



HOUSE OF FRIENDSHIP - 2008 BOARD OF DIRECTORS/ORDER OF MALTA TRIP NOTES

These Trip Notes were recorded by Board member Tony Rosa during a visit to Honduras this past August with fellow Board members and Louis Cappelli, President of Sterling Bank. COPPROME is the name of the umbrella organization in Honduras under which various facilities operate that serve the needs of children in one of the poorest parts of Honduras, the poorest country in Central America and one of the poorest in the world. With a worsening economy our children desperately need your help so please send in any donation you possibly can spare at this time. Thank you and God Bless You.

All told, COPPROME currently serves 221 children. But, as many parents also benefit directly and indirectly from the efforts of the staff at COPPROME the real effect is much greater and very hard to measure. The following facts and figures tell the story.

Hogar Providencia is the orphanage which we refer to as the House of Friendship (HOF). The orphanage facility outside of the city of El Progreso cares for 56 children - 40 girls and 16 boys - providing meals, housing, clothing and education. HOF cares for girls from infant to 21 years of age and for boys from infant to about 12 years of age at which point they are moved to a facility called Amigos de Jesus (Friends of Jesus) where they are taught life skills and trades. The benefit to separating boys from girls at this point cannot be lost on anyone and shows that the staff at HOF are truly professional in caring for these children.

The children are beautiful, well mannered, loving and grateful for our help. When asked about their time at HOF the children invariably responded that they loved being there. For many of these children this has been the only real home they have ever known. 80% of the children have been abused by their own parents and when they see us they run to be hugged and do not let go of us - for most of these children it will be the only time a man will hold them without trying to hurt or abuse them. Police in El Progreso have brought many children to HOF which is a fair distance from the city because they know that at HOF these children will have a chance at finding care, love and a home. And because they know that no child is ever turned away.



From left to right, Joseph Metz, Ph.D., K.M.Ob., the Hospitaller of the American Association, Patricia King, D.M., the founder with her late husband, Henry King, K.M. of the House of Friendship, Sister Teresita Gonzalez, our resident spiritual director and a member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Louis Cappelli, K.M., Robert J. Fredricks, Ph.D., K.M. Ob., the New Jersey Area Chair and a member of the Board of Councillors and Tony Rosa, AUX., a member of the House of Friendship Board.

In two small communities close to El Progreso we run library and after school programs which are meant to supplement the education that the children are supposed to be receiving in the local schools. Since most of these children come from very poor parents they cannot afford to even go to the public schools because they do not have shoes, decent clothes, pads and pencils, etc. For most of these children our so-called after school programs are in fact the only education they regularly receive. At a community called Palermo we serve 30 children per day but about 100 different children per week and at a community called Laureles we serve 70 children. Both facilities are in dire need of new roofs, doors and lights.

At Laureles a recent theft of their only Television and Tape player means that the Saturday afternoon movie which drew children from the surrounding area has ceased. Both facilities also educate parents in hygiene and parental skills. Their real value is in keeping many of these families just above the point where they might have to give up the children since the facilities also act as child care centers allowing the parents to work while their children are safely cared for and educated. Interviews with the staff at both facilities led to the same conclusion that if these facilities close then these families will likely not remain intact and these children will be at risk and on the street.

Parental care and external assistance programs are run by the staff of COPPROME and are directed at educating parents in basic parenting skills and hygiene skills. The value of these programs is to help these families to stay together and protect the children in these families from possible neglect or abuse. These programs serve 65 children - 32 girls and 33 boys.

Electricity currently costs about 15,000 Lps per month and filtered water for our children costs about 6,000 Lps per month. The water must be filtered in order to keep the children healthy as all water in Honduras is contaminated. At our five star hotel we were told not to use the tap water to brush our teeth so we brushed with bottled water and not to let any water from our shower to enter our mouths so we had to keep our lips tightly shut and dried our faces as soon as they got wet to avoid any possibility of contamination. You can hardly imagine what this is like so next time try taking a shower with your lips tightly clenched. For so many children in Honduras the daily struggle to just deal with everyday life is more than we can imagine but our short trip helped to give us some small sense of what their lives are like.

Life in Honduras is very different from what we know here. Banks and stores in most cities have armed guards at their doors and tourists are advised to be back at their hotel before night falls. We visited two shanty towns and drove past many, many more. At one of the shanty towns the homes were shacks of lumber and corrugated steel, dirt floors, gaping holes through which rain easily pours into the shacks when it rains which is often. One of the shanty towns is in imminent danger of being destroyed by the town mayor since the occupants are squatting on land they do not own and their shacks are also in an area that is contaminated by what they refer to as "black water". This particular shantytown houses 57 families with an average of five children per family. At the door of one shack we saw a pregnant woman with a child standing behind her, another child soon to be born from her womb; another child soon to enter this world of misery. And in case you were wondering the mother was perhaps 15 or 16 years old but looked more like a woman in her late thirties if not older.

