

# HOGAR INFANTIL

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 0 5

## Conneticut Yankees play Santa at Hogar

*(Excepts from a letter written by Becky Binns to friends and family after her first trip to Hogar this December. This letter was written after Becky had been home from her Peace Corps service in West Africa for 1 year.)*

Hello All,

On December 12, I celebrated my one-year-back-in-America anniversary. Where was I on this momentous anniversary? I was waking up to the sound of trumpets in a small village outside of Tuxtla, the capital of Chiapas, Mexico.

Chiapas? Why Chiapas? Lets back up a bit to the early 80's. I was in elementary school and my parents were reading a *Guidepost* magazine (together, with their arms around each other's shoulders). And there it was; this article about an orphanage in Chiapas, Mexico. My Dad had heard of Chiapas, it was down near Guatemala. The orphanage, Hogar Infantele, needed help. A man named David Guinn had recently stepped in and realized that the place was being run by a couple of 18 year old boys who had grown up there, and not much was in place as far as adult guidance or funding. Long story short, my family became quite attached and involved in this place from a distance. Flash to 2004. We still haven't visited Hogar and David Guinn invites Dad and me down for the Christmas party. A wonderful man named John Murphrey offers to take us from Houston to Chiapas in his six-passenger plane and all of a sudden the idea is not only affordable, but also quite exciting.

We arrived in Chiapas on the afternoon of December 9, and immediately loaded up a van and took off for "The Ranch". The best way to describe The Ranch, I think is just to say that there is something so very RIGHT about the place, the kids, the sense of play and caring and laughter. Let me share a couple small stories of my days there, and maybe you will catch a glimpse of what I mean.

### STORY I

There is a steep, magical-looking hill just beyond the Ranch. As soon as I saw it, I wanted to climb it, but wasn't sure this was a feasible idea. It was quite steep you see.. Thus, I was very happy when David's wife, Leslie, told me there was an actual path that led up the hill.

On my second morning at Hogar, I prepared to take on the hill and was immediately joined by three small friends; Julio, Hugo, and Gustavo. I believe Hugo was the smallest one, about 6 years old.



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**“A PLACE OF SHARING”**

## Conneticut Yankees *continued*

He became my personal guide, leading me straight up while the other two boys followed a faint zigzag path. After a while the path ended. Or maybe we just lost it. And we kept going, pulling ourselves forward by grabbing handfuls of tall sharp grass. It was like rock-climbing at a slant, except we were relying not on solid rock, but on thin vegetation to hold our weight. As we moved upward at the quick pace of three boys and a naïve follower, my friends pointed out the sharpest plants by saying “Guardar!” and showing me their bloody fingers. We babbled on, me in my two dozen Spanish words acquired from two weeks of listening to Phimlsers Spanish One in my car, them in long rambling paragraphs that didn’t necessarily need to be understood.

The top was victorious and breath-taking; an aerial view of the Ranch, each building dwarfed to perfection. Miles of mountains lay out to our right, and to our left was the nearby village of Ocozocautla. Straight ahead there must have been 1000 miles between the horizon and us. We sat for a long time (well, three and half minutes anyway, which was a long time for my three young guides). Gustavo advanced and made his way to the bottom in fast solitude. Julio and Hugo and I slid and hopped and crab-crawled our way back down, laughing at each other’s stumbles, babbling on, understanding only the hand gestures and laughter. At the bottom, Hugo emptied his small pockets of a half a dozen rocks that he had secretly gathered for me at the top. Oh, life was good, very good on this small ranch in Chiapas.

### STORY II



The Christmas party that we had come down to experience was held on Saturday night. A question had been asked regularly since the moment we all arrived: who would be Santa this year? Sometime on Saturday it was decided that both my Dad and I would be Santa.

I was a bit hesitant about the whole affair...until I found myself sitting in the middle of the party, in an itchy beard, surrounded by excited kids. It was awesome. Truly. Each kid’s name was called and they came forward to the applause of the entire community of circumstantial brothers and sisters. They hugged either my Dad or me, got their picture taken, and walked away with a modest bag of Christmas gifts. The joy of being Santa may have been the most unexpected gift of all.



### STORYIII

Back to the morning of the 12th and waking up at 5am to trumpets. It was still dark as I lay there in my comfy bed listening to what sounded like a Mariachi band having a party on the other side of the door. By the third song I was able to drag myself into a pair of jeans and a sweater and blink my way out the door, and sure enough, it was a Mariachi band, on the porch, in the dark, at 5am! There were two trumpets, a couple guitar type things (one real big and one real small), a fiddle, and a lead singer. A dozen kids, the on-site director, David and Leslie, and even some folks from town were all there, singing and leaning on one another, smiling, and not even looking like the 5am thing was a problem. Even in the groggy darkness, I couldn’t help but tap my foot and smile along.

The Ranch community had brought music to our porch that morning in celebration of David’s birthday; in celebration of a man who has gone above and beyond what could ever be expected of a volunteer for over 25 years of serving them. There was much to celebrate.

As we rolled back into bed at 5:45 that morning, I heard David on the other side of the wall saying to Leslie, “Life is Good!”

David, you stole my line. Life is good. Life is indeed Good.

Peace,  
~Becky



# RANCH NEWS

by Carlos Macias

Shortly after Christmas three new children were brought to Hogar Infantil. They were homeless. One is a boy eleven years old who has been living in the streets. He was brought by the

State Child Protective Services who said his name was Jose Angel. He is a mystery as he has no know relatives and there are no records of his birth or baptism certificates to be found.

