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To the many who have cared,

Pablo and I share the same birthday, May 7th, although forty years separate our being welcomed into this life. We come from different eras, different cultures – different backgrounds altogether - yet even so, spending time together is easy and relaxed.

Then again, I am comfortable in the company of all of our youngsters. Despite my advancing years, I remain young at heart in ways that enable me to regress at a moments notice and behave in a rather juvenile manner. And spending time in the presence of such good-natured young men undoubtedly helps to keep me youthful, at least in spirit. Perhaps it is a chicken and egg scenario in that it is impossible to decipher which gives life to the other.

There has been much discussion of late concerning the state of the family in western civilization. With so much priority given to individual fulfillment, it seems precious little concern remains for spending time in the company of loved ones. The ever-increasing absence of making an effort to come together surely brings consequences and diminishes our well being, both on an individual and societal level. Our humanity suffers for this loss of connection.

As a child, I was blessed with loving extended families. I remember spending countless hours gathered around kitchen and dining room tables, sharing a meal or a cup of a coffee, always accompanied by some sort of dessert. Conversation flowed easily with opinions given without reserve, so much so that it could be difficult for a boy not terribly sure of himself to *get a word in edgewise*. But I never felt excluded during such gatherings. On the contrary, I felt that I belonged, not only to a loving if slightly eccentric cast of characters, but also to a ritual rooted in times that long predated me and would carry on well after I ceased to occupy a place at the table.

Such gatherings nurtured me immeasurably. They helped me develop an identity and find a place for myself in the world. They showed me that I was cared for and taught me how to care about others. They educated me to the numerous pleasures of spending time in the company of friends and family. Most importantly, perhaps, they helped me look beyond the self-absorbed tendencies that often accompany adolescence.

I believe that the well-being of a society directly corresponds to the well-being of its families. Guatemala continues to struggle in many ways. Anarchy seems but a heart beat away. Violence and corruption continue to exist at alarming levels. Large numbers of youngsters are falling into delinquency and ultimately being lost. It is a topic endlessly discussed and lamented here. Not surprisingly, there also currently exists in Guatemala large numbers of broken homes and splintered families. Far too many men still walk away from wives and children, renouncing



their responsibility as husbands and fathers. Domestic abuse also remains a problem. How can a society thrive when its most essential building block, the family, is in such dire straights?

I've made a concerted effort to keep the art of making conversation alive and well in our home, wanting to pass on the joy I experienced as a child in the company of my family. The use of cell phones is prohibited at the table. Discussion is encouraged. At first, I needed to take the initiative sustaining conversation. Little by little, however, my companions more freely participated in our discussions and now put forth topics to be considered when they feel so moved. Most evenings we linger at the table well after dinner is done, talking about a variety of subjects, most of them of no great consequence. Then again, it's all about the company we keep.

Given how dangerous it remains to venture out, we spend a lot of time at home. Although our youngsters are often occupied by their studies, we still find time to gather in the living room to watch a sporting event or a movie. We are rediscovering the pleasure of old-fashioned board and table top games. On weekends, many of our guys go to a nearby park to hang out together and play sports. On Sunday mornings we attend church as a family.

This year my birthday marked a minor milestone, as I turned 60. To celebrate not only my, but also Pablo's special day, we went to an ecological park outside of the city. The fact that most everyone slept during the return journey late in the afternoon testifies to the day's success. Alone with my thoughts as I drove, I reflected on my life, and how utterly content I am at present. Over dinner that night, I offered the evening prayer then shared how grateful I felt to have spent the day in the company of everyone present.

Out of the blue of late, I've experienced moments of gratitude so pure and so great as to be moved to tears. Living in Guatemala, one is often surrounded by suffering on many levels. Year after year, all of our needs are met. Our lifestyle at Only A Child is undoubtedly modest by U.S. standards, but by Guatemalan and most of the world's standards, we are abundantly blessed. We lack for nothing.

When nearly a quarter of a century ago, I received unexpected notice that I was to leave my former life behind, I could never have predicted that things would turn out as they have. I couldn't have begun to imagine it. But I understood that the decision that I begin anew in Guatemala was a done deal. It was as if God had temporarily taken over my will and I was to simply follow the call I had been given. I have not regretted in any way where I have been led.

Over the years, from far and wide, a great number of people have come forward to support this work. It is through each of you that the Lord provides for this ministry so splendidly. Like me, you have been called and have responded. Thank you for coming forward on our behalf.

Enjoy the summer. May God bless.

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

George