While we have tried to pour all of our energy into discipling the boys and training them to become successful citizens of God's kingdom, sometimes we hear the clock ticking and think of all there is yet to teach them!

At the same time, we praise God for how He is faithfully transforming our boys into His men. Just a couple of years ago, David was so quiet and withdrawn that he seemed almost invisible. Now, he walks with a new confidence in his steps. When he is out at Villa Linda Miller, the kids run up to him shouting, "David, David!" He wraps them in his arms and looks very much like the loving parent and teacher that he may one day become. Danilo was quite the fighter on the streets; now, he is capable of showing such tenderness and empathy that it is obvious that there is a pastoral role in his future. Marvin was infamous as a child for hitting a crisis and escaping onto the streets. In the orphanage he used to live in, he escaped over the wall in the middle of the night at least five different times when things got rough for him. Now, he talks about becoming a counselor and how he loves to listen to other people and try to help them.

Yes, while we would want to hold onto the "kid" that is in each of these young men, we must celebrate the ways that God is molding them as they approach adulthood. The transition may be a scary one, but it is definitely in God's hands! Ever since first envisioning the Micah Project, we knew that the boys would one day reach this stage. And, since that time, we have understood that we must continue to support them in these exciting years of early adulthood.



(Above: Danilo reaches out to a girl at the city dump)

We feel that the Leadership House is where that transition will take place. This new home will offer our older boys a place to live as they finish their studies. It will eventually have space for twenty young men who want to pursue their higher education. A Christian mentor will live at the Leadership House to provide counseling, academic support, discipleship and career planning. This mentor will help each young man move through a process in which he will achieve increasing independence and adult responsibility, until they can become fully-equipped Christian adults and servant-leaders.

In late May, we found a home that we think would be ideal for the Leadership House. It is just four blocks from our current home. We are very excited about the potential of this property! It has a first floor apartment which would be perfect for the residential director who will live there. On the second floor, there are four bedrooms, three bathrooms, a living room, dining room and kitchen. Behind the house is an open garage for two cars. There is also a cement flooring built above the garage which could be used in the future to build more bedrooms. On the front of the house, there is a second floor patio and a rooftop terrace which both have a great view of downtown Tegucigalpa! You can view the house on our website, [www.micahcentral.org](http://www.micahcentral.org).

The asking price for the house is approximately \$46,500 (not bad for a house of this size!). Additionally, we will need another \$20,000 to remodel the house, furnish it and prepare it for habitation. As of June 1, we have raised \$22,000 towards the purchase of the house--almost half of the purchase price! We hope to purchase the house in the next few months in order to do the "fixin'-up" necessary to move the boys in next January.

You all have been so instrumental in providing the means for these boys to begin to dream and to work toward those dreams. I hope the amazing work that God has done in their lives fills your heart with as much joy as it does mine. Also, I ask that you prayerfully consider supporting the boys in this next stage of their lives, the Leadership House. To make a special donation towards the purchase of the Leadership House, you may write a check made out to "The Micah Project" and write "Leadership House" on the memo line. Please send all donations to the following address: Mr. Randy Mayfield, Micah Project Board of Directors, 7700 Davis Dr., Clayton, MO 63105.

As we raise funds for the Leadership House, we must also continue to raise funds to support our current programs. God has continued to bless the Micah House, our ministry out in Villa Linda Miller and our work among the street children of Tegucigalpa. Your support for these continuing programs is vital. Currently, we have operational funds through September; we are seeking new funds through the end of the year!

A couple of months ago, Jarvin, one of our eighteen year olds said, "The Leadership House will be something new for all of us. We know that we will have a lot more responsibility with both our own lives and with the other boys. Living there in the house, we will learn to think more about the future, to make goals and achieve them." I have little doubt that, with your support, these boys will accomplish the goals that God has laid before them!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller (prayer requests follow)

P.S. So that you may know how to pray for our older boys, I have placed here a short update about each one:

\* Marvin, 18: After his tenth grade classes, Marvin spends his afternoons in soccer practice for the "University" soccer club. He is also continuing his guitar classes and is in our men's chorale. He is talking about becoming a Christian counselor.

\* Jarvin, 18: Also in the tenth grade, Jarvin teaches a home-schooling program every afternoon at a soup kitchen for street kids. He also desires to continue his acting classes.