We will have to devise a way to get him some identification before he can be enrolled in school. This is a frequent problem with children that come to us. Usually a story has to be made up about them.

The other two children are brother and sister and come from the town of Villaflores. Lucia del Carmen is ten, and Francisco, her brother, is eight years old. Their father died a couple of years ago, and then last year their mother passed away, leaving them orphaned. They have a half brother who tried to care for them, but was too poor. They are very happy with their new home at Hogar Infantil and are adjusting to life with all their new friends.



A very special gift at Christmas made it possible for Hogar's Senior Soccer team to get new "tacos" (local lingo for soccer shoes, not something to eat) for every member of the team. They have no excuse

not to win every game with such wonderful shoes.

For many years it has been a dream to have a small chapel on the ranch property, a place to pray or just have a quiet time. A place to meet with others in God's name or to celebrate a sacrament. Finally, that dream is coming true. It



is a simple structure made of cinderblock and lots of love. We hope to finish it with fine wood doors, pretty windows, and wood pews. We feel blessed to have this place of inspiration.

Hasto Luego or  
Until Next Time!



*Editor's note: Jose Angel, the street kid, ran away from Hogar in the night about a week after he came. Authorities are looking for him, but are not likely to find him. He is in our prayers.*

## !Que Rico! Fresh Tortillas

by Katie Morgan Carrasco

"¡Qué rico!" The kids at Hogar Infantil say this all the time because now at every meal they are eating hot, fresh tortillas made just a few feet away in their very own tortillería. Thanks to director Carlos Macias and his relationship with Sedesol, a national social development agency, Hogar received a grant this summer to buy a tortilla machine. Construction was soon underway to convert the old TV room into a tortilla shop. Every morning before dawn we hear the squeaking machine and the effect is pavlovian; I, for one, go back to sleep dreaming of eating hot, velvety corn tortillas with breakfast.

*Continued page 4*



## Butterflies or Mariposas

by Katie Morgan Carrasco

In Chiapas there are so many butterflies that you cannot help but notice them. You can find just about any color or size, and some have special significance. For example, if you see one with a white stripe it means you'll be running into some extra money soon, while seeing a pure black butterfly means that someone has just passed away. These local traditions reflect what butterflies represent: change.

Sometimes I think of Hogar Infantil as a big cocoon, nourishing its young and keeping them safe as they grow and change. Everything about the kids here is constantly evolving: their dreams, attitudes, fears, even their bodies. Every time I return to Hogar I find girls who have blossomed into young ladies and boys whose faces have a more chiseled look and whose voices have deepened. Every child here is unique and has his or her own history, as well as his or her own path to walk. My favorite thing to do here is to ask the older kids what their dreams are. Johanna wants to be a nurse, Rafael is possibly thinking about studying architecture, and Cristina really likes accounting. These are just a few examples of kids who without Hogar probably would not have had the option of schooling past the elementary or secondary level, let alone college.

For those of you who know my husband, Neto, and me, you also know that we have our own "butterfly in the making". Eric Sicarú is almost one and a half years old, and we are here on his first trip to Mexico. Once Eric got used to all the kids and commotion at Hogar, he was off and running with his new



buddies, giggling and jabbering. It has been especially fun watching him trot up and down the same side-walks and paths that his Papi knew so well growing up here. We also took him

to Neto's village on the Oaxacan coast to spend some time with his Abuelita and the rest of Papi's family. In Bernal the native language is Zapotec, so everyone there calls him by his middle name, "Sicarú", which is the Zapotec word for "beautiful". He's had a great time in both places, and we hope to make Hogar Infantil and Bernal a very important part of our family culture.

We only have a few days left here at Hogar and I keep thinking of what changes our next trip ("si Dios quiere", God willing) will bring. A few of the kids may be gone, having moved on to a different path, while other faces may be new ones. But, most of the kids will be those it seems we've always known, still learning and growing and dreaming. They'll all be gradually extending those colorful butterfly wings a little farther, getting ready for that glorious day when they will lift up and take flight.

## !Que Rico! *continued*



Carlos and Vicky's main goal for this project is to teach the kids a sense of responsibility and pride in contributing to the greater good. They are not only learning about contributing to the good of Hogar but also to the outer community. Local low-income families can buy tortillas here at half the price they pay in town. The tortilla shop thus sustains itself and saves Hogar money while also teaching the kids to lend a helping hand to those in need.

This month there are three high school boys and two adult staff who are responsible for the operation, maintenance and record keeping, and they have many helpers who are learning along with them. Next month a new crew will rotate in, thus giving a chance to all those who wish to participate. Carlos and Vicky believe that this type of rotation will motivate more kids to get involved and will also prevent burnout. At the end of every month those who participated will get a special treat: a trip to the movies or dinner at a nice restaurant. Carlos plans to set aside some savings from each month's earnings to use for machine maintenance when needed, and what's left over will be distributed to the hard-working participants as a small bonus.

So far this new endeavor is a huge success – the kids are very enthusiastic and dedicated. When it's time to make tortillas, the shop is bustling with kids and adults who are having a great time and working hard. Everyone seems to want to be involved. They all hope that you get the chance to come visit them and try some wonderful tortillas! You won't regret it!

## Tsunami Relief

by David Guinn

The devastation brought about by the Tsunami in Southeast Asia is beyond comprehension. We urge you to donate to relief efforts as Leslie and I have done. Hogar always appreciates your help, but we have a small reserve of funds and can make some adjustments at the ranch. We feel that contributions should go where they are most needed, and that has to be to Tsunami victims. If you also can give to Hogar, that is fine too. God's Peace to you or as we say in Texas, to y'all.

DAVID