

HOGAR INFANTIL

February 2006

A Firsthand Look into the Lives at Hogar

Excerpt from a story by
Colleen Keefe

Meet Colleen Keefe, a young woman who is dedicating one year at Hogar as a volunteer. She first heard of Hogar from a family friend and stopped by for a couple days while she was vacationing in southern Mexico last February. It happens to so many who visit the ranch ... just a couple of days can make a powerful impact and create a strong desire to return to this unique and loving community. To make a long story short, she applied to the Board of Directors for a volunteer position, put her life in Oregon on hold and took her two suitcases on an adventurous trip back down this August. She lives with the older girls and helps out with everything from homework to dishes to just being a good listener when a child needs it. In November, Colleen began teaching English to Hogar's 5th and 6th graders, which will give them a jump start to the English classes they will be taking when they get to *secundaria*, or junior high school. She states that what impresses her most about Hogar so far is how dedicated the children and youth are to supporting one another. An example is some of the older girls who lead study groups and give one-on-one help to younger students, sometimes working with them from the time they arrive from school until dinnertime, only to have to do their own homework at night when many others are sleeping. Colleen also had an eye-opening experience when she went with one of her housemates to the remote village where she teaches kindergarten as part of a government program in which young people can exchange service for college tuition. Alejandra is teaching in a village with no running water or bathrooms, only a dirty lagoon to bathe in, and rampant fleas and lice. Here is an



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“A PLACE OF SHARING”

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RANCH NEWS *by Carlos Macias*

Wishes for a Happy New Year to all! We had a wonderful holiday season, with a lively and joyous Christmas celebration attended by many dear friends. The Guinns once again came with their plane loaded to the top with presents for the children and staff. It was also a special blessing this year to have two religious ministers with us: Anglican Bishop Benito Juarez Martinez, who ministers to Southeastern Mexico, and Roland Rose, and American who trains protestant pastors in Chiapas. They led us in a beautiful service in our new chapel. Honoring the birth of the Christ Child



is a way for us to also honor the new beginnings in our own lives, and it fills us with strength and hope. The party the next day was a blast for the children and adults, with traditional food and

dance, and although it is not a Mexican tradition, Hogar's children always get to meet Santa Claus (or two, in this year's case) and open presents. What fun to see the delight on their faces – especially our new children, some of whom may not have ever had Christmas presents to open. Thank you to all who have helped us make this possible for them.



Our big news to tell you is that we have begun construction on the girls' dorm! You can see that we are in the beginning stages, but we have a great start and many excited young ladies! It is situated just uphill from our new chapel.

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A Christmas Adventure

By Leslie and David Guinn

It looked like Santa wouldn't make it in time for the party this year. Unlike Santa's departure from the North Pole in *POLAR EXPRESS*, where his only glitch was giving up a sleigh bell, Santa Guinn's departure seemed fraught with problems.

Wednesday's planned departure was put on weather delay when a big ice and sleet storm hit north Texas. By Thursday afternoon, the ice had melted enough to go, but we had an instrument fail-a "no go" item. It was suggested that the instrument was probably cold, so we heated up the instrument panel, and it worked! So we launched with just enough daylight left to make it to the border before dark (maybe). Just over Middle of Nowhere, Texas, we caught up with that ole cold front, and started to pick up ice on the plane. (For you non-flyers, this is not a good thing.) We arrived in light rain and low visibility, but, gratefully, no ice.

Friday, we finally got to take off with a promise of good weather in Tampico, with turned out not to be true. We made an instrument landing in rain and low clouds. The customs official (also known as the *GRINCH*) wanted us to bring everything in for inspection. When you are carrying a load of Christmas toys, this is not good news. After the second trip from the plane to the terminal, in the rain, hauling heavy bags, he opened the drawer on his desk and invited a "donation". The *mordida* (bribe), while illegal, still lives, and we gratefully paid it.