\* David, 18: David is also a tenth grader. In the afternoons, three days a week, he runs our Bible club for children out at Villa Madrid, a housing project that is next door to Villa Linda Miller. Two days a week, he helps Jarvin at the soup kitchen.

\*Cristino, 18: Another 10th grader! Tino takes advanced computing classes at a technical school downtown every afternoon. Currently, he is learning computer maintenance and repair. He is also taking piano lessons.

\*Danilo, 18: He is in the ninth grade. He runs our Bible clubs out at Villa Linda Miller three afternoons a week. He also has an outreach to the children who live in the city trash dump on those same three afternoons. He is also taking piano lessons.



## August 2003 Update

Last Friday, the director of a local orphanage called the Micah Project just as the sun was setting over the western rim of Tegucigalpa's mountains. Surprisingly, instead of asking for me, she asked to speak to Marvin, the oldest Micah boy, whom she knew well from the many activities that we've done together with her orphanage. As I sat at my desk, I heard Marvin say, "lately at Micah, we've been really blessed and are learning a lot about God. We'd be glad to do it." When he hung up, I found out what "it" was. The orphanage had planned to do a "vigilia" which is a long, sometimes all-night prayer service that is very popular in the Honduran church. Unfortunately, the people who were supposed to coordinate the service cancelled at the last minute, and the director asked for some of our boys to fill in!

Marvin and Danilo headed out to the orphanage at 6:30 p.m., with their backpack full of Christian music tracks, and didn't get back to the Micah house until after midnight! When they got there, ninety kids and thirty teenage orphans were waiting to hear if our boys had anything valuable to say that would be meaningful to their own lives. Both Danilo and Marvin spent over three hours sharing what God has done in their lives and leading the boys in energetic times of worship! The older boys from the orphanage especially paid great attention as some of them began to understand, perhaps for the first time in their lives, that God loves them and is willing to use them in a mighty way, just as he is doing in the lives of Danilo and Marvin. As they were leaving, the director stopped to thank them. She told them that lately, her older boys seemed to lack hope for their lives and their future, and that Marvin and Danilo's message is exactly what they needed to hear.

In retrospect, it is not hard to see why people such as the orphanage director see hope embodied in a special way in our boys' lives. In fact, if you think about it, "hope" is the one word that best describes the difference between the Micah boys and the majority of Honduran young people. First, hope eternal—their knowledge that, because of the great sacrifice and victory of Jesus Christ, they are sons in his eternal kingdom. And secondly, they have hope that, in the here-and-now, God has an extraordinary plan for each one of their lives...for His good purposes!

How have these young men been able to grab on to hope so fiercely? It is because they have seen God so obviously working in their lives at the Micah Project, allowing them to take great steps forward in their education and in a life of servant leadership. He has graciously granted them a sure knowledge of his presence every step of the way. Recently, a couple of exciting things have happened to confirm yet again to the boys that God is preparing a future for them.

The first of these exciting signs is the purchase of the Leadership House! As I wrote to you in my last letter, we had identified a building that would be perfect for the Leadership House, the home where our older boys will live as they complete their

higher education and move into Christian adulthood. The house we identified costs \$43,500. While we have not yet raised the full amount, we felt that we should put a down payment on the house now to prevent it from being sold and to avoid having it looted (a common reality in Honduras), since it currently sits empty. After a negotiation process, the owner and I agreed that Micah would pay \$23,000 as a first payment for the house, with the rest of the price to be paid in November. That was pretty amazing, since at that time we had \$22,800 in our Leadership House account! On Friday, July 25, Micah Board treasurer Bob Bewley flew down with the cash to make the first payment. That same day, we met with the owner and signed the contract, officially claiming the Leadership House as our own! What an amazing moment of answered prayer!

Another amazing thing about this event is that so many of our supporters were present for it. In addition to Bob Bewley and his wife Jo, also present were Dr. Gene Alford and Mary Zavala from the First Presbyterian church medical team in Houston, Matt Darr, the gentleman who will coordinate the Leadership House next year, and twenty-seven members of the youth group from the Greentree Community Church. The day after we bought the house, we all gathered there for its official inauguration. We crowded onto the front terrace of the home, which has a beautiful view of downtown Tegucigalpa. There, we asked God's blessing on the house and all who would pass through its doors. What a special touch of God's providence that so many friends were on hand to ask for God's blessing for this new phase of our ministry!

