

The Healing Path

Arle's last year at the Micah Project was a disastrous one. He had come to us in 2006 as a 13-year-old, after his older brother Jarvin retrieved him from the orphanage where he had grown up in northern Honduras. Having lived all his life in a rigid, institutional setting, Arle was quiet and withdrawn in his first months with us. As always happens when invited into Micah's loving, supportive, open environment, though, Arle's true personality quickly emerged. We got to know a funny kid, whose charm and quick wit made him a natural leader.



Young Arle poses with Michael just a few months after moving into the Micah Project in 2006

That did not last for long, however. Adolescence brought new struggles for Arle...feelings of bitterness and anger as he began to deal with a past of abandonment and neglect and a family heritage of poverty and addiction. By 2008, he was drinking and inhaling thinner, and had become more-and-more volatile. The breaking point came in early 2009, when, during an explosion of rage, he left one of the other boys bloodied and barely conscious on the floor of Micah's living room. That was Arle's last day at the Micah House.

The entire Micah family mourns when one of our boys falls back onto the road to destruction. We shed many tears for each of the boys that leave...and we know that many of you share the pain of loss with us. I think that one of the qualities that makes Micah so successful is that we throw heart and soul into each young man. We give everything in our desire to see these young men move forward. Because of that, we also experience profound grief when one of the boys falls away. In a small, imperfect way, we understand how our heavenly Father must have felt when he said:

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water” (Jeremiah 2:13).

When a boy comes into the Micah Project, he begins a process that Christian psychologist Dan Allender calls “the healing path.” As they move towards wholeness in Christ, they often have to deal with a swirl of inner turmoil. To quote Dr. Allender: “the healing path is not a jaunt in the park. It is a life-rattling, heart-revealing journey that takes us through danger, harm, heartache—and ultimately to new trust, profound hope and...love.” It's that word “ultimately” that makes this work so hard...does that mean that healing comes five years into the future? Ten? Or is it a lifelong struggle towards healing?

It used to be that, when one of our young men left the project, we assumed that his healing path had come to a crashing, definitive halt. We've learned since, however, that our God is much, much bigger than the individual decisions that our boys make about their lives. His Spirit continues to move in them--to disquiet them in their bad choices. While they were once satisfied with life on the streets, when they leave Micah and return to that life-style, they realize, perhaps for the first time, how empty that life truly is.

Axel is another good example of this. Last August, I wrote an update called “Axel should not be on the streets right now,” which was, more than anything, a way for me to come to grips with the terrible decisions that this beloved young man was making. There would be moments during his first weeks back on the streets when I would

suffer a terribly strong, heart-wrenching sense of loss. In December, I ran into him in one of the busy plazas of downtown Tegucigalpa. We talked for a while, but he had that anxious, furtive look of a street kid that is not quite willing to fully engage in his reality. But, after we parted ways, I heard him call my name. "Michael", he asked from a few feet away, "you're still my dad, aren't you?" It was all I could do at that moment to keep myself from kneeling down right there amidst the bustle of the square and weeping.

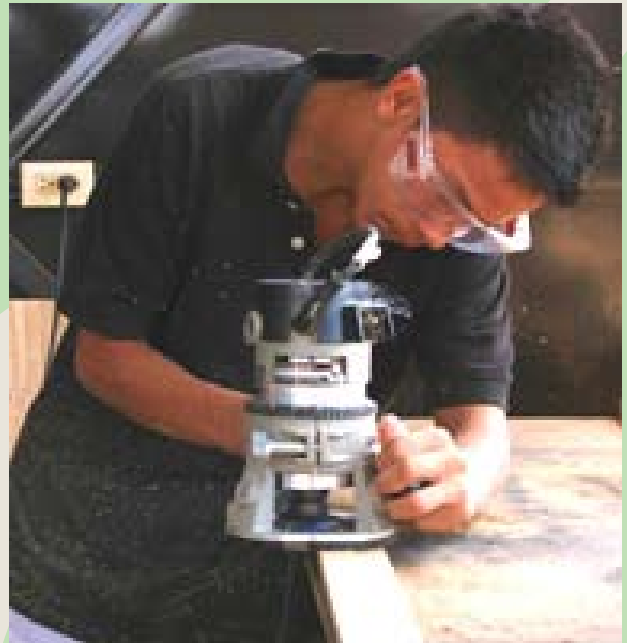
At some point, though, near the beginning of this new year, Axel decided to claw his way back on to his healing path. He came back to the Micah House one day, asking to be given another chance. We decided that he needed to have a month of probation, to prove to himself and to us that he was really ready to work for his own healing once again. All this month, our first month of classes in the new Honduran school year, he has been living with his mom in a shabby motel in the heart of the outdoor market and getting up every morning to be at the Micah House before 7:00 for classes. As February comes to a close, he has not missed a day. If all goes well, he will officially rejoin us in the next few days!

