

March 2006 Update

Little Arly's arrival at the Micah House wasn't exactly my idea. In fact, when this twelve year old showed up in January, I had never even met him. His older brothers, Jarvin and Darwin, both long-time residents of the Micah Project, were the brains and the brawn behind Arly's acceptance into the project.

Both had been plotting their brother's rescue for some time; Arly didn't know what persistent brothers he has! The brothers, eighteen and twenty-one years old respectively, reestablished contact with Arly several years ago, when they found him in an orphanage in San Pedro Sula, five hours north of Tegucigalpa by bus. Since then, they have visited him a couple times each year, establishing a family contact that could very well have disappeared forever.

Last year, Jarvin, one of our high school graduates who is completing his first year of college, began filling out the legal paperwork to get Arly's custody transferred to the Micah Project. Jarvin spoke with the orphanage director several times and even went before the family court judge to get all the necessary approvals. Finally this January, just before I was to go up to the States for a few days, Arly's final paperwork came through. He had officially become a Micah boy!

Honestly, it doesn't surprise me that Jarvin and Darwin were so intent on getting their brother into the Micah Project. The fact that they had so little family to speak of in their childhood makes their desire for family that much stronger now. Both young men made the streets their home after their father disappeared and their mother went in and out of jail. The Micah Project was the first real family that Jarvin had when he moved in on our first day of operation in January 2000. Once he discovered how powerful it can be to be a part of a family—even a patchwork one—Jarvin made it his mission to get his brother Darwin off the streets in 2002. Jarvin accompanied Darwin with great determination in his first months at the Micah House as he fought his addiction against yellow glue. And this same instinctive desire to protect and provide for one's family is why both brothers banded together to "adopt" Arly into the Micah family.

While Jarvin and Darwin's dedication throughout this process was amazing, Arly's attitude has been pretty inspiring as well. Let's look at this process through the eyes of this twelve year old: two older teens show up every once in a while where he lives claiming to be his brothers. Finally, they come saying that it's time for him to leave all of his friends, the staff at the orphanage, and even the city in which he grew up to move with them to an entirely new place! He gets on a bus with them, makes the trip to Tegucigalpa, and arrives at the Micah House (much smaller than his orphanage!). He is immediately surrounded by his twelve new brothers, all of whom are older than he is.

Though such circumstances would make all of us want to run and hide, Arly started moving in and fitting in all at the same time. By the time I got back from the States just a few days after Arly's arrival, he already seemed like a Micah Project veteran. This round-faced, quick-to-smile child has already made fast friends

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(partners in crime?) with Erick and Maycol. He's one of those people who, upon meeting for the first time, makes you feel like you've known them for ages. He still forgets that Jarvin and Darwin are his brothers (he calls Darwin by his last name "Matute") but, even so, he is already a fixed part of the brotherhood that is the Micah House.



Above: Jarvin picks up Arly (left) at his orphanage in San Pedro Sula.

Little did he know, Arly moved into a project that is undergoing many transitions as well. I wish that I could handle transitions as easily and flexibly as Arly handled the uprooting and transplanting of his life! January and February have been months of exciting change at the Micah Project. And while all transitions are scary at first, I believe that these changes at the Micah Project reflect God's continued blessing and care.

The first big transition involved Jeony, the Honduran missionary who has been our ministry coordinator out at the city dump and Villa Linda Miller for the last three years. In February, Jeony was installed as the pastor of the new church at Villa Linda Miller! Since founding Villa Linda Miller after hurricane Mitch in 1999, we have been praying for a pastor to help shepherd these 165 families. Throughout the past year, it has become clear that Jeony is the man for the mission. He established

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two cell groups in the community for weekly Bible study and worship. He also began a marriage support group for couples that were struggling to stay together. Finally, in December, Jeony moved into our ministry house in Villa Linda Miller with his wife Jesse and their three children. Talk about an incarnational ministry!

In mid-February, a group of men from the First Presbyterian Church of Meridian, Mississippi came down to build Jeony and Jesse a permanent home in Villa Linda Miller. While the group was here, over one hundred people gathered in our community center for his installation service as the new pastor. In the most touching moment of the service, Jeony and his family knelt before the crowd while several of us placed our hands on them. At that point, Jeony's pastor said a prayer of blessing over the church and the ministry that this family was poised to undertake.



Above: Randy Mayfield and the men from Meridian First E.P.C. lay their hands on Jeony's family at his installation ceremony.

