

Love Letter

A Newsletter for Friends of Arms of Love

Spring 2017

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Bless the lives of children today!



For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

— Matthew 6:21



Arms of Love
International

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A Legacy OF LOVE AND SHARED BLESSING



When we say Arms of Love is a family, this is the heart behind those words. Celsa took a job as a cook

with Arms of Love Philippines in the fall of 2001. Initially, her position meant arriving at 3:30 AM to prepare breakfast for every single mouth. Those were the early years of the ministry, and Celsa remembers all the children that first arrived. And they remember her. You see, while Celsa's position would later transition into a support staff who is intimately involved in

every house, to the Arms of Love children she was always more than a cook. When our program graduates return, they greet Celsa like a beloved parent figure. The love and respect is undeniable.

When our program graduates return, they greet Celsa like a beloved parent figure.

When asked what she appreciates about our family, Celsa quickly shares how she loves that the children get to go to private schools, are supported so they can finish their studies, and ultimately are

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A Legacy OF LOVE AND SHARED BLESSING (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

empowered to have a good job. “I always have told the kids, if I were you, I would study hard because it is your own future. Look at what you can do!” Celsa reflects fondly on the incredible accomplishments of our children, like when Myla finished her degree. Another thing she values is that some of our house parents are pastors, and are able to teach the children about the love of Jesus in a special way.

There are many challenges along the way

Specifically Celsa mentioned that when kids first arrive, their behaviors are very difficult. She remembers way back when Rachel first arrived, confused and afraid, full of anger and always hiding. Celsa can laugh about it now, and smiles as she talks about Rachel being a healthy young woman with a sweet baby boy.

Celsa also shared how working with the older kids takes unwavering patience. She reminds herself to smile through the frustration of some of their

decisions. “Somedays I see a new grey hair and I think to myself, well, I know where that came from!” But even when the staff is worn out, Celsa says **“It’s ok because we love our children.**

Every child has a difficult story of why they are here. They need love. They need patience. They need family.”

Celsa’s greatest hope

Ultimately Celsa’s greatest hope is that every child will complete their studies and find good employment. Also that each would have healthy families, be good parents, and share the love of God with their children.

“The Arms of Love kids are like my very own children. Before they were so small, and now they are teenagers and young adults. I am now a Lola (grandma). When program graduates return with their own kids, like Jean, she blesses me

as Lola.” The look in Celsa’s eyes as she reflects tells you just how much Arms of Love’s mission means to her. For many, a cook position could be seen as having a minor role in the lives of our children, however to Celsa, her children, and to Arms of Love, nothing could be further from the truth.

Celsa has three children of her own, the youngest of which, Carla, now also works at Arms of Love Philippines. Carla emotionally shared that our ministry’s impact reaches beyond the rescued children being raised and restored at Arms of Love, it blesses the community ... it blessed her own family. **“I am a product of Arms of Love, and I want to give back,”** she described. “I was able to attend school because my mom had a job.” Carla grew up right alongside the Arms of Love children. **And now as an employee, she is loving the next generation of kids with a heart full of love and purpose.**

I am a product of Arms of Love,
and I want to give back.

— CARLA, ARMS OF LOVE STAFF



It’s ok because we love our children. Every child has a difficult story of why they are here. **They need love. They need patience. They need family.** — CELSA, ARMS OF LOVE STAFF, PHILIPPINES



Building a Heritage of Advocacy and Friendship

Matt and Becky Merkey visited Nicaragua for the first time in 2013. Since then, more trips and countless blessings have ensued. They have become champions for our children and ministry in so many creative and generous ways. Relationships are at the core of it all. We asked Becky to share their Arms of Love story with us, including their unique friendships with Meyling (at right) and Kelvin (below).



It all started in the summer of 2014

Our team had the opportunity to host “girls’ night out” at a local arcade, and Matt and I had a special connection with Meyling. By the next summer I had learned more Spanish and our relationship really blossomed. Before leaving, I gave her a soccer picture of mine and Meyling gave us a note to take home telling us how special it is that we visit and that she prays for us.

When we returned in 2016 Matt and I received a note from Meyling, and we corresponded throughout the week. Meyling told us that she feels we are part of her family and is joyful when we visit, as well as giving us more background of her heartbreaking story. **Our hearts truly belong to her.**

With Kelvin, the connection was art. I had painted several murals at Arms of Love, and I learned that Kelvin

loved art. I invited him to help me paint a mural in the computer lab. **At first he was too shy to join, however, eventually Kelvin made his way, paintbrush in hand.** His confidence has grown immensely over time and we’ve witnessed Kelvin come out of his shell.

Matt had a special moment with Kelvin while on a run with him and a group of boys. Kelvin diligently stayed ahead of Matt, which we learned was Kelvin’s way of protecting him in the neighborhood. We have realized more and more just how special Kelvin is.

