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To the many who have cared,

We seldom acknowledge the degree to which common kindness sustains and inspires us. We may smile and readily nod our heads in approval upon hearing of a caring word or deed. More often than not, however, we are quick to move on to whatever awaits our attention after briefly having had our spirits lifted by the knowledge of the kindness of another. Even so, it is likely that each of us has experienced good will, both as the giver and the recipient of basic human decency. Either way, we are blessed through the process and reminded of the endless ability of kindness to ease despair and transform a day.

Being that Only A Child is a charitable organization and my vocation, I often find myself in the presence of kindness. Our work is based on the belief that others will care enough about its existence to sustain it. Our ability to reach out to others is built upon the understanding that others must first reach out to us. Only A Child simply pays your kindness forward.

Kindness has a rather effortless way of breeding additional kindness. As Only A Child's good will ambassador, I have seen it happen time and again. Therefore it came as no surprise when recently I was called upon to facilitate the wish of caring souls to reach out to others in need.

The opportunity presented itself in April, on the occasion of our annual fundraising dinner. As is customary, the evening's events included a slide presentation, highlighting our work throughout the previous year. A series of slides focused on several of our program's graduates, while discussing the challenges and accomplishments of their lives since leaving Only A Child. Included was a photo of Jonathan and his 5 year old daughter Kimberly. Kimberly's mother has been absent from her life. Jonathan's own father abandoned his family some time ago and, for several years, Jonathan's mother has raised his younger siblings in her home town, several hours away. Jonathan, who adores Kimberly, has largely been left to raise her alone.

As the evening drew to a close, two of our longtime supporters approached me to speak in private. They asked if they might sponsor Jonathan and Kimberly. I was moved, not only by their request, but also, by the urgency of their wish to ease the struggles of a father and daughter they had never met. Perhaps their acute concern was personal, for Jonathan's new sponsors or *padrinos*, the Spanish word for godparents, have a lovely daughter whom they adopted from Guatemala when she was 9 months old. I imagine that their love for their daughter served as the fount of their compassion.

Contact with Jonathan has been occasional of late, as caring for Kimberly demands much of his time. Work is nearly impossible to come by in present day Guatemala, and Jonathan had settled into making ends meet as best he could, improvising as a street vendor, selling whatever might

be in demand at any given moment. In the spring, Jonathan found employment in a small factory. The days were long, from early morning till eight at night, but Jonathan was willing to put in the demanding hours in exchange for a steady source of income.

In Guatemala, wages are often paid twice monthly. Jonathan received his first paycheck two weeks after beginning work. The amount was roughly \$40. Even by Guatemalan standards, the pay was woefully inadequate considering the requirements of the job. It was an all-too-common example of shameless employers taking advantage of young men desperate for work.

Disheartened, Jonathan began to work in Guatemala City's infamous garbage dump, sifting through trash, serving as a human recycler. We met to talk one morning shortly after my return to Guatemala. It was at that time that I told him of his *padrinos'* decision and presented him with the first installment of their monthly sponsorship. Jonathan shook his head in happy disbelief while resisting the urge to cry. He had badly needed relief from the burden of being a single father raising a daughter in the face of unrelenting poverty.

Jonathan and I parted company just before noon. He had taken the morning off to meet with me and needed to return to the dump to work the rest of the day. Later that afternoon, word began to spread that there had been a major implosion at the dump. Dozens of workers had gone missing and it was feared that many of them had been killed, buried alive in the trash. My heart beating more quickly than usual, I called Jonathan on his cell phone, praying that he would respond. On the fourth ring he did. "Thank God you're alive," was all I could manage to say. Jonathan, in response, also gave thanks to God.

Many lost their lives as a result of the implosion. The numbers varied, but most accounts of the tragedy concluded that more than 20 people died. Some were never found.

After leaving my apartment, Jonathan did not return to work that day. Encouraged by the news of his *padrinos'* generosity, he took the afternoon to buy some badly needed groceries and a toy for Kimberly. He could have waited until evening to make the purchases, but wanted to savor the moment and bask in the knowledge of his new found blessing.

Each of us has within us the capacity to care about the wellbeing of others. It is a birthright of our humanity. It is in our nature to alleviate suffering when faced with it. Jonathan's *padrinos* chose to lighten the burden of a single father thousands of miles away. Their willingness to honor the compassion they felt may have, as a consequence, saved Jonathan's life as well.

The reasons that each of you supports our work are likely many. But together we share a common concern and purpose: to rebuild damaged young lives. And so, together, we build kindness upon kindness upon kindness. Thank you for continuing to honor the compassion you feel for the young men that Only A Child serves. May God bless.



George