In the first couple weeks of Sunday services, it was easy to see Jeony's passion for this ministry. The church has rented a bus, which stops by the dump every Sunday to pick up families for the service. Because of that, many of the children in our program at the city dump are now able to attend church! On the second Sunday of services, three people went forward and became Christians. We feel that this is

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just the beginning of a great work that God is going to do through the church at Villa Linda Miller.

While the Micah Project will miss Jeony's daily presence as our ministry coordinator, we are very excited about this new avenue of ministry. We will continue to support Jeony and his family both financially and spiritually while the church gets off the ground. We appreciate your prayers for this new ministry!

Another exciting transition has occurred in our Leadership House ministry. In February, we hired a young Honduran couple, Marlon and Nohemi Castellanos, to take over the coordination and operation of the Leadership House, our home for our older participants. Both have been active as leaders in their church for several years, coordinating cell groups and a ministry to newly married couples. Marlon also worked with a program that taught primary education to ex-gang members in a couple of the slums in Tegucigalpa. Additionally, he has been involved in our young men's lives on an informal level for a couple of years, both as a friend and a role model. Marlon is currently studying in a local seminary.

We cannot even express how excited we are that this couple has joined us in ministry. We have long prayed for a couple that can model for our young men what it means to have a God-centered Christian marriage. This young couple has already shown a passion for discipling them and has found an effective balance between parenting the guys and empowering them to make the first important decisions of adulthood. Miguel, Oscar, Danilo, and Edwin are all starting college in the next few months. Marlon and Nohemi will provide them with a sense of security and guidance that they will very much need in this scary new stage in their lives!

The arrival of the Castellanos brought yet one other transition to the Micah Project. Becca Haver, our missionary from West Virginia, has been the interim coordinator of the Leadership House for a year and a half. On top of that position, she maintained a full load of responsibilities in her very powerful outreach to the young men of the Micah House. She is a courageous young woman who brings a sense of balance and direction to our project and to our teens who are always moving in twenty different directions at the same time! Because of her steady sense of vision for this project and her passion for discipling these guys, Becca has been asked by the board of directors to take on the role of Assistant Director of the Micah Project. This new title really reflects what she has been doing all along: taking a lead in making sure that this ministry does the best job possible in creating disciples of Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this update, I felt more like a bystander than a participant in the effort to get little Arly into the Micah House. In reality, there is some truth to that in all of these recent transitions! While God calls us to be faithful ministers of his word, it is clear that He, in His sovereign love, brings the right people and resources into our lives in His perfect timing. I give Him praise and

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glory that he has brought us Becca, Marlon, Nohemi, Jeony, Roger and Jessica to take up this daily challenge of disciple-making!

In the same way, I praise God for you all for supporting this effort with your prayers and resources. I praise Him for the approximately 150 of you that will come and work alongside us this year on short term missions trips. I praise Him for those of you that have supported Marvin, Tino and Olvin in St. Louis over that past few months as they continue to adjust to their life and studies at Missouri Baptist University. And, last but definitely not least, I praise God for all of you who may have never met a Micah boy but have felt the call to support them anyway. I hope that all of you understand what a blessing and encouragement you are to us and to these young men!

Thank you, friends, for the many ways that you help us to strengthen and grow our little patchwork family!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

“Seemingly Impossible” June 2006 Update

In April of 2006, Missouri Baptist University published an article titled “Saving Grace: Three Honduran Students Reflect on the Road that Led Them Here.” The article describes the incredible obstacles that Olvin, Marvin and Tino had to overcome on their long journey from the streets of Honduras to the classrooms of Missouri Baptist. At one point, the article states, “After graduation from high school with above-average grades and unmatched hard-learned life lessons, three of those boys are now pursuing what was once seemingly impossible: an undergraduate degree at MBU.”

“Seemingly impossible”: don’t those words encapsulate perfectly so many of the journeys that God asks us to undertake in this life? When we received a calling in 1999 to establish a home in which street kids could be formed into Christian leaders, the words “seemingly impossible” were always somewhere in the back of our minds. Is transformation possible in a kid whose only idea of “living” is to sell enough peanuts on the streets to buy a few tortillas for dinner? Can vision and purpose be instilled in hearts so damaged by abuse and neglect? Whenever these young men even dared to have ideas about what their lives might look like beyond the misery of the streets, the world always seemed to shout back at them: “IMPOSSIBLE!”

