



Emmanuel Children's Home

By Betel Lopez and Keren Lopez

On March 21st, after the news reported the events and Emmanuel Children's Home was part of the news, I received a call from the Child Protection Offices saying " Ms. Lopez, we are calling to inform you that we need you to get the children that we have under your care ready, we are sending a bus to pick them up. We consider your institution to be in danger and we have the obligation to make sure the children are secure. We know there will be an investigation but in the meantime we will go and take the children to a different children's home".

I have to say my world fell apart. Nothing else had been more painful than the idea that in a few hours DIF was going to come and take the children I had seen every day, I had hugged and I was seeing grow taken from me. I went to speak with the dorm mothers to get the children ready. They began to complain that they did not want to go anywhere. We told them they were probably going to some event, they responded "we don't want to go to any event, we want to stay here". I was falling apart inside, praying for a miracle. I just could not stand the doubt and fear in their little eyes sensing that something was really wrong. In a desperate attempt I made a call to the highest authority of child protective services to her personal cell phone. I called and begged for a personal favor. I told her she knew I was the one that run the operations, I was the one with the children day in and day out. I reassured her with my life that they were not in danger and that she did not have to fear for their safety, that I would soon provide the necessary legal documentation that would prove the ministry had no involvement in the events contrary to what the news was reporting. She said there was nothing she could do, that the order was coming from the state offices. She said all she could do is wait for that documentation so we could continue to be a children's home but that in the meantime, her responsibility was to make sure the children we had under our care were safe. I knew that the event that had transpired gave her all the right and obligation to do what she was doing.

Keren and I saw the van from the government arrive and our hearts feared we would lose the children. It was so painful to think of their little faces asking us why they had to go and where they were taking them. We had no answers we just kept praying for the Lord to do a miracle. The assistant to the Child Protection services director arrived looking for me, I introduced myself and she instructed me to take her where the children were. They were all ready sitting in the dining room waiting. I thought I had done everything I could, I could do no more and I was trying to stay strong for what was about to come. Keren and all the dorm mothers were silently crying and holding some of the children. Some were brave enough to stand and directly ask the lady standing there from the government why they were taking them and where.

She looked around and saw our children afraid and confused and began to ask them about when was school starting again and so on and so forth. It was Easter break so we were off school. I was a bit confused, but then she said to them "you don't need to worry, we just came to visit you and see how you were doing." She turned to me and said "the director called me and told me you called, you have five days to present documentation. We know you are good people, we will help as much as we can, good luck and God bless you." Keren and I hugged each other and began to weep, and we realized how much we loved those children. We realized how painful it was to think we were not going to see them, or hug them or know how they were doing in school, or know if they had everything they needed, we realized we were not willing to just lose them. We realized the Lord had given us more love for those kids than ever before.

From that moment on we decided to take a stand and do whatever it takes in God's will to continue to be a refuge for the children and for ourselves because that day we realized we don't help them, they help us. They help us be better people, they help us to think beyond ourselves, they help us to see and experience God's love, they are the reason Emmanuel Ministries exists, they are the reason God has given us to serve Him. Needless to say God has given us the opportunity to rethink who we are and why we are here: the children.

To follow, please read some of the stories of our children and how Emmanuel Children's Home is making the difference in their lives as told by my sister, Keren:

Adrian and Israel Perez

Adrian and Israel are two of our youngest boys. They have beautiful personalities, they are fun and sweet and very friendly. They love going to school every morning and playing with the rest of the little boys at the Infant dormitory. Adrian and Israel have a story that we sadly hear over and over. Carmen, Adrian and Israel's mother, came from Veracruz looking for better opportunities. She met a young man at work and began a relationship. Soon she had Adrian and a year later she was pregnant with their second child. While pregnant she found out her partner had another family he had never told her about. She decided in that moment she did not want to live in a lie and that really her partner did not truly love her since he had been lying all this time. She left and asked her brother to help her until she could get established. She would go to work and her sister in law would watch her boys in the meantime. She would pay them for caring for them. But every time she left the boys would cry in panic. She discovered that they were physically and emotionally abusing her sons and not providing them with enough food or personal hygiene. She then was told about Hogar de Ninos Emmanuel and how in this place people would take care of her boys and give them school. She thought a place like that could not exist and that if it did she could probably not afford it. She still had to try, and even though she has to ride the bus for 2 hours to bring them and pick them up for the weekend, for her boys she was willing to do it.



