



Suffer the Little Children

by Jean Easley

As a childless couple ourselves, Bro. Easley and I have often been found giving of our love and time and substance to bless homeless or other people's children in Guatemala. The poor and destitute peoples of Guatemala find themselves in hard places, often through no fault of their own; they were simply born into the wrong family or cruel circumstances plagued them. A reformed beggar once told us, "I wanted to get a job, but you can't get a job looking this way!" That statement explains to me, in a simple sort of way, the plight of the poor especially in countries like Guatemala where there are no assistance or self-help programs available for the destitute. And, so often, it seems, the children take their suffering with a special grace that grips the heart.

We lived in a rather quiet community off a very busy main thoroughfare in Guatemala City. We had been able to rent a house for that term on the field, and we enjoyed becoming somewhat acquainted with the people in our neighborhood. Our colonia was the site of several building projects that year. The contractors move in to those sites equipment and building materials that are very valuable, and so they often hire someone to live on the property while the building is going up to guard them. It was the children of this family that we came to know and love.

First Marlo (about 5 years of age) stopped by one day, rang our bell, and asked for a cup of water. He looked hungry, too, so we slipped him a little sweets with his cup of cold water. Soon, Marlo and Elder (about 7 years of age) appeared, and they asked for candy. We obliged a time or two. But when they began to come more often, we decided to give them something more healthful to eat than sweets. So, we gave them buttered toast. Still they came, and I began alternating my food offerings between warm toast, cereal (corn flakes), and bread with peanut butter and jelly. It was hard to decide which they deemed their favorite, for they just kept coming every other day or so no matter what I fed them.

Pretty soon, here appeared a third sibling, Jesica (about four years of age), and she was hungry, too! So many hungry children! I didn't have the heart to turn them away because their little faces told us they really were needy! Their clothes were often full of holes and dirty as could be. It wasn't long until straggling along behind the others was little Alpita (she was about two). Alpita had the roughest time of all, for she couldn't keep her dirty diaper attached and half the time it was dragging the ground all the way to our house! To our horror she also couldn't keep up with the children and would be found trying to find her way all alone coming down the road! We didn't know whether to scold her or hold her once she was retrieved from the middle of the road.

We believed that there must have been very unusual circumstances that caused these children to seem so neglected for that was not the normal treatment for Guatemala's children, even the poorest ones. Usually there was someone to give better care, even though the children are sometimes dirty because their places of play are so.

Anyway, when they would come to the gate, they would tell us, "Tenemos hambre!" or "We're hungry!" I usually asked them to sit on the step and wait 'til I got something for them. It took a few minutes to prepare four cups of cornflakes or other food for them.

One day I overheard their conversation as I was just about to open the front door and go to bring their food to them. Alpita was literally dancing, jumping up and down, crying with glee and clapping her little hands, "Ella viene! Ella viene!" She was saying, "She's coming! She's coming!" And then she would be almost overcome with her giggles of delight. It was such a beautiful happiness she expressed that I have scarcely heard an expression of delight more touching. I only wished she had been my child to squeeze and cuddle after I heard those words.

The children came many, many times for their food during the course of that year. I bought Bible story and coloring books for them and sat on the step reading the captions to them. I told them frequently that Jesus loved them and so did I. As with so many of Guatemala's transient, we lost that family and those children when we returned to the States, but we always keep them in our hearts and trust that one day they will come to know the Lord because they realize just how much Jesus really does love them.

The little children were brought to Christ that He might touch them (Mark 10:13-14), but the disciples rebuked the ones who brought the children. The Scripture says that Jesus was very displeased by their actions, and He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God." Christ does love the little children, and they are precious in His sight. The mission fields of the world still need people who will care for the children and bring them to the arms of Christ. He will never turn them away!