We value the things that they have taught us about life and dealing with adversity. —BECKY MERKEY

We value the things that they have taught us about life and dealing with adversity. **It is amazing how we can come from such different cultures and backgrounds, yet we seem to have the same physical, emotional and**

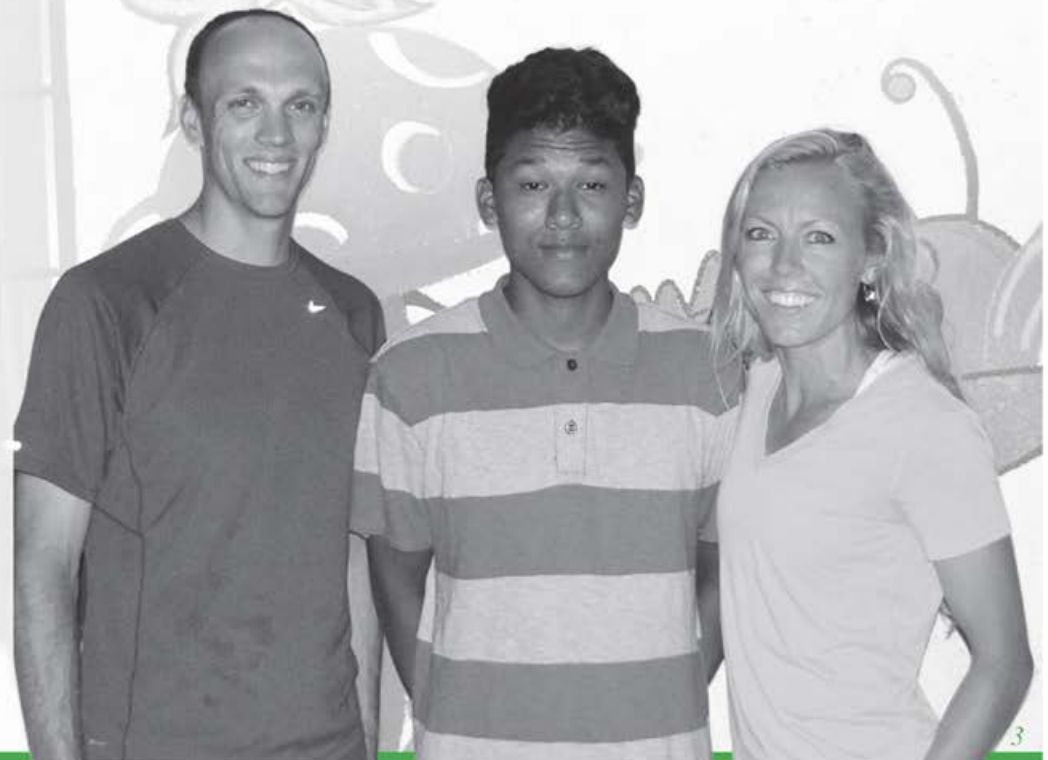
spiritual needs. We would never have dreamed we would connect on such a deep level given the language barrier, but because of our common Creator and beliefs, we are able to offer each other so much.

On our first trip, we learned that what is the most meaningful to the children is when people return. So Matt and I decided we wanted to commit to



Kelvin (above left) enjoys helping paint the computer lab with Becky.

Matt, Kelvin and Becky share a photo together at Arms of Love.



Building a Heritage of Advocacy and Friendship

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returning to exhibit their value. In addition, we believe in the mission of empowering locals and we enjoy coming alongside leaders to encourage them to continue their great work. We are thankful to Arms of Love for allowing us to be part of their efforts, and we look forward to seeing the fruits of their labor as the children grow up and become independent adults.

Additionally, God is working his unexpected plans in ways I could not have imagined. I had no idea that he would use pharmacy school as a platform for Nicaragua ... but that is exactly what has happened!

I had the opportunity to share my personal connection to Arms of Love with my classmates last spring to promote a t-shirt fundraiser. I took a class where every year the professor asks students to design a course-related t-shirt to sell and donate the proceeds towards a good cause. Of course the design was right up my alley, but I **also asked if we could use Arms of Love as the "good cause" ... and my class voted yes!** The money we raised went specifically towards supporting the dire need for a psychologist.

I am hoping to do the same this year with a whole new group of pharmacy students.

And as if that was not exciting enough, I have also been invited to speak to an international health care class in Duluth, MN about my experiences in Nicaragua. God has provided yet another platform for me to advocate from. And finally, I am in the process of putting together a team of pharmacy students to actually go to Arms of Love this coming summer. I am not sure how God will use us or what he has up his sleeve, but I do know it's going to be great!

*Arms of Love is so grateful for **Becky and Matt**. What began as a service trip to Nicaragua has blossomed into lifelong relationships, leading volunteer teams, funding projects and programs, and being huge advocates for the ministry. They thought outside of the box, and our children have been blessed immensely.*

Would you pray about what your next steps of involvement might look like? We need more creative and passionate champions for our children!

DETACH AND RETURN WITH YOUR GIFT

Advocating for Children

We are looking for people, churches, and organizations to host Arms of Love. Would you be willing to bring your community network together, and have us share about Arms of Love's mission?

If so, please contact Jess at:
jess@armsoflove.org



GIVE BY MAIL. SEND YOUR GIFT TO:

 2973 Harbor Blvd., #535,
Costa Mesa, CA 92626

GIVE SECURELY ONLINE:

 Visit us at www.ArmsOfLove.org
to put your gift to work right away!

GET INVOLVED AND VOLUNTEER:

 Learn about serving on our website or
email us: volunteer@armsoflove.org

My gift to help bless the lives of children today!

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
- \$350 to care for 10 children** in need of sponsors for 1 month
- \$_____ Community Development & Sustainability Efforts
- \$_____ Crisis Response / Where Needed Most
- Yes!** Please increase my monthly donation by this much \$_____

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

THANK YOU!



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Name: _____

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