“Who then, can be saved?” Just as the disciples asked this simple yet desperate question to Jesus Christ, his answer was equally simple but also incredibly profound: “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). Through human lenses, opening the Micah House in 1999 to create disciples out of the “lost children” of this world was at best a quixotic dream and at worse a fool’s errand. And, I’ll admit, that there have been challenging times in the last six years in which we have wondered if this dark world wrought too much damage in the lives of these young men; perhaps true healing was impossibly beyond our reach. But those times are when God always worked most clearly. The greater the obstacle to overcome, the more clearly God seems to proclaim: “Just wait and see how I will display my glory through your lives.”

Now that nine of our young men have graduated from high school, the prevailing feeling around the Micah Project these days is not one of impossibility but one of hope. Not a Hollywood-happy-ending kind of hope that says, “Now everything will turn out perfectly for me.” In fact, each of our graduates can tell you how challenging it is to begin their university studies and adapt to a new way of life—in some cases, even a new culture and language. Nevertheless, the seemingly insurmountable obstacles always seem to get surmounted, and the guys continue determinedly onward towards their future.



It is with that future in mind that we ask for your continued support. We have prayerfully worked together with our graduates to identify the institution that will best prepare each of them to meet their future goals (see below for details). While the young men have been able to obtain \$29,000 in institutional yearly scholarships, we will still need to raise approximately \$96,000 for the 2006-2007 school year to pay for college costs, over and above the funds we raise for our operational costs here in Honduras. Your donation to our scholarship fund is an investment in our young men's future and a physical sign of hope in their lives. If you would like to contribute to this special fund, we ask that you send a check to "the Micah Project" with a memo that it is to be used for the scholarship fund (see address below).

In the same Missouri Baptist article mentioned above, Tino was asked what the Micah Project meant to him. He responded, "For the first time in my entire life, I found love. That love gave me hope that I had never felt before." Many of you have given of your time, energy, prayers, and financial resources to show our young men that they are indeed loved. Please know that, through your support, the words "seemingly impossible" have been replaced by a confident assurance in what God will do in the lives of these young men.

“Hard to Forget” July 2006 Update

It was the grand debut of “Los Micah Boys.” On this sunny June day, the central plaza of Tegucigalpa was teeming with people. Thousands stream through the square every Saturday on their way to the fruit market, or stop to stroll through the stalls that surround the plaza. As Jose, Jerson, Pedro and Marvin walked up the stairs and onto the stage that overlooks the plaza, they looked a little nervous, but they also had a fixed sense of purpose in their eyes.

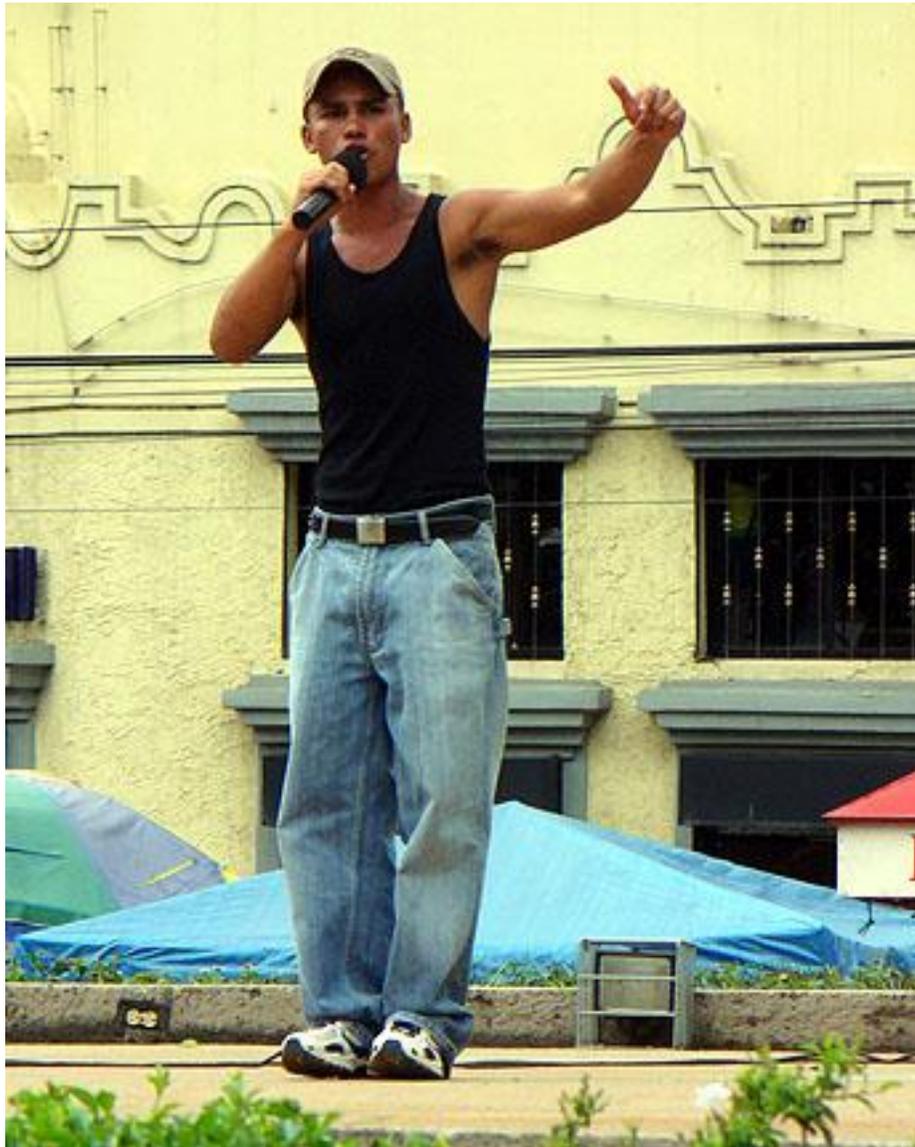
This would be the first time that the public would hear songs from their new CD, entitled “Difícil de Olvidar”, or “Hard to Forget.” They had worked on their album for months. Each of them would spend hours at a time, holed away in his room, writing lyrics that stemmed directly from his life. Often, the words of their songs speak of the pain and darkness that each of them encountered as children. But in each of the eleven songs that they eventually produced, what shines through most clearly is hope, not despair.