Making the first payment on the Leadership House was a physical sign of hope to our boys that God has a plan for their future. Yet, that same week, there was another, even more eternal sign that God is working in our boys' lives. As I mentioned, the youth group from the Greentree church in St. Louis was spending the week with us in Honduras. They ran a four-day sports camp for the teens of Villa Linda Miller. During the week, the Greentree youth and the Micah boys were focused on sharing their faith with the teens from Villa Linda Miller. After four days of presenting the gospel through word and deed, the group finished their camp last Thursday evening with a bonfire. As we surrounded the fire, we had one of the most open and joyous times of worship that I have had since being in Honduras. After the worship time, several teens from Villa Linda Miller gave their lives to Christ! Additionally, a couple of the Micah boys renewed their commitment to their Lord. It was truly a Spirit-filled and joyous event!



(Above: visiting the newly-purchased Leadership House with the Greentree group!)

To see God breaking down barriers in some very difficult and hardened teens was a sign of hope for all of us present. It was also amazing to some of our boys that God was able to break through some barriers in their own hearts that they did not even know existed. You can imagine that our boys, having lived through terrible abuse and trauma in their childhood and while on the streets, aren't naturally trusting of other people. A defense mechanism that many street kids demonstrate is that they keep tight control over their emotional lives, carefully guarding their souls, in order to avoid the risk of being rejected or abused all over again.

While many of the boys have been able to open up their lives and their hearts while in the Micah Project, some still have these old barriers that they constructed in their hearts to avoid being hurt again. However, God really used that night of worship, along with the other clear and recent signs of his grace, to begin to remove them. Recently, two of the boys' have opened up to me about some difficult experiences of their lives that they had not shared with anyone. To me, that is another sign that hope is ever-increasing in their lives; they are beginning to trust that God will shine his live into these locked corners of their hearts and will prevent the darkness of this world from hurting them so terribly again.

It is truly a blessing to be surrounded by so many signs of hope. As Marvin and Danilo so clearly demonstrated at the orphanage last week, we cannot keep all these signs of hope to ourselves! In order for hope to increase in our hearts, we must be willing to share it to a hopeless world. Our boys will get that chance again this week. On Sunday, we accepted a new boy into the Micah Project. His background includes such acts of degradation that he sees almost no hope for his life. In recent months, he has been hanging out with a group of friends on the streets that will surely lead him to destruction. As this boy steps out of a fallen world over the threshold of our hope-filled home, will he be able to experience the same hope that lights our boys' eyes? Every time we get a new boy, erasing the habits of hopelessness seems like a daunting task. However, there is a group of verses in the Lamentations 3 that speak well to our boys as they enter this process:

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall...Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

We have full confidence that God will continue to demonstrate to Micah boys, both old and new, that his compassions will not cease in their lives. We pray that as this miraculous process happens in our boys' lives, that it will give you hope in your own journey as well!

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

P.S. In this exciting time in the Micah Project, we ask that you would prayerfully consider donating to this ongoing ministry! Currently, we have raised approximately \$29,000 toward the \$43,500 purchase price of the Leadership House. Additionally, we will need an additional \$20,000 to remodel the home and prepare it for opening in January 2004. Please see our website, [www.micahcentral.org](http://www.micahcentral.org), for more details!

## October 2003 Update

There is a haunting picture of Jarvin, one of the Micah boys who has been with us since the beginning of the project. He can't have been more than seven or eight years old when it was taken. Although there is no context to the photo, no background to show where he was or what he was doing, the picture speaks volumes about his life on the streets. In fact, maybe it is that very lack of context, the sense of empty space, the frightening nothingness around him, that informs us so well of this street child whose face is half hidden in the shadows. Indeed, the picture speaks of a child who is used to the shadows.

I have heard the story of this child; he has told me in great detail of the things he suffered on the streets. It is a story that I do not want to tell you; it contains horrors that would fill a thousand dark hours with nightmares. While Jarvin's stories are better left to the demonic pit in which they were created, they are nevertheless written in all of the lines and shadows of his face in this one searing photograph.

That face...it wears the expression of an old, world-weary man who has seen too much, yet it sits on an eight year old frame dressed in tattered rags. It expresses a sadness that already seems to have given up on a life that has only just begun. It is a face that seems to ask, "What horror awaits around the next corner?" It seems to demand, "I am eight years old. How much more must I bear?"



