

Yesterday's Street Children, Tomorrow's Christian Leaders: A Motto Come to Life

Micah Project Summer 2007 Update

A couple of weeks ago, we had a combined celebration for Wilmer, Marvin, David and Danilo. Sixteen young men and our staff crammed into the recently remodeled dining room of the Micah House in order to share a joy-filled dinner in honor of these four lives. What made our little party so amazing, however, was not the usual ruckus that marks a Micah gathering; rather, its uniqueness lay in what we were celebrating in each life. Everyone cheered for Danilo and David as they came in straight from the airport for a short break from their university studies in Costa Rica. At the same time, we all applauded Wilmer and Marvin for making it through their very first full day in the Micah Project! Opposite ends of our spectrum came together in one joyful moment: two confident collegians returning to the home in which they lived for seven years, and two little boys spending their first day without a bottle of yellow glue.

Let me back up and explain.

For over a year, the Micah boys and staff have made a weekly trek to minister to the street kids that live under one of the bridges in Tegucigalpa. At first glance, everything under the bridge seems to be in a state of decay. Its expanse crosses the putrid, sewage-filled river that divides the central business district of Tegucigalpa from its sprawling, teeming outdoor market. The thousands of vendors in the market use the river and its small floodplain as a dumping ground for all the trash, rotting vegetables, and animal parts that are leftover from each day's sales.

Amidst the trash under the bridge, there is human decay as well. Almost sixty kids and teens rot their brains by sucking in the fumes of yellow shoe glue out of old plastic Coke bottles. As the daily life of this capital city flows across the bridge above their heads, the addiction to yellow glue takes a hold of these kids and brings living to a standstill. Life is distilled down to the next rushing intake of yellow glue into their ever-craving bodies.

Wilmer and Marvin are two boys that called the bridge home. The boys are eleven and twelve respectively, but could be taken for eight or nine. Both had long since abandoned their abusive and fractured families for the fleeting comfort of yellow glue. On our weekly outings to the bridge, we served them food, played soccer and other games with them, gave them piggy-back rides, and in the process, began to earn their trust. At such a young age, it is still possible to see some vestiges of childhood in them, but it takes just one look in their hardened eyes to be able to imagine them turning into the angry and often belligerent teens that also call the bridge home.

Yet, if there is one thing we have learned in the last seven years of operating the Micah Project in Honduras, it is that in humans there is no such thing as irreversible decay. God's image can be stained, abused, forgotten, and stamped out by memory-erasing drugs, but the handiwork of the Master Creator can never fully be destroyed. A couple of weeks ago, we had spent the afternoon under the bridge and were preparing to get in our van and head back to the Micah House. As we said our good-byes to the street kids, Wilmer and Marvin asked if they could come with us and visit the house. Glue bottles in hand, they came with us and took a wide-eyed tour of the home. And, amazingly, both

of them threw away their glue bottles and asked to stay. Somehow, something in the Micah Project appealed to them even more than the dulling, memory-erasing buzz of the glue.



Top left: Marvin inhales glue under the bridge. Top right: Wilmer plays with a water gun during one of our Sunday visits to the bridge. Bottom left: Marvin hugs Micah dog Mocha during his first week at the Micah House. Bottom right: Wilmer reads "The Cat in the Hat" with Darwin during his first week.

That is why we were celebrating on the following day. Our dining room buzzed with excitement as we all witnessed so many "firsts" in their lives. Even the simple act of sitting at a table and eating with a knife and fork represented something novel for Wilmer and Marvin! And while they spent their first day stomping around the Micah House like bulls in a china shop (how do you teach an "indoor voice" to a street kid???) there was also a real, palpable sense that they had come home.

Mid-way through that first meal, David and Danilo came home as well. Their flight from Costa Rica took less than an hour, but the gaping distance between their experiences there and their previous lives in Honduras is truly enormous. David, who grew up on the streets of Tegucigalpa, is now

a sophomore in Costa Rica studying psychology, and Danilo, who spent his childhood in the trash dump of the northern town of Progreso, is a freshman studying bilingual education. As they entered the house, there was an immediate sense of something different... a new sense of poise—of purpose—in both of their countenances.

We all listened, everyone from Marvin and Wilmer all the way up through our four young men who will be graduating from high school this year, as Danilo and David gave us an update on their lives in Costa Rica. David, who for many years was the shyest and most reserved Micah boy, spoke with great passion about his studies, about the Christian family he is living with, about his church where he is a Sunday school teacher. As he wrapped up, he challenged the rest of the Micah boys to continue to seek God's will in their lives and to prepare for a future in which they can serve Him. We ended our festive evening with a big group hug. As Danilo hugged Wilmer, and David hugged Marvin, the Micah Project's motto flashed through my brain: "Yesterday's street kids... tomorrow's Christian leaders"—and the fact that I was seeing both aspects of the vision all wrapped up in one warm and joyful embrace brought tears to my eyes.

"Yesterday's street children, tomorrow's Christian leaders." Most of the time, the sharply contrasting worlds of our motto are laid out in the more muted colors of every day existence: waking up the boys in the morning, providing them with an education, encouraging them to act with brotherly love... things that every family does in order to bring up their children in the way that they should go. Other times, the "Christian leaders" aspect seems far into the future, as our guys struggle with darkness and strive to put the past behind them. But there are certain days, like the day that Marvin, Wilmer, David and Danilo came home, that we can get a little glimpse of what God's mighty hand is doing in their lives from beginning to end.

Those glimpses drive us forward in hope-filled joy. Your support and prayers do the same!
Su hermano en Cristo,
Michael Miller



Left: David (purple shirt) on the street in 1995. Right: David and Danilo on their way to college in Costa Rica!