Finally, this past Saturday, these long pent-up lyrics burst forth into the public arena. As their pulsing rhythms and powerful lyrics began to echo off the 250-year old cathedral that loomed directly in front of their stage, hundreds of people began to move forward to hear our young men better. And instead of getting nervous and faltering, each one of the singers seemed to grow in stature and in confidence.

And let me tell you, these young men were not just a teenage boy band trying to imitate the Backstreet Boys or Eminem. Their lyrics carried the power and maturity of a life already refined in the fires of darkness, yet now shining brilliantly in a new Light. Jose, for example, wrote a song called “Sueños”, or “Dreams.” One part of the song goes like this:

My dream and my desire is to one day be at home with my Lord,
Touch his face and feel his love.
And see His justice reigning in us,
It will be awesome, it will be awesome,
To see a world no longer divided,
A beggar no longer rejected
An old man no longer abandoned
A child no longer mistreated
And tears that no longer fall like rain

Because of the lack of justice;
It will be awesome, awesome!
Shouting joyfully, Lord, I am,
Because that day will soon come
When You will come back for us.



Jose's song paints images of desperate lives, scenes that he lived day-by-day in his childhood. This young man, who had to flee his alcoholic and abusive home and help raise his five younger brothers and sisters by shining shoes on the streets, has

no end of stories about darkness. Yet, his song is not principally about those stories. At the end of this song, Jose writes:

“With an immense love

Care and tenderness

He says, “I love you, I don’t want you to keep

Suffering

Only think of me

And you’ll realize that, in me,

You’ll leave your past behind.”

Indeed, José is not writing bitterly about the past, he is rather writing hopefully about a future in which, “they will not toil in vain or bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the LORD, they and their descendants with them.” (Isaiah 65: 23).

Fittingly, as Jose and the others sang, a group of about twenty-five street kids dressed in rags came and sat on the edge of the stage, listening intently to his songs. Did these kids, high on yellow glue, realize that this confident and passionate young man survived his childhood by shining shoes not thirty paces from where he now stood? Did they know that he fled to the streets just as they did to escape the rages of an alcoholic father? But most importantly, did they understand that his song was a really a prayer for them, that justice would reign in their lives?

At that moment, I had a realization that brought tears of joy to my eyes. Our young men have truly become missionaries to their own culture! Using the rhythms of Latin American youth, a musical style called “requetón” in Spanish, our guys express their faith in a way that can be clearly understood by the youth of Honduras. They are not just speaking theoretical words into a void; rather, they are preaching incarnational truth to people whose lives look much like their own.