In the meantime, we continue to have faith that God is the Healer that directs the healing path, and "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles..." (II Corinthians 1:3-4). Sometimes, it is hard to keep hoping, such as in the case of Marvincito, who has recently taken to assaulting people in the outdoor market sector at knifepoint in order to sustain his drug habit. It sometimes seems so hopeless, yet we are called to keep praying and waiting. A few nights ago, our missionary Jenna Miller found Marvincito weeping in front of her apartment building late at night. All she could do for him was wrap her arms around him and pray...and keep hoping.

And what about Arle? In 2010, after almost a year of drifting aimlessly, Becca Bell helped him to enroll in a Christian boarding school three hours away from Tegucigalpa. Becca has an amazing ability to lovingly, creatively (and stubbornly!) guide our boys back onto their healing paths. Arle grew in leaps-and-bounds at his new school, and when he came back to Tegucigalpa to spend his November, December and January school vacation at the Micah House, he was a different young man. Rather than volatility, he showed amazing maturity. He became a responsible, loving older brother to the other guys in the Micah House. And we were able to see, once again, that it is God who directs the healing path in His perfect timing.

As Arle was getting ready to return to his boarding school for his senior year a couple of weeks ago, he pulled John Bell aside and asked if he could talk. "John, I really feel that I am ready to accept Christ as my Savior. Can you help me do that?" He and John talked for a while about the meaning of salvation, then they closed their eyes and prayed together. What a huge moment of joy and victory for John and the entire Micah family! And what an awesome witness that God continues to work in lives that we may have written off long ago.

It is those moments that remind us to keep hoping, to keep praying and to love these young men tenaciously with the love of Christ. In some of their lives, we may never see the fruit of our ministry to them. But that is not the purpose of ministry, after all; it is not about our own sense of satisfaction. When Jesus describes "the rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7), He reminds us exactly why we are doing what we are doing.



Not only has Axel returned to our academic class schedule, but he is also receiving carpentry training in our Technical School

Their victory is ultimately a heavenly one. It is not ours to know if that victory will be won in an individual life this year, next year, or ten years down the road.



Arle gave us a glimpse of his radical heart change as he served alongside the other boys, ministering to impoverished children in northern Honduras in January

What we can do right now is to reflect His loving and healing presence to them every single day...and to constantly search for ways to do that more effectively. That is the main reason that we have decided to move the Micah Project out of the city this year. As our ministry grows beyond our current facility, and the neighborhood around us grows increasingly violent, we have decided that we need to find a better space where we can raise these boys.

Late last year, we identified a piece of land adjacent to the Villa Linda Miller community as the best place for the new Micah. We will have ample space to build the new Micah House, technical school and staff housing while still having lots of green spaces and play areas. At the same time, the boys will be able to be a part of the Villa Linda Miller community, which consists of 165 working-class families whose houses we helped to build after Hurricane Mitch in 1998.

As we begin to communicate our vision of this new Micah facility, however, we want to make one thing clear: through all the talk of bricks and mortar, of architectural plans and building

phases, we want to remind ourselves daily that these things are of merely secondary importance. They are a means to a much more important end: providing a better space for our boys to walk on their healing path. A new facility has nothing to do with creating more comfortable spaces or prettier views...it is about having a better way to point our guys to Jesus and better infrastructure for forming His young disciples.

Pray with us, in the coming months, for the big decisions that we will make regarding the purchase of the land and the building of the new facility. Pray that it will be a place where His loving and healing presence can be encountered in every square foot! And, as always, continue to pray for each of our boys as they take each step along their healing path.

Your prayers, your love, your words of comfort in difficult moments and celebration in the good ones, remind us to keep pouring hope out onto these young lives. Thank you for being such faithful partners on this path!

Su hermano en Cristo,

Michael Miller

Luke 15:32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"