I don't share this picture with you to inspire pity; rather, so that you might understand the enormity of our joy when Jarvin turned nineteen this Monday. For if this picture is the physical definition of depravity, Jarvin the young man is a physical reminder of awesome grace.

There is no earthly reason that the child in the photo should be the confident, peaceful, caring, intelligent young man who blesses our lives here on a daily basis. There is no earthly reason why Jarvin's spirit was not destroyed before his ninth birthday. Yet I stand before you as a witness to testify that this young man is, as he stands now at the doorstep of adulthood, one of the most remarkable people I have ever known.

Jarvin wrote some reflective words on his birthday this Monday. In his eloquence, there is great insight into how he survived the worst that Evil could throw at him. He wrote, "I have learned that God is a just God. I am happy that I can see his hand, manifesting itself in our lives on a daily basis. I know that He has chosen us for a great purpose. We might not know why he has chosen us, but we have seen how faithful he has been."

If there is a living, breathing sign that God can create a beautiful new work out of something that was unrecognizably damaged by evil, that would be Jarvin. He has become an amazing man who does good things with his life, not to be noticed, but rather to humbly share with others the love that infused new life into him.

On Saturdays, for example, he hops on a bus early in the morning, which then winds up treacherously steep dirt roads back into the slum from which he fled so many years ago. He spends all day Saturday teaching four different levels of English classes to very poor people who are enrolled in an adult education program. At the end of a long day of teaching, he spends the night on the floor of a shack inhabited by his sister and brother-in-law, only to get up early on Sunday morning to be back at the Micah House in time for church.

No one told Jarvin to do this. It was not a part of our ministry plan at the Micah Project and Jarvin doesn't fulfill any requirement for doing it. Besides asking for a few lempiras now and then to make some copies for his classes, he never makes a big deal about what he is doing. Somehow he seems to know that this slum, which was the scene of some horrific events in his life, no longer holds any fear for him. Rather, he takes it on himself to shine the light of hope in the place that for him held the darkest memories.

Turning nineteen may not seem like a big event for a boy who has already lived an entire lifetime of struggle and change. Yet it is huge for a boy who knows clearly that he will be used greatly by God in the years to come. The first part of those coming years will take place in the Leadership House, where Jarvin and five other Micah boys will move next January. Although the Leadership House is only a few

blocks from the existing Micah house, that transition will be a physical sign that the boys are moving every nearer to that big life purpose that Jarvin talks about.

The Leadership House is a beautiful building. It's tall ceilings and airy rooms open onto a patio that overlooks Tegucigalpa. But what will go on inside the Leadership house will be even more beautiful than the bricks and mortar of its physical structure. The house may have a wonderful view of our city, but the boys who live inside the house will gain an even better view of the kingdom of God and their place in it. As a "chosen people" who belong to God, the Leadership house will prepare the boys to "declare the praises of Him who called [them] out of darkness into his wonderful light" (I Pedro 2:9).

When we bought the Leadership house in July, we paid half of the purchase price (because that's all we had!). Now, because of your generosity and faithfulness, I will meet with the owner of the house this Friday to pay the rest of the price. The house will be ours!

The day that the boys found out that donations had arrived to complete the purchase of the Leadership house, we had an impromptu worship service. They boys celebrated the fact that God has them in his hands. Perhaps Cristino said it best when he wrote these words about the Leadership house: "God has a purpose and a plan for our lives. It is not just by chance that we were chosen to be in the Micah Project. God had this place prepared for us just as he prepared the Promised Land for the Hebrews when they left bondage in Egypt. God has poured so many blessings into my life...both material and spiritual. This tells me that He is preparing something even bigger for us and for our lives. For all that He has done, for all that He is doing, and for all that He will do in our lives, we give him thanks."

I would like to echo those words of thanksgiving. I give thanks to God for the blessing that these boys have been to me and to many other people whose lives they have touched. I would also like to give thanks to you all, who continue to be a physical sign of hope in the boys' lives. As we continue to raise funds to complete the remodeling and furnishing of the Leadership house, I constantly remember that only a few months ago, the Leadership house was nothing more than a vision. Even the leaky roof and broken plumbing that must be repaired before we move in seem like a miracle when I think about how quickly God has moved to provide this place for the boys' future!

