

CRUZ'S JOURNEY TO LIFE AT VILLANOVA PREP, *By GENEVA CONRAD ARRÍZON PFEIFER*



Among a myriad of deep-rooted Augustinian ties, Villanova Preparatory School in Ojai, and St. Augustine High School in San Diego have maintained a linkage

much deeper than a common origin. The mutual affiliation between the two schools is their unyielding and unconditional support for the Hogar Infantil La Gloria Orphanage in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. Both spiritually and financially, Villanova Prep has continuously shared and enhanced the lives of the children at Casa Hogar by promulgating their core values of *Unitas, Veritas, Caritas; Unity, Truth, and Love.*

Cruz, a resident at Casa Hogar, and his siblings had the exceptional opportunity to attend World Youth Day 2019 in Panama. Initiated by Pope John Paul II, this pilgrimage, organized by the Catholic Church is tailored and focuses solely on the youth. Upon Cruz's return from this trip, I was able to hear all his amazing stories about the multitudes of people he met and the intriguing conversations he had with people from all around the world. As a former 2016 WYD attendee, I can see just how WYD changed Cruz's life for the better and ignited a celestial flame within his heart.

That same summer Cruz was offered a sponsorship from Villanova Prep School to further his academic and spiritual endeavors. With the help and guidance of Father Kirk Davis, OSA, Villanova personnel, Casa Hogar staff, the Mexican government, and many more,

Cruz accepted this once in a lifetime opportunity. This extraordinary high school scholarship was able to offset the cost of tuition, room and board, so that Cruz could focus solely on his spiritual and academic advancement.

In an interview with Cruz about his experiences, he disclosed "my year was wonderful, I learned so much about academics, friendships, things from other countries, and most importantly what a family really means." He mentioned there were a myriad of ups and downs due to uncontrollable factors - such as the language barrier which sometimes affected his academic performance. However, Cruz's steadfast motivation to persevere through the tough times was his Casa Hogar family - they were the celestial flame inside Cruz's heart. Providing a glimpse into Cruz's familial and nurturing character he told me, "at the beginning of the school year, it was difficult as I had to walk away from important people, among them was my family and friends at Casa Hogar. But... I always had something in mind - the thing that kept me firm when I felt bad - the reason why and for whom I was doing this. I did it because I want to give my siblings and loved ones a good future, they are the only reason."

Dr. Nan Freitas has been a Spanish teacher at Villanova Prep since 1992. As the head of Foreign Language Department, Dr. Freitas played an instrumental role in Cruz's transition to life in America. Not only because she spoke Spanish, but because Dr. Freitas was particularly fond of where Cruz was coming from. She has been the moderator for the largest service

club on campus, 'Friends of Hogar Infantil' for the past 24 years. "The best part of leading the program is aiding the children of Casa Hogar and watching how these experiences allow Villanova Prep students to develop and flourish in their leadership and service ability." It is due to the wonderful faculty and staff at Villanova Prep, such as Dr. Freitas, that helped alleviate any possible stressors associated with Cruz's monumental life adjustment and to make this past year one to remember.

Cruz was giddy at the thought of returning next year; he wants to do better, he wants to learn from his mistakes, and he wants to grow stronger mentally every day. The interview concluded with Cruz's forever gratefulness to the people that helped him get to where he is today. "I want to thank each of the teachers and advisors who collaborated and supported me... thanks to their support I was able to get ahead each day by day... I am forever grateful for all the participants who made this year possible, my year was wonderful."

When I first met Cruz 5 years ago, his celestial flame was no more than a spark, but today it has begun to set ablaze and is a leading light for his siblings to follow. Cruz is an exemplar and a manifestation of the Augustinians' fidelity, ceaseless service, and perpetual dedication to the children of Casa Hogar. Hogar Infantil La Gloria is Cruz's loving and forever home, and because of your generous contributions, Cruz now has an extraordinary platform to be a changemaker, spreading his newly developed core values of *Unitas, Veritas, Caritas* - all thanks to your generous donations.

CASA HOGAR LA GLORIA ADAPTS TO A NEW REALITY

The children and staff at Casa Hogar La Gloria are resilient, creative and well supported. These past few months have been quite a change for everyone. As soon as Stay at Home orders were issued in Tijuana the schedule at the Casa Hogar completely changed. Our Director and her staff immediately cancelled all visitation to the property and a commercial sanitization team was engaged to make sure that the property was disinfected. The staff is now working in 24 hour shifts and transportation is being provided for all the staff as they come and go from their homes in order to avoid their using the public transportation. In Tijuana the bus system is complex and is considered a serious infection risk.

With school closed and extra-curricular activities cancelled since mid-March the staff have been coordinating innovative play and work projects. Plenty of rain has caused the gardens to grow and the children have enjoyed working and playing while cleaning up the property. The children are safe and healthy and looking forward to a time when they can get back to their friends at school and their sport activities. The children's prayers continue for those affected by the COVID-19 virus and for those who help provide them with a safe place to be. We have a few children with compromised immune systems, and we are appreciative of the donors and supporters who help us keep them safe and healthy.



MISSION

Our Mission is to give each child in our care a secure home and loving family in which to develop and grow. Hogar Infantil, Inc. is committed to providing for children in need and does so by providing support to the children's home, Hogar Infantil La Gloria.

Contact us:
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Hogar Infantil Inc. is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization incorporated in California and recognized by the United States of America. Donations are tax deductible as permitted by law.



WISH LIST

ALERT: Some regular donation sources have been curtailed due to school fundraisers being cancelled! We need donations for general operations and monthly subscriptions throughout the year. Cash Donations help defray the cost of Utilities, Medical Expenses, Tuition, Clothing, Diapers, Formula etc.

Recurring cash/credit donations can be set up at our website, www.hogar-infantil.org. These ongoing donations help us better budget and provide for all of the children's needs.

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SUNDAYS ARE STILL MY FAVORITE DAY OF THE WEEK, *By BR. BOBBY BAIOTTO, OSA*

One of my primary ministerial roles for Casa Hogar La Gloria is making sure that the children have the opportunity to attend Sunday Mass. Crossing the border Sunday mornings, loading the children into our van, and going to Mass used to be my favorite activity of the week. However, since travel across the border has been limited due to the corona virus, my Augustinian brothers and I have had to get creative in figuring out how to continue providing liturgical services for the children.

Thankfully, Fr. Carlos Medina, OSA has responded to the challenge by streaming live Sunday Masses in both English and Spanish. Fr. Carlos provides me with the link for our Ipm Spanish Mass at St. Patrick Church on Sundays, which is then sent to the directors of

Casa Hogar. The directors plug a laptop into the big screen television in one of the dormitories and the children gather for Mass. The directors, caretakers, and children discuss what they should pray for, and then they select two prayer intentions and send them to me to be included in the Mass. During communion, I briefly put up on the screen a picture of the children watching Mass at the orphanage...our Spiritual Communion!

Around the world, as we struggle to maintain hope and unity during these trying times, one of the blessings that I have encountered is how we come together and struggle for the opportunity to praise and worship together. During this pandemic, our attention is being called to focus on things and ac-

tions that are 'essential'; our attention is called to focus on being able to distinguish between our temporal wants and physical and spiritual needs. I feel like God is giving us a lesson in identifying our true needs, the needs of others, and the importance of maintaining human dignity and unity. Therefore, I would be remiss if I did not thank our donors and benefactors who are doing the work of identifying true needs and committing themselves to providing the 'essentials' for our children.



Fr. Carlos Medina, OSA including the children in the closing prayer.