

Love Letter

A Newsletter for Friends of Arms of Love

Spring 2016

inside



1,4
In My
Own Words



2
Q & A with
Francela
and Ewner



3
Run with
Endurance

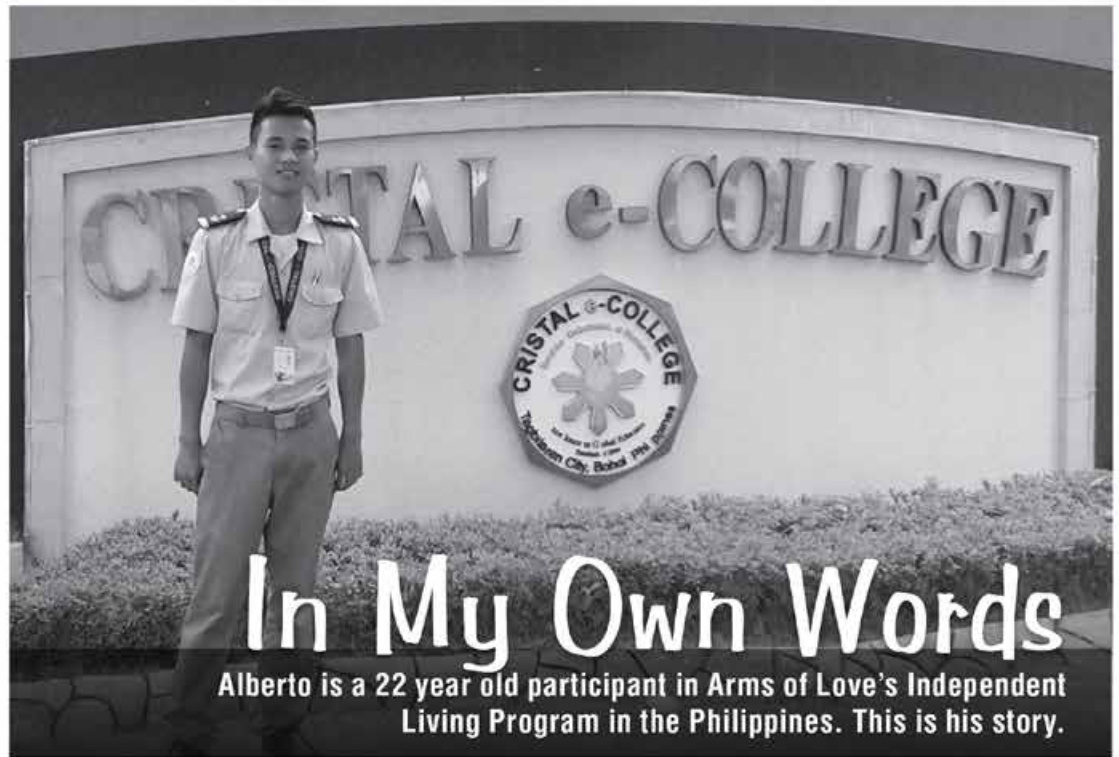
*Let us not
become weary
in doing good,
for at the proper
time we will reap
a harvest if we
do not give up.*

— Galatians 6:9



Arms of Love
International

2973 Harbor Blvd., #535, Costa Mesa CA 92626
(phone) 877.ARMSOFLOVE
www.ArmsOfLove.org



My life began full of misery, living in poverty and abandonment. I remember when I was

4 or 5, my parents would neglect my siblings and I, often just leaving us all alone. We would go looking for food, begging or stealing to survive. We stuck together, sleeping wherever we could. Out of desperation we became street children.

One day I was hit and wounded by a motorcycle. A kind American found me, and brought me to their home, giving me treatment, food and clothes. It was a blessing. They invited me to

stay, but I wanted to find my siblings. I found my brother, but my sister was missing for many days. One day I was so hungry, and I was singing for some people so that they would feed me.

For me, it was a great privilege to find Arms of Love. It changed my life. — Alberto

As I was singing I saw my sister. I shouted to her and was filled with joy. She had found her way into the home that would become Arms of Love, and my brother and I were able to join her. We were rescued.

For me, it was a great privilege to find

(continued on page 4) ▶

Q and A with Francela and Ewner in Nicaragua

Each child joins our family with unique sets of needs after surviving multiple forms of trauma. In June 2003, Francela, age 10, was placed at Arms of Love (Brazos de Amor) by the Nicaraguan social services after being discovered in dreadful living conditions. Her stomach was so bloated from malnourishment that a doctor administered a pregnancy test. She was diagnosed as having emotional and mental underdevelopment. Francela could not read or write, and struggled to talk. It was uncertain if she would ever attend school or have an opportunity for an independent adulthood. Today, Francela, 22, continues to overcome challenges, hardships, and disabilities. We are proud of the young woman Francela is growing into. We would like to share an update about her journey.

What does Brazos de Amor mean to you?
My house, my family.

Tell us about your life in Heather's House (Casa #3)? My life is good and I am usually very happy. I am sad sometimes, but I think that's normal. I enjoy helping the little girls.

What are you currently studying? Bakery.

What has been your favorite thing to learn to bake? Donuts. I make delicious donuts!

In this new season of life, what is most exciting? What is most challenging?
Going to school and learning is exciting, and the challenge is exploring the world outside of Brazos de Amor, like taking the bus and studying with other girls.

How long has Francela lived at Brazos de Amor? Francela has been part of our family for nearly 13 years.