Everywhere we turned we saw barefoot children and teenagers with vacant looks on their faces. For these people there is no hope just survival at the very fringe of society.

A LETTER FROM SR. TERE TO PATRICIA KING

Querida Patty,

I hope this will help you, in your concern to help our children and many other children who are in miserable situations. Your help means a lot to us, without your support the House of Friendship could not exist. Because of you we have our daily food and other needs taken care of, you are an angel to us. Sometimes it is so hard when we see that the sacks of beans are diminishing and there is no money to pay the employee's wages, it really is a worry but God is always present through people like you. Thank God that we have you. You and I know the work is worth-while as you have seen over all these years. You have seen our efforts to do our best to help our children to overcome their past and to grow. It is not always easy, it has been more difficult to educate some than others.

Here is the story of Gabriel Romero. The child was placed in the Las Mercedes Catholic Church Nutrition Center by a Judge after he was removed from his mother's custody as she suffers from mental illness. He was picked up from a "barrio" at 9:00 p.m. one night in September, 1997 with a very high temperature. He had bronchopneumonia and right away he was taken to the hospital. Gabriel suffered from severe malnutrition and because he had no other family, was placed under the health and protection of the Center. The case of the child was brought to the attention of the authorities by a couple who said that his mother always wandered the streets. Because of her illness, the mother mistreated the child, especially whenever he asked for food because of hunger.

Gabriel has lived in Hogar Providencia since the age of four. The child acknowledges the people that care for him as his family and thinks of everyone very fondly. The child's situation is that of total abandonment, for which all his necessities need to be served by us. We are his family and we are happy to have him!

As you can see Gabriel has come a long way! He has become a great chess player and has begun competing and winning in tournaments; he is a good athlete too, among other things. But all this needs faith, patience, and love to accomplish. As with Gabriel, there are other children with intelligence and other gifts and talents who just need an opportunity to develop their potential. But to be successful we need your loving, friendly heart to continue their education in many ways.

Your endless help cannot be put into words, the true value of your help can be seen in every child that has called the House of Friendship home, in the past and in the present, and this is a truly priceless gift. Thank you.



THE GREAT BUS SAGA BY PATRICIA KING D.M.

As many of you may know, John Corr KM owns a school bus company. He has been extremely generous, renovating old school buses and donating them to various projects all around the world. A few years ago John most graciously offered a school bus to the House of Friendship so that our children could get to classes each day. We waited our turn on the list - fairly long as you might imagine. Before we could claim our bus however, a national catastrophe occurred - Katrina devastated New Orleans. Naturally, this took precedence and John managed to provide many buses to groups all over the South to aid in the recovery - schools, church groups and charitable organizations. John should be applauded for the tremendous impact he had on so many people in that area.

By the end of 2006, we were back on the list! In early 2007, we were notified that not just one bus was waiting for us, but two. Both were small, one seated 12 people, the other about 20 people - perfect for our needs. The only problem was that they had been sent down and stored in a car lot in Southern Florida and the owner had sold the lot, left the buses there and forgot to tell anyone. Enter the State of Florida who claimed the buses as abandoned and prepared to sell them at auction! Thank goodness for Tom Flood, KM who hurried over just in the nick of time to claim the buses before they went on the auction block. All was well we thought!

I contacted a company in Fort Lauderdale who was willing to ship the buses to Honduras. When Tom arrived to set up the shipment, they told him that because the buses were 12 and 14 years old respectively, they could not accept them as the new law in Honduras forbids entry of buses older than 9 years! We were so close - now what?

NJ Area Chair Bob Fredericks contacted the Knights of Malta in Honduras. Bernard Casanova, KM and Hospitaller for the Order in Honduras, was able to speak to government officials there about getting a dispensation from the law, but he needed the original titles and transfers. Unfortunately we did not have them! After taking care of the paperwork with the shipping company, Tom had mailed them to me and weeks later they still had not arrived. We now had to get duplicate documents and Tom went back to the post office to see if he could nudge them into tracking down the mail. It must have worked because ten days later, the letter with the titles appeared in my mail box. Precious papers in hand, I headed back to the post office to mail them to Honduras trusting and praying that this mailing would go more smoothly than the last!

With these documents in hand, Bernard was able to go to the government and receive the necessary exemption from the law governing the age of the buses and finally they set sail for Honduras. Arriving in Puerto Cortes in July, the buses cleared customs, however since the titles had been turned over to the House of Friendship and the dispensation was given to the Knights of Malta, yet more paperwork was needed. Back and forth we went until finally all was secured and buses were delivered to Sister Tere for the children in August 2007.

I can tell you that they are beautiful buses and I had the pleasure of riding in them to pick the children up from school one day. The excitement as they all lined up to take their seats, the care they take of this invaluable gift and the difference it has made for the House of Friendship to be able to control transportation costs and ensure that each child can get to their school was worth the wait!!!

Matching Gift Program

Does your employer have a Matching Gift Program? If so, take advantage of the opportunity to double, or even triple, your generosity. The House of Friendship, a 501(c)(3) organization, generally falls within company guidelines for matching employee gifts to health and human services charities or medical relief groups.