It is my sincere desire that you can join with us in celebrating the fifteen miracles that are the Micah boys and the big plan that he has for each of their lives!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

**“Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the  
Morning”  
December 2003 Update**

Last Wednesday was the saddest day that we have experienced at the Micah Project since opening our home in 2000. Around noon, we received news that Jeony’s twelve-year-old daughter Gabriela had died in the main public hospital of Tegucigalpa. Jeony, the Honduran missionary who works with the Micah Project, is like a father to many of our boys, and Gabriela was like a little sister to them. She had a kidney transplant a couple of years ago, and had been in the hospital this year since October. On Wednesday, she succumbed to her illness after putting up a very courageous fight.

“Brave” and “faith-filled” are appropriate ways to describe Gabriela. Although she lived in constant pain, she always managed to be a blessing to those around her. She had a level of maturity that was way beyond her twelve years. As she began to slip away in the past couple of weeks, she said to Jeony that, if they were thinking of getting her a new kidney transplant, she would rather go home to be with Jesus. I think she wanted to spare everyone the pain of another surgery. She had an amazingly generous spirit for such a young child!

Even so, you can imagine how devastating her death was to her family. The death of a child is an excruciatingly painful reminder that we live in a broken and fallen world. While we know that Jesus has won the battle against death and that Gabriela is resting safely in His arms, we also cry out against the separation and tragedy that remain with us until He comes again. Jeony, who is a loving and faith-filled Christian man, has been living that tension between grief and hope in the last few days. At Gabriela’s burial service on Thursday, Jeony spoke to those gathered there with tears streaming down his cheeks. He said that he was going to donate all of Gabriela’s Christmas gifts to the children who scavenge through the dump, the children that Jeony and the Micah boys have been working with this year. That simple statement brought home to all of us standing around the grave not only the loss of his child, but also the hope that God continues to bring new lives into His eternal kingdom.

This tension between loss and hope with which every Christian lives has been made very real to the Micah boys in the past few weeks. The boys have had to say “good-bye” several times recently. Jeremy, our intern from Wheaton College, left Honduras in November after six months with the Micah Project. He was truly a big brother to the boys, and had an easy way of relating with the boys that made him an instant friend. Our Darwin made it a point to give “Jerry” at least six hugs a day! It was a hard day for Darwin and the others when they took Jeremy to the airport for the last time.





(Jeony Ordoñez ministers to the children in Villa Linda Miller)

Also, the day of Gabriela's funeral was the day that Becca Hogan, Micah volunteer for two years, left Honduras. In fact, we dropped Becca off at the airport for a subdued send-off en route to Gaby's funeral. Becca was also an important part of the boys' family for the last couple of years. During her time in Honduras, she was a master at one-on-one conversations, and created a safe space in which the boys and others could open up to her. She learned Spanish faster than anyone I have ever met. When I asked her why she said, "there was so much I wanted to say to the boys when I first came, that I had to learn Spanish out of necessity!" Indeed, she did have a lot to share with the boys during her two years in Honduras, and she will be greatly missed.

How are the boys handling so many good-byes in so short a period? You might think that our boys might be accustomed to loss after surviving life on the streets. After all, they suffered unspeakable tragedy throughout their childhood. It may even seem that these current losses are small compared to what the boys lost while on the streets. Yet street life is so heart deadening that it trains those who live it to look at loss without blinking an eye, steeling their hearts to bury any sense of human grief that tragedy should bring. In the streets, the most common way to deal with tragedy is to laugh it off and to keep moving on.

I think our tendency at the Micah Project is to want to shield the boys from tragedy and loss. Haven't they lived through enough, after all? Yet I have come to believe that this is not a healthy desire. Our goal at the Micah Project is not to hide the boys away from real life, to create a protective bubble around them that will keep all painful reality at bay. On the contrary, if our boys are to be healthy and

compassionate Christian adults, they must learn to confront the world with all their heart, mind and soul. If they are not given the chance to both grieve and express hope so openly, as Jeony did beside his daughter's grave, then they will live the rest of their life interacting through the tough shell of their defense mechanisms that they constructed on the streets.



(Above: Becca Hogan chats with Cristino.)