Her brother lets her use two rooms roughly built in the outskirts of Juarez where there are no streets and there are no sewer lines. I had the opportunity to go visit her house and my heart was broken. We had to drive two hours from HNE to her house. The two small rooms were in the middle of an ocean of wild weeds. She made the comment she was always afraid for Adrian and Israel to go out of the house because she was sure there were probably spiders and scorpions that could harm them, so she kept them inside during the weekend when she takes them home. The water truck comes every three days so she fills large drums to hold the water she will need to wash dishes and clothes and clean her two rooms. She does not have a bathroom and has not had the financial surplus to build one so she walks to her brother's house who lives ½ mile away when she needs to use the bathroom. For the boys she keeps a potty chair. Carmen works at an assembly line factory and has even worked up to three shifts at a time sleeping only 3 hours a day to make all her expenses. As a single mom she carries all the responsibility and she has decided even though there are other "more profitable" jobs where she could make more money, she loves her boys and does not want to put herself or them in any dangerous situations. It was a difficult thing for me to go drop her off and leave them there knowing now they live in such a vulnerable situation. It is very hard to know that this is how these children live in the majority of the families that we help at Emmanuel.



Erick and Jesus Falomir

Erick and Jesus have been at Emmanuel for 9 years. Mrs. Falomir, mother to Erick and Jesus, suffers from epilepsy. It is very difficult for her to keep a job, she gets hired but as soon as she has an epilepsy attack she gets fired. As you can imagine this impacts her income immensely. Erick and Jesus have done their best to try and take care of their mother since a very young age. They tell us stories of how there were times when they had to drag their mother from the street after she had an episode of epilepsy to protect her from the passing cars.

But even with this sickness Mrs. Falomir is a loving and responsible parent. Since she came to Emmanuel children's Home she has been a faithful member of our church and she is here every weekend to visit with her two boys. I had the opportunity to take her home and she lives in a one-room house. She has no kitchen and when the boys are there the neighbors lets them heat up food in her stove. Mrs. Falomir is always expressing her gratefulness for the opportunity her boys are having at Emmanuel. They are cared for in every way and they are being educated in the Lord and also receiving an education that will help them be men that can one day take care of her and a family of their own.



Erick graduated from Junior High this past summer and is now in High School and Jesus graduated from 6th grade and is now in Junior High. Both boys attend Alfa and Omega Christian Junior High and High school where all our teens attend. Erick has a very sweet personality and a beautiful spirit of service. Erick's desire is to finish High School and go to college and have a degree so he can support his mother and buy her a house where they can live as a family. Jesus is a very active young boy who loves to have friends and is one of our assistant teachers in our



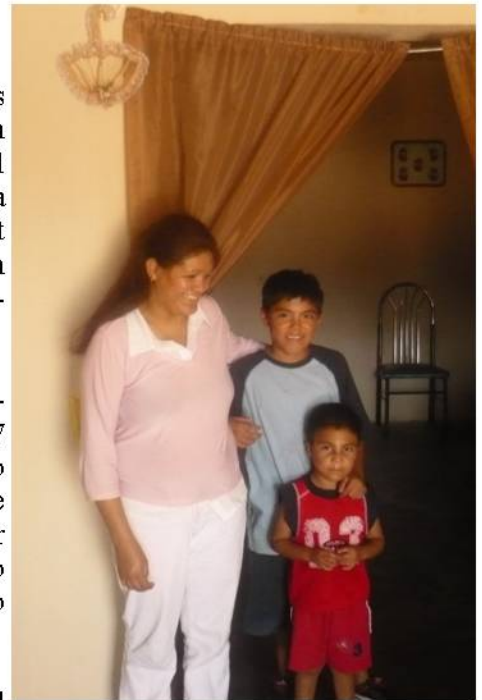
gymnastics class and other dance classes. He has received many recognition certificates for dedication, the most accomplished, being always on time and never absent. Jesus and Lucia are now the teachers for the youngest class of gymnastics. Both Erick and Jesus are thankful to be able to be at Emmanuel and pray for their sponsors and those who they know support Emmanuel constantly. It is such a blessing for us to know that through the work the Lord is doing through Emmanuel we are being a refuge and a place of opportunities and destiny for these two precious young men.