Simply fill out the employee portion of your employer's matching gift application and forward it to House of Friendship. The House of Friendship will contact your company to obtain the matching gift.

If you are uncertain whether your company matches a gift to House of Friendship, please mail us at the address below and we will follow up with your company.

House of Friendship
P.O. Box 127
Monmouth Beach, NJ 07750

WHAT A DIFFERENCE A DAY MAKES BY MONICA PUGA

The sounds of bird calls awaken me. I step out of the room into the heat of the morning sun. I look off from the balcony at the precious sunrise set by faraway mountains and nearby palm trees. To think about the work that is ahead, exhausts me already, yet I feel content. I make my way downstairs to find some scrubs that hopefully will match. I bump into the receptionist and we exchange morning greetings.

Adjacent to the hotel is a cafeteria. A mix of town locals and American doctors and teens are seen eating breakfast. I heap on to a plate of pancakes, tajadas, fried banana, and share some laughter with the Brigade cook's eleven year old daughter, Marbella. After our hearty meal, the Brigade members grab water bottles and boxes of supplies and we head off on our non-air-conditioned yellow school bus to a town. On the bus I find Marbella has crept on and giggles behind some boxes.

Each day, the medical team travels to a town and sets up a clinic wherever there is room; sometimes it is in a church or a school classroom. As we haul the boxes of medicine to the specific places where they must go, the patients have already lined up. We split into different groups which are made up of pediatrics, general medicine, pharmacy, physical therapy, and dentistry. The teams examine and treat more than 350 Hondurans a day, many of them children.



Honduras is a breathtaking country with beautiful people. Despite the magnificent panorama of this country, it is under much turmoil. Villages are still recovering from the effects of Hurricane Mitch. The government is doing little to aid in the reconstruction and because Honduras is economically deprived, jobs are limited, so people move to the mountains to farm in order to survive. The mountains are the only land that is available, because most of the land has been turned into tobacco fields. It is difficult to cultivate the soil of the mountains. It is hard labor to toil the mineral deprived earth and many of our patients develop physical problems as a result of their backbreaking labor. And as if that was not enough, the people from the mountains burn their garbage because there are no landfills. The plastics they burn are toxic and begin to affect their lungs. Sore throats and burning eyes are a common complaint among the patients young and old.

The people from mountainous regions are also sick from drinking the contaminated water and most of them have parasites. In children this manifests itself in the form of bulging stomachs. Adults may not realize they have parasites, but many speak of a constant burning sensation in their stomach. We give them parasite medicine in the hope it will help them; our hope is to rid the whole town of parasites if even for just a few months. Unfortunately the parasites return. Despite their health problems, the patients are eager to see the doctors. We always hand out a little bag of toiletry items and hats after their consultation. You simply cannot imagine how appreciated an item such as a bar of soap can be!

After a long morning, it is time for the Brigade to have a break. We go to a house to eat our lunch, which consists of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. After that, we have a little bit of time to relax. Marbella, my breakfast buddy, shows me around the town. She takes my hand and we run through the streets to get to Senora so-and-so's house to buy a bird. She welcomes me into her home and as I step inside it is a new world for me. The house is one room shared by a family; it consists of a bed and a stove right next to it; a makeshift cardboard closet holds neatly folded clothes. The house has a dirt floor, but the house is orderly and tidy.

There in a corner is a bucket of tiny birds, recently born, their feathers still growing. The bird costs something like five dollars and Marbella exchanges the money for her new treasure. She proudly tells me she will call him Paquito, named after the original bird we bought when the Brigade came last year. Unfortunately rumor has it that the original Paquito had a box fall on him. Marbella is content with her new pet and insists we run back so she can show the Brigade members our new mascot. We joke with her to keep it away from the boxes when we packup!

It is now mid afternoon and the lines of patients are finally dwindling. As four o'clock approaches, we tell the remaining patients to wait until we come back the next day and that we will see them first thing in the morning. We load our boxes back onto the bus and head back to the hotel so the precarious journey down the mountain and over the river can be made in daylight.

Back at the hotel, we shower and gather for dinner. The Brigade members exchange stories about the interesting cases of patients we have seen and tell funny anecdotes about the day. Feeling refreshed from the shower and food I go down to the patio to play with the bus driver's twelve children. We play Frisbee on the patio and chat with our local Honduran friends until it gets dark. I rush over to the balcony to watch the sunset. I stare out and see the silhouette of palm trees with an outline of mountains in the backdrop. I am exhausted from the day's work, but I feel like the Brigade has accomplished a lot in one day.

I hope you enjoyed my description of a typical day working alongside doctors on the House of Friendship's Henry B. King Medical Brigade. Every year American doctors and students from around the country get together for a nine day adventure. We offer free medical care to people in remote villages who are in need of medical attention. For more information, please visit the House of Friendship's website at: www.copprome.com