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To the many who have cared,

We all have doubts. We have all experienced moments when we questioned our ability to manage certain situations or complete tasks before us. Such doubts have plagued me off and on throughout my tenure at Only A Child. It's not that I've felt incompetent but rather, thought there surely were others more qualified than I to fill my post in any number of ways.

Along that line, I have often regretted my choice of name for this ministry, Only A Child. It is not a name that is self-explanatory and therefore, it is not unusual that someone questions its origin. For some reason, whenever asked, I have found myself resisting the urge to wince, or at least until recently.

The name Only A Child was taken from a journal I kept, chronicling my initial journey to Guatemala during March 1994. The entry recounts my first experience spending time with children living in the street. The third and final destination visited on that occasion held special interest for me, as it had been home to a boy named *Giovani*, when the term *home* had nothing to do with a physical structure providing security and protection from the elements. For those of you who may not know, *Giovani* was the subject of a story fronting the May 2, 1993 edition of the Boston Globe Magazine. It was *Giovani's Story* and the details of his struggle and ultimate failure to survive in the streets of Guatemala City that compelled me to thoroughly upend my life and begin anew in an unknown land.

Giovani's former home at the time of my first visit, was a decaying and by night, largely abandoned bus terminal on the corner of 9th Ave. and 18th St. It was called *la Novena* or *the Ninth*. My guide, a man named William, and I arrived just before 10 PM. *La Novena* had been described in some detail in *Giovani's Story*. Throughout the 10 months leading up to my arrival, I had often tried to imagine how I would respond upon seeing it firsthand. Finding my way there, I was in no way disappointed. On returning to my hotel shortly after midnight, exhausted but exhilarated, I wrote in my journal:

"La Novena is home to one of the city's major bus terminals. At its center is a large, cleared space. At the terminal's entrance were the *casettas* or food stalls I had read about so many times in *Giovani's Story*. Some were still open for business. There was the spreading tree on the corner, giving shelter to the *casettas*. And there were the kerosene lamps, still giving off their flickering light. But the flames were larger than I had envisioned. They were torch like and strong. A pesky wind, traveling down 18th St., briefly held in check by the confined stretch leading to 9th Ave, suddenly let loose in the wide and open space of *La Novena*. The wind wrestled with the lamps flames, as if trying to snuff them out and extinguish their light. The flames bent and they thinned, and their light dimmed to the point of disappearing altogether. But the flames would not be doused. Their light would not die."

“A moment later, William tapped my shoulder then pointed to the ground ahead. But I didn’t want to be disturbed. ‘Not now,’ I thought. But William had called my attention to a pair of boys lying before us, sandwiched between well-worn cardboard boxes, fast asleep. ‘Please give me just a minute or two alone,’ I wanted to say. I knew it couldn’t be. *Giovani* was no more. The two sleeping boys still lived. *Giovani* was dead. He had died only a child. I could do nothing to change that. *Giovani* would never be more than what might have been, what, in all of its sad truth, should have been. Lying before us was what still might be. I stood in *La Novena* trying to make sense of *Giovani*’s death. Barely visible between the cardboard boxes lay the chance to do so.”

Looking back these many years later, I believe I decided to found this ministry at that moment, although my decision would not take conscious form for several months to come. When faced with the need to name the organization I had chosen to begin, I remembered the journal entry just recounted and, in memory of *Giovani*, decided on Only A Child. Simply put nothing else came to mind, or at least nothing I preferred. I had misgivings with the name from the beginning. I thought it rather uninspired.

Much of my time is spent fulfilling administrative responsibilities. It is work for which I have little affinity. Understanding however that considerable documentation is required in this line of work, I strive to complete these responsibilities as best I can, in service to the One who has entrusted me with this ministry and those who benefit from its existence. Nevertheless, this aspect of my job can feel tedious, perhaps contributing to the self-doubt with which I have struggled. It is difficult to feel good about work that can sometimes seem a burden.

A couple of years ago, I once again found myself questioning my abilities and asking, “Why me”? The doubts were persistent and troubling. Whenever struggling with a situation, I keep a Bible by my side at night, to have it readily available should I awake in need of words to counsel and calm me. Waking one morning well before dawn, I opened my Bible randomly to one of Paul’s epistles. I can’t recall which. I possess a teaching Bible. Explanations of the readings are given at the bottom of the page. I read a section of verse first then found its explanation below. The explanation stated (I paraphrase): *What the Lord seeks most in a servant is not intelligence or talent or ability. What the Lord values most is a willing heart.* “That’s it,” I thought. “That’s me. I have a willing heart.” This has proven to be the only explanation necessary as to why I was called to Guatemala. The nagging thoughts that had plagued me for so long have not returned.

Not long after settling in Guatemala, I began the practice of beginning my day in prayer. The amount of time given to this practice has grown steadily over the years and, for some time now, has been accompanied by the reading of a daily devotion. A series of devotions during the month of July touched a common theme and led me to the Bible’s book of Jeremiah.

After finding my way to the Old Testament book, I faced a page highlighting Jeremiah’s life and work. I felt I should read it. Towards the end of the profile a key verse was given, taken from the first chapter. I have stretched it slightly to include verses 5-8. It states:

5 " Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart... 6 'Ah, Sovereign Lord,' I said, 'I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.' 7 But the Lord said to me, ' Do not say, I am only a child. You must go to everyone I send you and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid...for I am with you and will protect you,' says the Lord."

The key verse taken from my Bible's book of Jeremiah further served to confirm that I was meant to take root in Guatemala. Living here I fulfill a purpose chosen for me long ago. It also seems to say that any further doubt in that regard would be counter productive and pointless. I do not walk this earth alone. I keep divine company as do we all, should we so choose.

Furthermore, Jeremiah 1: 5-8 has provided me with a deeper appreciation for our name. It has also comforted me with the knowledge that its selection was not mine alone. Only A Child was also chosen by a far greater authority than I on such matters. In future days, when asked of the origin of our name, I shall respond without hesitation.

I feel fortunate and blessed to lead this life. Much of my work is anything but burdensome. One aspect of it however, particularly speaks to my heart: mentoring the young men I have been charged to watch over; giving them the best example I can muster at any given moment as to what it means to be a godly man. With each passing day, I feel ever more compelled to be the kind of person who gives the Christian faith a good name. That is where I find my greatest challenge and fulfillment.

Thank you for continuing to believe in this Only A Child, its work and yes, thank you for continuing to believe in me and my ability to head this ministry. Thank you for continuing to care about the young men who have found a home and sense of purpose while under our care.

May God bless.

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

George