What changes have you witnessed in Francela since she began studying baking?
Self-confidence. She is experiencing the real world and spending time with girls her same age. Now she is doing better in House #3 and with her responsibilities at Arms of Love. I am encouraged to see her desire growing to restart and finish primary school.

What other changes have happened?
Francela is taking the bus to school 3 days per week, is starting to handle small amounts of money, and is even using a cell phone.

Do you anticipate Francela will continue to live at Brazos de Amor for a long period of time? Forever? It will be her decision and will depend on how her life unfolds. We want to help her have as much independence as she can. She will always be welcome to call Arms of Love her home. She is special to us, and we are her only family.

And anything else you would like to share about Francela? Like all of our kids, Francela is unique and has a story all her own. She came to us as a double orphan (lost both parents) and without any known biological family. **Her life before Arms of Love was incredibly difficult. I am so proud of Francela and am hopeful for her future.■**

Francela (left) enjoys helping the other young girls at Arms of Love.



Ewner is our Director in Nicaragua



Run with Endurance

— A guest piece by Arms of Love Founder, Robert Benson

The first two years of my life I was neglected, hospitalized, and severely malnourished. I was later abandoned on the street and placed in an orphanage. Adoption changed my life, but emotional abuse and neglect followed me during my childhood.

Thirty years later, I established Arms of Love to care for other orphaned and abused children. But life continued to present new challenges. One year brought the loss of a job and nearly a year of unemployment. Overextending myself in career and ministry led to many years of a difficult marriage that barely survived.

The detachment disorder rooted in my childhood has also challenged me throughout my adult life. I have battled depression and anxiety, with some periods more severe than others. Working as a partner in a global law firm is also challenging. The middle of

2015 found me hitting yet another “rock bottom.”

But life is filled with new starts.

Over the last half of 2015, I transformed my lifestyle and engaged in a holistic journey back to health, which included losing nearly 100 pounds through improved eating, exercise, and a better life balance.

Restoration is an ongoing journey, one that requires a lifetime of perseverance.

— Robert Benson

With the support of a professional endurance coach, I am now training for the only self-sustained multi-stage ultramarathon in North America, the 170 mile Grand-to-Grand Ultra, in late 2016. I will be using future ultramarathons to raise funds for the university expenses of our ILP students.

By running these races, I am identifying with everyone who has survived abandonment and abuse.

Restoration is an ongoing journey, one that requires a lifetime of perseverance. Life will always present new challenges, and the Lord’s healing is a process that requires peeling back new layers year after year . . . until that final day, when we reach our eternal home. Until then, I am blessed to have the love and support of my wife, children, and community, who are running beside me in this journey. ■

Robert’s 1st half-marathon the Xterra Boney Mountain Trail Run



Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

— Hebrews 12:1-2

In My Own Words (continued from page 1)

Arms of Love. It changed my life. I was changed physically, mentally and spiritually. I can smile every time I wake up. I learned about God and have grown up with all the love, care, and support I could ever ask for.

After high school I was given the opportunity to pursue higher education in the Independent Living Program (ILP), but there were challenges and a few years ago I chose to start working instead. I was a produce merchandiser at the shopping mall. It was good experience, but I realized I needed to finish my education. I am grateful that Arms of Love gave



"Put your trust in God because if you take the first step God will do the rest."
— Alberto

me a second chance to reapply, and I give heartfelt thanks for the prayers and financial support of my sponsors.

I've been given the responsibility of being the ILP president and serving on the board of directors, and I'm eager to learn and grow. I don't know what my future looks like, but once my course requirements are complete I hope to get a training position at a local company. My dream is to be a chief mate or a captain, and to work internationally. I want to be able to help my family and people in need.

I think back to the pain, confusion and shame of my early life, when it seemed like there was no way out, and that nobody cared. But God sent us his Holy Spirit to be right there with us, to be our guide, our helper, and our counselor. He sent me to Arms of Love, and built a foundation of love, respect, and commitment. **I'm so thankful, and am fully hoping for the other children living at Arms of Love to follow the instruction of their house parents, to trust the word of God, to take steps of faith, and to follow their dreams.**

detach and return with your gift

You're Invited!

Join the Arms of Love multi-generational team on a life changing service trip to our Filipino children's home **July 23rd — Aug 9th, 2016.** Match your passions and talents with our volunteer needs.

INTERESTED? Email info@armsoflove.org



Be A Hero

Thank you for being a source of hope and joy for Arms of Love's children and communities. We will persevere as a family through every challenge and circumstance.

As you consider making another generous donation, know that your financial support is directly fueling our sustainability initiatives, meeting desperate needs in our neighborhoods, and forever **changing the lives of children just like Alberto and Francela!**

My gift to help bless the lives of children

Yes! I want to help protect, feed, educate, and empower children through the life-changing programs at Arms of Love.

- \$35 to support a child in need of a sponsor for 1 month
- \$105 to support 3 children in need of sponsors for 1 month
- \$_____ Community Development & Sustainability Efforts
- \$_____ Crisis Response / Where Needed Most

- I would like to make a monthly commitment of \$_____ to sponsor a child.
- Nicaragua Philippines

YOU CAN CHANGE THE LIFE OF A CHILD TODAY



N1015

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____



Arms of Love International

2973 Harbor Blvd., #535, Costa Mesa CA 92626
(phone) 877.ARMSOFLOVE
www.ArmsOfLove.org