The young men of the Micah Project are not just learning to preach pretty words, though; they are also learning to “walk their talk.” This year, the guys have been focusing on outreach in several ways. Each Tuesday, they visit the government asylum, a gloomy place where indigent elderly people are placed and quickly forgotten. Our guys move from bed to bed, delivering snacks to the elderly and spending some time to chat with them. Then, on Thursdays, the young men spend the afternoon on the streets, ministering to the street kids near the national stadium and in the public squares. These times of outreach are an awesome opportunity for

our young men to say, both with their words and their presence: "See this light in my eyes? Hear the hope in my voice? Come, join me in it!"

Erick, a precocious and lively Micah boy, who at fourteen is one of our younger ones, came bouncing back into the Micah House one day after visiting the asylum. "Guess what?" he enthused. "An old lady told me that talking to me was the highlight of her week! She asked when I was going to come back!" Erick, along with our other young men, is beginning to understand what a joy it is to share the light.

The wonderful thing about the Micah Project is that the young men are learning to give because of so many people that have faithfully given to them. The hope that you have displayed in their lives is what is now pouring out into others. Your support is beginning to bear great fruit in Honduras! To echo the title of our guys' album, your love for the Micah boys is "hard to forget"!

We appreciate your continued prayers and support as our young men continue to step out in faith!

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller

“The Father of Lost Causes” Christmas 2006

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord.’”
(Luke 2:8-9)

Do you ever wonder why God chooses lost causes? Why he chose insignificant shepherds to announce the lowly, homeless birth of Jesus? Sure, the shepherds “spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child” (Luke 2: 17), but couldn’t there have been a more flashy, attention-grabbing way of announcing the arrival of a Savior?

Maybe God chooses the lost causes of this world to spread His good news because it makes it crystal clear that man has nothing to do with his own salvation. If He chooses the stuttering to be His voice and the stumbling to be His feet, we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is the one doing the saving. And that truly causes us to sing “Glory to God in the highest”.

In 1987, another baby was born into lowly circumstances. He too had no place to lay his head. His mother, a mentally ill street woman, never spent more than a month or two in the same place. She quickly abandoned her young boy to a life of misery and violence on the mean streets of Tegucigalpa. By all accounts, this boy was destined for a life of violent crime, gang warfare and probably an early death...another nameless statistic in an ongoing tragedy.

But God delights in working through lost causes. One morning in March 2002, we found this forgotten child sleeping on the sidewalk in front of the Micah House. He entered through the doors of the Micah House for the first time—a lost cause now found—a young man ready to discover his identity as a child of God. Pedro is his name—Peter. Fittingly, the young man’s namesake is the fisherman disciple who made great leaps of faith—and often found himself drowning in the process. Another lost cause, Peter the disciple denied his Lord after promising to follow him to his death, only to be later commissioned by his Forgiving Friend to feed His sheep.

Our Pedro has grown into a true disciple as well in his four years at the Micah Project. And, unsurprisingly, he has a true talent for believing in lost causes. Last week, he was doing some nighttime street outreach when he came across an abandoned baby. The newborn’s prostitute mother had left the baby in the arms of a teenage street girl before disappearing. Pedro took the sixteen-day-old baby in his arms and went off in a taxi to see if someone, anyone, had “room at the inn” for this little one.

Pedro is not perfect...what disciple is? But his Father has taken this son by the hand and has used him to bring the “good news of great joy” throughout Honduras. Pedro has developed into a talented singer and songwriter. This year, he has sung in public parks, high schools, churches, and on television. One of his songs ends this way:



Whom are you going to choose?

That is the question that I want to ask you;

Because in your failures you only want to run.
Listen!

In God there is life; hope that doesn't turn back.

Why does a forgotten son of a street woman sing so confidently about hope? It's obvious to him: because God loves lost causes! We have seen this hope multiplied twenty-four times in the Micah Project in our seven years of operation. Some of our young men have been with us since the beginning and are now defying all odds by moving through their university education towards a hope-filled life. Others are newer arrivals, still discovering for themselves that they are not lost causes. All of them, though, have one thing in common: the salvation that has found them, that has reached into the darkest corners of Tegucigalpa to redeem them, shouts “glory to God in the highest!” through every one of their lives.

Your love and continued support reminds our young men of the hope God has called them to. Even as they choose light and life, darkness still surrounds them on all sides, whispering to them that it is their true home. Thank you for giving them the courage to step out into the raging sea, just as Peter did so long ago, knowing every day that their Savior's loving hand will sustain them.

In this Christmas season, we thank you for empowering our young men to join the heavenly chorus in singing, “Glory to God in the highest”.

Your brother in Christ,

Michael Miller