Kevin and Andres Reyes

Mrs. Angela Reyes came from Hidalgo, a small town in the outskirts of Mexico city, she fled with her two boys and left her daughter back with her brother and sister in law because she did not have enough money for all three of her children to ride the bus to Cd. Juarez. She came looking for a better life. She was married to a man who was an alcoholic and would beat her and her children. She decided she could not stand watching her children being abused by the man who was their father. She felt very intimidated because she was 32 years old and he was 50.

She decided to get as far away from him as possible. When she arrived at Cd. Juarez she had no one. Kevin was a baby and Andres was 7 years old. She found work and would leave her boys with a neighbor who offered to care for them for a small fee. She would leave her boys and come after two shifts of work to a dirty and starving Kevin wearing the same diaper she had left him with early in the morning, and a sad and upset Andres who would tell her how this neighbor was mean to them. She still would have to pay her almost 70% of what she was making for she had no other choice.



Then she found out about Emmanuel through a friend at work and immediately came to register Andres. Kevin was too young, but we made an exception and admitted Kevin even though he was not even 3 yet. We realized her need was very great and the children were in danger in the care of someone who did not really care for the children. Since late 2005 Kevin and Andres have been with us and their mom Mrs. Reyes faithfully comes every weekend to see her boy and to attend church with them. She is grateful for Emmanuel and all the people that make this ministry possible. She has accepted Jesus in her heart and hunger for more and more understanding of His love. We pray we can be an example of tangible love to her and that God is more real every day.

Kevin is now 4 years old but was our youngest boy for a long time. Everyone would want to hold him because he is so tiny and precious. When he first came to Emmanuel He was too young to go to school. So Kevin would run all over the Home, jump in all the beds and try to "help" the dorm mothers during the morning when the rest of the children were all in school. He was very quiet when he first came but now he talks and talks and it is very fun to sit and have serious conversations with him. This past summer another little boy came just as tiny as him. So Kevin was very happy he now had someone he could play with. He would get a little jealous at first since he was no longer the only little boy, but he has matured since and now they are the best of friends. Kevin started school this year and he loves it.

He goes to pre-kindergarten every morning and he is the first one up and the first one ready. He loves going to school and being able to wear his uniform like everybody else. Kevin is very sweet and we pray for a bright future for him. Even though he looks very fragile we pray the Lord makes of him a strong man who loves the Lord and is a blessing to his family.





Andres is now 9 years old. He is a very responsible young man and a good friend. He loves soccer and his dream is to be a professional soccer player. Having a formal soccer team this year had been an amazing outlet for our boys to use their energy and a motivator for good behavior and the desire to be excellent and good soccer players. Luis Flores, Luz Portillo's husband, is the team's couch and he is always encouraging them to be better in everything they do, not only soccer. Andres is very good to his young brother Kevin, you can see him in the afternoons playing with him and always finding the time to spend time with him and teach him how to play soccer.

We feel so privileged to have the opportunity to care for children like Kevin and Andres. We feel grateful to have the opportunity to show these boys and the rest of the children we have at Emmanuel the Love of Jesus through the provision of a safe environment where their needs are met and they are able to grow up and be children and not worry whether they will have something to eat for dinner or not. Our children are the reason for

Emmanuel to exist, and we feel pressed more and more to sow in them the Love of the Lord and the knowledge of the sacrifice of his son Jesus on the cross. We feel the time they spend at Emmanuel is precious for it is the opportunity we get to sow in their hearts the seeds of His word and then in faith we let the Lord do the rest. We believe in His word that says "train up a child in the way..." and in his promise "He that began a good work in you will be able to complete it".

By Keren Lopez

