Respect everyone as the image of God, since in reality that is what they are.

St. Raphaela Mary

Like elephants, volunteers never forget

Through hamburger sales in Atlanta, flea markets in Wyncote, church collections in Ohio, soup and bread events in Miami and Philadelphia, volunteers continue to make their presence felt in El Salvador.

Not a week goes by that I do not hear from someone wanting to know how this child is, what is happening in Las Granadillas, or did they finish the house in Las Delicias. They ask such questions as “What can I do to help send so and so to school?” “Can I buy shoes and send them?”

The short-term experience that touched the hearts of our volunteers had a ripple effect that reached parents, relatives and friends.

A mother of a student who volunteered from Walsh Jesuit High School helped to get a grant to build a shady protected area where the children of the malnourished center where we work are able to be outside protected from the elements. Teachers from the same school were part of a tricycle race to raise money for the education of students while children from the North of Ireland, who heard stories of El Salvador, collected money to send for the children. Two different volunteers, one from Miami and another from Pennsylvania, asked relatives and friends to give gifts to the children of El Salvador in lieu of wedding gifts. The mother with AIDS who is helped by volunteers from Pennsylvania, Alfred with his hearing aids purchased by friends and family of a volunteer, the houses being built with money raised by volunteers, the students going to school because volunteers raised funds to help, the little school without walls in Las Granadillas that is subsidized on a month to month basis by donations of volunteers and friends, all of these are this ripple effect from the FIAT experience.

I am profoundly humbled by the generosity and love of the volunteers who pass through the Casa Voluntariado. They are truly the hands, the feet and heart of Christ.

Sister Gloria Petrone, acj

Spring Break 2006

When I stepped outside of the airport and onto Salvadoran soil, I knew I had made the right choice for a spring break destination. It wasn’t because of a wild club scene, decorative bars, or even a fancy hotel to relax in. It was due to the warm feeling I received from the blazing sun that beamed from above. That same feeling grew larger as my gaze met those of several
small children who desperately tried to sell cold sodas to the already sweating gringos! I fell in love with the Latin music beats that blared from the cars surrounding us. My satisfaction at making the right decision to travel to El Salvador came to a climax when I met our jovial van driver and soon to be good friend, Joaquin. He eagerly greeted each of the volunteers, and was more than excited to introduce us to his country for the first time.

Monday morning arrived quickly, and I anticipated my first day of work as a volunteer in El Salvador. I wondered, “How will I communicate? The last time I tried speaking Spanish I ordered tuna with turtle instead of with lettuce!” I was curious about the physical work that needed to be done, “How tired will I be? Will it get too hot? I hope that we have enough water!” I worried, “Will I make it through the day without falling asleep? This is earlier than I normally wake up!” My troubled thoughts were put to rest as soon as our van turned onto the unpaved road that led into the village. Our vehicle, familiar to the community, acted as the Pied Piper.

Shortly after one child spotted the van, a long line of laughing children trailed in the dust of our wheels. After I met the smiling faces of the curious children, I knew that I wasn’t simply in San Salvador to build a road; a bigger bond was being built between two very different cultures. This thought energized me for the week ahead! After the week of service came to an end, I felt the best that I ever felt during my entire senior year of college.

“I am also positive that I left a little bit of myself behind..”

I left behind sneakers, an entire suitcase of supplies and at least two bags of sweets. I am also positive that I left a little bit of myself behind with every child that I hugged goodbye on the last day. After all of the “donations” were distributed I realized how miniscule they were compared to what I gained from the trip. I learned about a great history of a culture with people full of an undying faithfulness for their country and religion. I learned about love and compassion. I finally concluded that spring break isn’t just a time of rest and relaxation before one final semester of exams. It had become for me a time to learn about myself through the people of another culture.

Caitlin Jones
Immaculata University

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The return to my roots

I’ve always thought I knew who I was, but all that changed this past year when I chose to attend an alternate spring break trip to El Salvador. The only reason why it was of such an interest to me in the first place was because El Salvador was where I was born. I was adopted when I was 7 1/2 months old and given a life children from my home country could only dream of.

