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To the many who have cared,

Despite the fact that Guatemalan president Giammattei declared an end to the pandemic this past July, the country has struggled to establish a stable, post- pandemic existence. Everyday life has yet to redefine itself in a coherent way. There remains, at present, no sense that a consistent rhythm has taken hold and begun to lead the way to a new established order. The need to be flexible and take each new day as it comes remains an invaluable tool and strategy to survive and thrive, for uncertainty remains the order of the day.

Countless people still struggle to re-establish their place in an ever-shifting economy. Many lost jobs during the pandemic and continue to seek employment, eventually needing to invent for themselves sustainable but unstable work in the informal employment sector. In addition, while most schools resumed on-site classes in January, Guatemala's primary public university, the University of San Carlos (USAC), has lagged behind and continues with virtual study.

Most of our youths' studies are USAC focused. With the goal to keep them engaged in academic activity and establish on-site educational alternatives - while creating possibilities to reestablish social contacts and networks outside of the home - Only A Child has developed a supplementary educational program for our residents. A significant amount of time was given to researching and implementing these additional options. New opportunities for study have now been established in a variety of locations, including: English language academies, area vocational schools, computer studies institutions, online platforms offering a vast selection of courses and, the Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce.

Throughout the pandemic, Only A Child has worked in earnest to adapt to the profound changes resulting as a consequence, while seeking to offer a variety of education-related alternatives which will best guarantee our residents chances to fulfill their objectives during their tenure at Only A Child. The implementation of a supplementary educational program represents our latest effort to adapt and evolve in ways which best serve the interests and the needs of the program's residents.

This May 2nd will mark the 30th anniversary of the publishing of *Giovani's Story*. Many of you are aware of the significance of this event to the founding of Only A Child, but for those of you are not, I offer the following brief explanation.

Written by Sara Terry, *Giovani's Story* tells of the life and brutal death of a Guatemalan street child named Giovani. It was the cover story of the Boston Globe Sunday Magazine on the day of its publication. I casually decided to read the piece, never imagining the profound impact it would have on my life. Halfway through the reading of *Giovani's Story*, I closed the magazine and thought, "You can leave this magazine closed and if you do, you'll likely be able to return to your life as it was before you opened it. But if you reopen the magazine and finish reading *Giovani's Story*, your life will probably never be the same again." The following

March, just 10 months later, I found my way to Guatemala for the first time. Thirty years on, I continue to live in work in the land that has, for all practical purposes, become my home.

In large part, *Giovani's Story* moved me beyond measure for, as detailed in the piece, he had been born into a life of extreme poverty and deprivation. Giovani was picked up during a routine police sweep, common to that era. He was tortured, then murdered, his body later dumped in a remote field on the outskirts of Guatemala City. Such treatment of homeless children was common at that time, its purpose and attempted justification, to clean up the streets.

It is widely accepted that we possess a free will which grants us the ability to decide for ourselves what shape and course our lives will ultimately take. But in the months and initial years following the publication of *Giovani's Story*, I felt as if I no longer had a say regarding my life's future direction. It was as if I had forsaken all ability to resist the unrelenting summons, I found myself confronting. I did not object to placing my life in the hands of Another. It appeared the wise and proper thing to do. Destiny, it seemed, had taken hold of my life with uncompromising authority, leaving me with no option but to submit to Its will.

In the beginning, I had no idea as to what I would actually do, once in Guatemala. I only possessed an unwavering desire to do something, in the attempt to alleviate the suffering of the children I had come to serve. Over time, I found my way and Only A Child evolved and refined its focus, ultimately settling on our present mission - namely to offer opportunities for betterment to young lives in need and in search of them.

On the day of his abduction and murder, Giovani was selling inexpensive items in the street. Not long before, he had returned home to try and rebuild his life. He was doing the best he could, working with the meager opportunity life had afforded him. Only A Child did not yet exist to reach out to him with the kind of alternatives which he had little access to at that time. Perhaps if it had, Giovani might still be alive today.

For the first time since 2019, we will be holding our spring fundraiser. It will once again be held at Sons of Italy hall in Watertown, MA. The hall is large, with a capacity for 250 people. Our gathering generally draws 125 guests on average, allowing us to leave generous space between tables. As in years past, the event will feature an informal luncheon, a raffle featuring prizes both Guatemalan and local to New England, and a presentation by yours truly. The money raised from this event will continue to provide a needed source of revenue in support of our work. I look forward to greeting you in person, after an absence of 4 years.

May God bless.

George

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PS One of our residents was taken seriously ill in December, requiring 17 days of hospitalization. He had 4 different life-threatening illnesses at the time of his admission. Indeed, his very survival was in doubt. He ultimately survived, but his full recovery will require 6 months of care. Thus far, OAC has incurred a \$6,500 expense. The money was taken from our general funding account. The money raised from our spring event will be used, in-part, to reimburse that account. I ask that you be generous in support of the event.