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A Firsthand Look into the Lives at Hogar - *Continued*

excerpt of her story:

"...At nine we headed over to the school house, a dusty single classroom with a single light bulb and a radio, as well as two tables full of children's books, crayons, and notebooks. No kids had shown up, so Alejandra went around retrieving them. I asked her why they didn't just come to school and she told me that many times teachers didn't show up for class, and many of the kids stayed home to help out their families anyhow. We started about 20 minutes later (with 3 of 7 students) working on the alphabet, drawing pictures, and reading a story before the lunch break. The afternoon classes were much the same, working on new letters and reviewing ones we had already worked on. Alejandra had asked them to draw pictures of what they had for breakfast, and made a point to show me how similar all of their pictures

were: beans, tortillas and coffee. There wasn't much room for variance in a community this small and this poor. A few families had a TV, and/or a refrigerator, but that was about as rich as it got. They shared what they had for the most part, and we watched TV with a group of little kids as soon as the afternoon classes were over. One of the neighbors invited us to eat lunch at their house, and we enjoyed eggs, salsa and hand-made tortillas..."

Colleen was able to experience firsthand what life is like for many children in this area of Mexico – a life that many of Hogar's children have experienced prior to coming to the ranch. There is so much more to Colleen's story - please read the rest on our website, : www.hogarinfantil.org.

Ranch News *by Carlos Macias - Continued*

Thanks to all who have donated so far to make this long-time dream a reality. We will keep you informed of the progress.

You may wonder how we keep up on some of the everyday things with so many children, like cutting hair. Here is a picture of "hair day" at Hogar. We have several students come from the beauty school *Chambalá* in nearby Tuxtla every five or six weeks. They get to practice their new skills on our patient children, and we get some major grooming needs met for free. It has been a great relationship and we've done this for several years.



By the time you read this, I will have undergone a 14-hour knee surgery, scheduled for February 1st. It will leave me with a recovery time of about a month, but between my supportive wife, Vicky, and Hogar's strong staff, they will be able to make up for any duties that I cannot fulfill during this time. I take great comfort in knowing that I have many people praying for me, and I have faith in a good outcome.

Editors Note: While construction has indeed begun on the girls dorm, we are still raising funds for this project. Currently we are about halfway to our goal!!! An in depth look at this project will be in the next newsletter.

A Christmas Adventure *by David and Leslie Guinn – Continued*

Saturday, the day of the party, and we are about half way there, looking at low clouds and misting rain and wondering if this is the year Santa doesn't come. We finally had good enough weather to take off, and didn't see the ground for the clouds the whole way to Chiapas. We made another instrument approach through fog and mist and dodging the local mountains. **Really** grateful to have arrived safely, we are warmly welcomed by Hogar's guests, Bishop Benito Juarez Martinez and Roland Rose, and many very happy children.

Since the party got deferred to Sunday, Saturday evening we had a service in the new chapel, lead by the bishop. How precious that little chapel is! Our hearts were about to burst with joy to see it so full (standing room only!) of enthusiastic children. Leslie is a licensed lay minister and the bishop asked her to help. She really fought back tears of joy to be so blest to give the Lord's Supper to all at Hogar. It is still moving to write about it!

For all our problems getting there, the annual

(number 28 for us) Christmas party went off without any. The bishop and some of the girls made an Advent wreath out of pine needles from our trees. The cooks fixed a wonderful meal. Hogar's folk dancers put on a great dance program, but the primary school boys stole the show. They did a skit as old peasant men with beards and canes, all hunched over but full of life. They were hilarious! Two Santas were chosen from men who grew up at Hogar decades ago and now serve on the Mexican board. It is amazing how a disguise can change a personality. These normally reserved gentlemen were very entertaining during breaks in handing out the gifts. Once they were in costume, they really hammed it up.

*So, neither rain, nor sleet, nor dark of night
kept Santa from arriving with a sleigh of
toys. Another Christmas accomplished!!
Thank you for your donations!!*