

January 18 2004

Dear Friends,

As most of you know, I am currently in the Philippines, working on the Lingap Center Project. I am now in Manila on the return leg of the trip. I have so much to tell you all that I do not know exactly where to begin, so I will give it my best shot. I hope this won't be too long!

Upon arrival in Cebu City, I immediately met with Libay Rigor and the rest of the staff of World Vision's Cebu City office. We discussed a lot of the administrative details of the project, clarifying their role, compared to the role of the Toledo City officials and my own. They are a truly wonderful group of individuals, completely committed to the welfare of the children. I was again reminded how fortunate we all are that I was able to partner with World Vision. They also had some very welcome news for me, which was that World Vision Philippines was ready to begin construction even though we have not raised all of the money required for the project as yet!!! This means that in addition to the 24 children currently at the Center, an additional 75 may soon be off the streets and into a safe and secure environment and on their way to receiving educations!!! I can not tell you how happy this makes me!!

We then traveled to Toledo City, (an hour and a half across the island) where we met with Mayor Zambo, the City Council, the City Engineer et al. This was a most productive meeting, since it was a follow up to meetings that they had held earlier with World Vision. Most of the discussion was again, clarification, much like we did with World Vision the day before. One problem did come up however and that is with the land where the current Lingap Center stands. You will recall that our original plan was to renovate the existing facility and build a new dormitory. It seems however, that the land owners surrounding the Center sense money, so they are going to restrict access unless we pay them fees (not unusual here in the Philippines - just another way to take advantage of the children). Naturally, this is unacceptable, so we collectively decided that we will need to find an alternative site. There were two locations that we visited, the first in a very hilly area, and the other in a flatter area, but more expensive. Since it is Toledo City that is donating the land and doing the site preparation, we looked to them for guidance and I believe (although it is not yet final) that they have chosen the hilly area, even though it will take more work to prepare it. (It is very beautiful - you can see the ocean in the distance, and very quiet) approximately 5000 sq meters. They had the land surveyed on Friday and they are ready to begin site preparation today (Monday - 1/19/04). I expect that they will have the site prepared by the end of the first week of February. They will be competitively bidding the work (under the close supervision of World Vision) and are planning to begin the actual construction on or about March 1. As I said earlier, I am in Manila right now, to meet again with World Vision Philippines, to ensure that their engineer/architect is involved and to be sure that everyone is lined up before

any work is started. I will be meeting with them at 1:30 today and at the conclusion of this meeting, I anticipate the green light!!

You will also recall that I had planned to give the children a belated Christmas Fiesta while I was here. This took place on Friday. I will be unashamedly honest when I tell you that I had a raging headache after the fiesta. This was because I was struggling the whole time to keep from crying. It was probably THE most rewarding and emotional experience I have ever had. The children were so very excited. They had games and prizes, skits, singing, dancing and more food than you can imagine (I ate like a pig). The lechon, siopao, lumpia, sweet & sour fish, Girl Scout cookies (donated by Brownie Troop 122 of Hanover) were wonderful. The halo-halo was excellent and I can see why the children are so fond of it (it is a kind of shaved ice with various fruits eg. fresh mango and others, with coconut and sugar). It was so good that even though I was full beyond belief, I had some more!

The ladies from the DSWD and the house mothers worked very hard during the day and their love for the children was incredibly obvious from watching them. We are fortunate to have them as well!!!

I then gave each of the children a wrapped gift. I got all of them both slacks and blouses/shirts. The twins got look alike outfits (they were so surprised and happy about this). The kids are very disciplined and all sat patiently while the gifts were distributed. Then, once everyone had theirs, they ripped open the packages and even though the temperature was maybe 90F, they put the new clothes on over what they had on!! The excitement in their faces was indescribable. What they were so happy about was not that they received gifts or clothes, it was because they were NEW!!! This never happens....

Each child came to me and put my hand on their foreheads (a sign of respect) and said "Thank you Tito John....." (Uncle)... This went straight to my heart like a bullet....

Then it was over..... and I had to take more Excedrin for the headache ... and get Kleenex for the tears.

Of course, I took a lot of pictures, but they don't do it justice...

Different subject - many of you have asked what the children need. So I did some investigation and find that the most needed things are an oven and washing machine. These have already been included in the budget - so there is nothing more we can do about these just yet. But, what they do need are as follows:

- toothbrushes - toothpaste - shampoo - soap - school supplies - backpacks - new shoes - SPOONS & FORKS - glasses - plates - summer clothes (new)- flip flops - and things of that nature. It must be recognized that all of these things can

be purchased locally, for far less than in the U.S. (not to mention shipping costs). So if any of you are interested in sending something, please contact me and I can discuss it with you and we will work something out. One thing that I would like to send however, is toothbrushes. If you know of any dentists out there, please ask if they would be willing to make a contribution.

One other thing that they need VERY BADLY, is a trip to the dentist. None of them have ever been to a dentist, except for extractions when they get a toothache. The cost of this is \$20 per child, which would include cleaning and any work that might need to be done.

The very top priority is, was and continues to be to get the facility built as quickly as possible. We must get these kids in a safe environment. The things I mentioned above can come later.... unless this is something you might want to do.

I will send another update when I get back to the U.S. where I will discuss the status of our fund raising efforts (we have raise over \$80,000 thus far, of the needed 300,000 - so we have a very long way to go). There are many events being planned by a lot of individuals, so I will try to give you all of the specifics when I get back.

I was anxious to tell you about the good news around the beginning of construction - and about the Fiesta.....

I return to the U.S. on Wednesday January 21.... more then. Thanks so much for your continued interest!!!!

John Drake