This is one of the many reasons why we involve our boys in ministry, why they work with the children at the city dump and people in desperate situations. We don't want them to think that Christianity is only valid within the safe confines of the Micah house. Their faith must be able to grieve with those who have lost so much just as it must be able to maintain hope in the salvation and future victory of our Lord over sin and death.

In these past few days of great loss, I have been able to observe how the boys are reacting to it. Some of them, especially the younger ones who have been with us for less time, still have remnants of that hardened protective shell that comes with surviving the streets. As tears welled up around them on the day of Gabriela's funeral, I could see a couple of them pull into themselves a little bit, withdrawing from the pain around them. But at the same time, I could see the beginnings of maturity in others, as they met the pain head on. In one of the most beautiful

moments of the day, Cristino walked up to Jeony and put his arm around him as they smoothed over the last layers of dirt on his daughter's grave. They stood there arm-in-arm for quite a while. What a brave, gentle and compassionate thing for Cristino to do!

Miguel was another who showed signs of growth on that day. This young man has about the hardest protective armor possible when it comes to shutting out pain or fear. Since coming to the Micah Project in 2000, he has been one of the slowest to trust, to open up the areas of his heart that he was forced to close off during his time on the street. That began to change however, a couple of months ago when his mother and younger siblings reappeared in his life after many years of estrangement. Since the day his extremely poor mom showed up at the Micah house, I began to see a new softness in his eyes that indicated that, possibly, some of those barriers in his heart might be weakening. Then, as I sat by him for a while at the cemetery after Gabriela's burial, I could see in his face that he was letting these things reach his heart. That evening, he went to visit his mom at her shack for the first time in a very long time. I know it was his sadness and sense of loss that drove him to go to her on the day of the funeral. But I am also sure that it was his hope, hope for healing and a restored relationship that made him seek her out.

While these losses have weighed heavily on the boys hearts in the past few weeks, they have also seen many signs of hope. Indeed, this year has been one of great hope at the Micah Project. Even as I write this, for example, the boys are putting a new roof on the Leadership house. The miraculous way that God provided this new house for the boys as a place where they can make those final steps into manhood has been an incredible symbol of hope to them. It is a physical sign that God is preparing for them a future of Christian leadership. They have been given many reasons to believe that God has their future firmly in His hands.

I praise God for His sovereignty, even in allowing the boys to confront tragedy. For I believe that the loss that they are feeling currently will add a layer of maturity to their faith. It reminds them that their true hope does not lie in the bricks and mortar of the Leadership house, or in thoughts of studying in order to live a life of ease and comfort in the future. These harder times help them to realize that these earthly things will pass away in a twinkle of God's eye. They will come to understand that there will always be loss in their lives, and their true hope is not a physical one, yet an eternal one. Their true hope lies in their salvation and their acceptance into their Father's eternal kingdom! These are difficult lessons, but it is important that they begin to learn them at this young age.

This Sunday, we will have yet another chance to live this tension between loss and hope. Lauri Deniakos, who has also been with us for two years, will head back to the States to start a new life. Just like Becca, Lauri was a teacher, friend, counselor and big sister to the Micah boys. Lauri had an amazing way of appreciating the beauty in all of God's creation that helped the boys open their eyes to the masterworks of our

Creator. At the same time, Lauri's humble way of living life was a true model to the boys. We will have yet another aching "adios" at the airport on Sunday!

It may seem difficult that all of this has happened at Christmas time, which is supposed to be a time of happiness and peace. Yet I think it is the perfect time! Christ came into the world to cry with us at the brokenness, to weep at the way sin has mutilated His beautiful creation. The pastor at Gabriela's funeral shared the story of how Christ wept at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. Yet Christ did not come only to weep at brokenness, he came to defeat it. Jesus said to Lazarus' sisters, "I am the resurrection and the life." New life in Jesus is what we celebrate at Christmas!

This new life is something that our boys have been able to claim as their own since being at the Micah Project. I would like to thank you all for your prayers, visits and support, and for allowing us to be a family for these boys, to create a place for them where hope can still reign even in times of loss and tears. Please pray that God would continue to mold and guide these boys, that they may continue to be standard-bearers for hope in Honduras.

May God fill you and your family with the light of hope as we celebrate Jesus' birth this Christmas!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

Post-script: Please keep Jeony's family and the Micah boys in your prayers during this difficult time.