The weeks prior to the trip I was nervous; I didn’t know what to expect or how I would feel. Finally that day arrived; I was on a plane heading to a place where I had dreamed about visiting for the longest time. Stepping off the plane I had this weird sensation of being home, though the only family that I’ve ever known were miles away from me.

Each day I was exposed to something new, and I experienced new feelings and emotions that I never knew I had. Each day we went to this little village outside of the city called “Las Granadillas.” Some of the things that I saw while helping out this quaint little community were definitely life changing. These people had no running water, hardly if any electricity, and very little food. Yet, they woke up each day knowing that they had things that they had to accomplish and lived each day to its fullest which most people in America don’t.

The most inspiring thing that I witnessed was the extent of community involvement that took place. While our group was down there we helped build a road-paved, sifted and shoveled. It was back breaking work. Everyone, from the
The return to my roots (continued)

older men and women to the children, helped to build this road in their village.

I think the most emotional day for me was when we went to visit a malnourished center for children. I wanted to just cry when I saw these children, but I held onto my emotions until later on in the night when I wrote in my personal journal. I had the feeling that this could have been me; it was me to a certain extent. For the first 7 1/2 months of my life, before I was brought to America, I was in a children’s orphanage.

Another site that we visited was a memorial wall with thousands of names of people who were either killed or reported missing during the time of the civil war. I don’t know why I was given up for adoption, but I guess I thought to myself that the 80’s was a time of war for the Salvadoran people. Maybe my parents did not want my youth experiences to be stories of war and tragedy. I almost felt guilty standing in front of that wall thinking, "Thank God I’m alive and live a fantastic life." My birth name was Angelica Campos, and upon going down the wall looking at the names I saw people with the last name of Campos. Now, I don’t know if I am related to any of them; however, while standing there, I quietly said a little prayer.

Being in El Salvador changed me on a deeper level. I know I will never be the same person again since this experience. Just seeing the sites everyday, the lifestyles of the people, the food and the culture were fascinating to me. I always think about "what ifs," but I know that everything happens for a reason.

Sister Gloria and Lynette really gave our group the Salvadoran experience. They showed us what these people go through and live with everyday, and I’m thankful for that. God bless everyone who made my experience a memorable one.

Dana Ponczek
Alvernia College

The volunteers who have been coming to help us have shown us love and a strong willingness to help. They have given us their best. Their work with the babies has definitely proven beneficial in their time of ministry with us.

Sam Hawkins
The Love Link

It was draining and energizing, hopeless and hopeful, disturbing and encouraging, confusing and clarifying—all at the same time. It was simply a profound time in a profound place—one of the most meaningful experiences of my life. Leaving El Salvador was truly difficult, and the memories of the time and people continue to stay with me each day. It is a place and a people which take hold of your soul and do not let go.

Jeff Tucker

Working with the children of Las Granadillas has deepened my dedication to service and put a face on poverty.

Kristen Kolenz
Imprints left behind

Each volunteer that participated with FIAT International and every person that donated a piece of themselves through donations, fundraising, and prayers, made an invaluable impact on the people of El Salvador.

With the help of our friends this year, we were able to build two houses for families in Las Delicias and work with the people in Las Granadillas erecting a retaining wall and helping build new roads.

With the countless donations from our friends who sponsored children, we were able to assist over 20 children and their families with their school tuitions, school supplies, and uniforms.

Through the generous giving of our family of friends, we were also able to assist Fr. Paco in Las Granadillas with the school program called “Under the Sky.” This program is for all children that are unable to attend school because of overcrowding or family concerns. The children are educated outdoors, under the sky, with the basic skills needed for daily living.

The Handmaids of the Sacred Heart of Jesus are eternally grateful for the help of our extended family of friends. They remember each and every one of them in prayer.

Won’t you join us in making your imprint in El Salvador?

All donations are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Please remember us in your will.

Won’t you join us in making your imprint in El Salvador?

Project FIAT International 2007

March 3-10
March 10-17

June 4-12
June 13-21
June 23-July 1
July 5-13
July 14-22
July 23-31
August 1-9
August 10-18
August 20-28

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