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To the many who have cared,

Opportunity has a way of presenting itself when we least expect it. Sometimes we are prepared, but more often there are times when an opportunity catches us off guard, leaving us to decide how and when we will respond, should we choose to respond at all.

Life at present in Guatemala is often unpredictable. Danger is found in much of Guatemala City and even when out and about in areas considered to be safe, circumstances can change at a moment's notice, suddenly transforming relative calm into a life threatening situation. Consistently being under threat of harm leaves a person feeling vulnerable and constantly on alert. Not all situations that present themselves unannounced are to be avoided, however. Some even present us with the opportunity to reach out to another in a moment of need and intentionally be a force for good in the world.

Such was the case on a recent Sunday morning when, returning home from church, I came upon a car stranded on the side of the road. The car had failed its owner in a particularly precarious spot, at the end of a short ramp exiting an inner city highway. An adolescent girl had replaced him in the driver's seat, where she sat, back arched, pressed against the steering wheel, tensely holding tight to it as if she wasn't prepared for the task before her. I assumed that she was the owner's daughter. The owner, a man in his 40s, labored to push the car to a safer location. But the car, an old and battered BMW, was mid-sized, likely heavy and thoroughly uncooperative. I turned our microbus at the nearest corner and pulled to the curb. I spoke to the young men who live in our shelter, "I want you to go back and help that man jump start his car. But pay attention to the traffic and be careful."

My companions scrambled out of the bus and hastened to the immobile BMW, leaving me alone in a vulnerable area to watch over our vehicle. I waited longer than expected without word or a sign of my crew. Becoming anxious, I stepped out onto the street intending to search for them, when two of our guys, Marvin and Bryan turned the corner and approached me. Marvin spoke. "We can't jump start the car. Its owner thinks it is out of gas. What should we do?" I thought for a moment before responding. "Ask him if he has a container that will hold gasoline. There's a gas station nearby and I'll be glad to give him a ride, if he has a proper container." Marvin nodded and muttered, "very well," then along with Bryan, disappeared once again.

Soon after they reappeared with the others and the owner of the BMW, who clutched a worn and discolored plastic jug to his chest. His daughter, whom he had left to guard their car, was nowhere to be seen. "Do you want me to leave a couple of my guys with your daughter," I asked. "No, she'll be fine," he responded dismissively, but I wasn't convinced. "It's not a problem and

my guys will be glad to do it if I ask them.” “No, no,” he insisted. “We won’ be long. Don’t worry.” But I did worry and drove faster than I normally do or should have.

After a brief and mostly silent ride, we arrived at the gas station. Our passenger grabbed the yellowish jug and declared, “I won’t be long,” then hurried to make his purchase. Finding ourselves alone for a moment, my companions gave voice to their thoughts regarding our unexpected opportunity to assist a couple of stranded motorists. They had concluded that it was fortunate that we had come upon the father and daughter at what had been, at least for them, the opportune moment. I contended that it was more than good fortune, that God had orchestrated our meeting, that He had invited us to be His heart and His hands and we had merely chosen to accept His invitation. My companions consented and then fell silent.

Our passenger returned, his jug full and reeking of gasoline. Conversation flowed more easily during the second leg of our journey. Our passenger was curious to know why I totted around a somewhat unorthodox group of young men. He was delighted with my explanation and shared that he was the coach of a girl’s volleyball team. He had been on his way to pick up one of his players and give her ride to a game when his car had faltered. The girl’s parents were of limited means and without a car and transportation to and from the games was often difficult for her. Our good deed had come in response to his attempt at a good deed that had developed a glitch. I smiled to myself at the thought of it.

We dropped our passenger off at his still lifeless car. Both the car and his daughter were safe and unharmed. I offered to wait to be sure that his BMV had been thirsty and nothing more, but he assured me that all would now be well, leaving me to wonder if he was an old hand at managing this sort of thing. I also wondered if the needle on his gas gauge still functioned, but refrained from asking.

I further shared my observations with my companions during the brief ride home. “You know, I wasn’t sure if we should stop when I first saw the broken down car. We’ve all heard stories when situations like these are traps and innocent, well-intentioned people are assaulted and killed. But I looked at the father and his daughter and their need seemed real to me. And then I thought, *what better time to be a Good Samaritan than after having just attended church.* Once again my companions quietly consented.

The scent of gasoline lingered in our microbus for a day or so, a toxic but somehow pleasant reminder of our act of kindness.

We live in a world where human contact seems to be on the decline. We retreat into our homes and our electronic gadgets as never before. Neighbors often largely remain strangers, year after year. Yet who among us does not still need to know that simple human decency is alive and well? The need is great in Guatemala, given the degree of violence that currently exists. I find myself consistently battling the tendency to be wary of strangers when they cross my path. No doubt the inability to trust others comes with a cost, for the isolation it produces only serves to create further suspicion and harden our hearts. Life, it seems, was meant to be a shared experience.

Many of our youngsters have come to us from troubled backgrounds that were lacking in assorted ways, harmful far too often, leaving them ill prepared to face life on their own. Only A Child spends much of its time grooming them for adulthood, making up for lost time, making the most of whatever time we will have together. We nurture their humanity as best we can, working in a place where one's humanity is often under assault. As such, sometimes we are given the opportunity to be our own agents of hope.

Our response to the many challenges facing Guatemala may be modest in the overall scheme of things, but it remains necessary and vital, especially to the young men who call Only A Child home. Thank you for continuing to stand behind our mission and its work.

May God bless.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be the name 'George', written in a cursive style.

George

PS Members of our Board of Directors are hosting a fall fundraiser for Only A Child. The event, **A Taste of Guatemala: An Evening to Benefit Only A Child**, will be held on Saturday, November 19th from 6 to 8 pm at Arlington St. Church in Boston. For more information on attending or sponsoring this event, please contact us at bodfinance@onlyachild.org or visit our website at www.onlyachild.org.