

Dear Friends,

There is something to be said for the miracle of Christmas. This year we really were not sure if we would be able to provide for the children the Christmas celebration that they look forward to so very much. It has been a very difficult year for Casa Guatemala and the financial crisis has affected us gravely. We have struggled and we have had to cut back but we have pushed forward thanks to the help of our staff, volunteers and of course, our donors.



Christmas would not have been possible if it wasn't for all of our gracious friends who answered the call and came forward to help us provide a magical experience for the children. For this we are extremely grateful.



It was really down to the wire this year; most of the decorations and supplies for the celebration didn't arrive until the

morning of the 24th at the orphanage but we in the end we were able to pull it all off and everything went wonderfully.



The kids were excited as ever, all dressed in their nicest outfits

waiting for Santa's arrival on the docks as they



watched as lights approach. There were shouts of glee when he arrived and presents were opened in both the boys and girls houses. As we headed down to the school yard, the hundreds of children from the local Mayan villages gathered to meet Santa and receive their presents too!



It is a wild and crazy evening of excitement with lots of laughs and lots of smiles. The kids had tamales and hot chocolate early in the evening to tide them over until their Christmas dinner after all the presents have been opened. This is the best meal of the year for the kids. They don't have to line up and wait for their food but instead sit down to a table full of goodies waiting for them and all the volunteers serve them their meal. Turkey, stuffing, mash potatoes, vegetables, gravy and flour tortillas are a welcomed change from rice and beans! There were apples and grapes and candies and cakes for everyone and when it was all done, we cranked up the music and danced the night away until they went to bed, exhausted, clutching their new toys and falling into the sweet dreams of Christmas.



While the children enjoyed their presents on Christmas day, the

festivities continued. At our hotel, Santa made another appearance and handed out presents to about 200 more children from the local community. It was a great day and everyone was able to enjoy and for a moment, not worry about where we would be able to get our next donation to keep our project running. Thanks to you, we were able to make this all happen. And you should know that your donations have a ripple effect that go much further than the purchases we are able to make with them.



We try our best every year to really make Christmas special for our kids so

that they know what the real spirit of Christmas is all about; not just getting gifts but sharing and giving and loving. Sometimes it's not always easy to tell if they are really getting the message in the mess of ripped wrapping paper and plastic packaging but every once and a while they show you that they really do understand. This morning one of the older girls, Maria, who is working at the hotel during her winter holidays, told me that yesterday she had spent all the tips she had made for the day. At first I was surprised, as we try to teach them to save their money and use it wisely. But when I asked her how she could spend everything she had made, I was so shocked and touched by the answer that it brought a tear to my eye. It turns out that she and the other teenagers working at the hotel decided all on their own, that they would all contribute some of their money to buy groceries for the little old lady who lives in a shack beside the hotel. The woman is very poor and at times has nothing to eat and so they all felt the need to help her. I was so touched by this act of generosity. It made me very proud of these children and the work that we are doing.

As we all head into 2009, the future is not clear but we are steadfast with hope and faith that we will be able to continue to provide for the children in our care.



It won't be easy; already in 2008 we had to stop our farm production of chickens and pigs and close

down our centre for the babies in the city. There is an uncertainty in the air. When we see whole nations and some of the biggest names in business on the brink of bankruptcy, we wonder to ourselves, if they can't make it, how ever will we survive? But still we move forward and are grateful for the help that we have. Thanks to the hard work and effort of you and others like you, we have been able to survive for the last 30 years. Things might change, but we are confident that with the support of our friends around the world, Casa Guatemala will continue to provide love and care for the children of Guatemala.



So with this we wish to you the best in the New Year and hope and pray

that it will be a prosperous one for you and your loved ones. Thank you again for all of your help on behalf of our staff, volunteers and most importantly the children. You are their guardian angel and though you might never meet them, they pray for you every night and thank God that you find it in your heart to help them to succeed in the world.

With love and gratitude,

Angie

