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MISIÓN MÉXICO NEWSLETTER

Dando Amor, Vida y Esperanza



★GENERAL Update

CHILDREN'S Backgrounds★

Saludos a todos,

It is already May as I start writing this update on the children and life here at Misión México. I don't know if you all feel the same, but I feel like life is on 'fast forward'. One day it is Monday, then next, it's Friday. Then, the weekend; Sunday once again, watching 50+ children at the beach! Then it's Monday again. It seems crazy but I guess I need to expect, that with around 50 children, we are not going to have much time to anything extra.

It is always hard dealing with the 'highs and lows' of living here. One minute you are feeling that everything is going along wonderfully and then, 'bang' the bubble bursts. As I have said in the past, 'we pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and move on, learning from the experience and adjusting our ways to better prepare for the next problem'. We do have our fair share of problems, that's for sure!!

This past year has been quite a challenge for us physically and mentally. We had quite a bit of building and remodeling going on late last year and early this year. Living with over 50 children in amongst all the chaos was difficult to say the least, but, now things have taken shape and the place is looking great.

There will always be work to do around here but at the moment it is quite comfortable.

We still need to finish remodeling a room for a clinic for a dentist and doctor. Some dental equipment has been donated that needs to be installed and cupboards need to be put in. Some of the dental equipment is ancient and Alan says that it looks like something from a horror movie, so we will need to replace some parts! Once we have this in order, we are looking forward to getting teams in to work with the children to improve their dental and physical health through treatment and education.

If you are a doctor, nurse or dentist and are interested in this helping with this, please get in touch.

Yessica and Hector are siblings who came to us when Yessica was two and Hector four. The children witnessed their mother throw boiling water over their father during a domestic fight. A couple of years later, they returned to live with their parents who were reunited after the mother spent time in prison. It wasn't long before the children were picked up once again by the welfare department after being neglected by their alcoholic and slightly backward parents.

Hector and Yessica once again were brought to the refuge. The two children have now been living with us for many years and are advancing very well, even though they can be a little difficult at times. They both attend a private school through a scholarship and are quite bright though do not apply themselves as well as they could. Teachers have remarked that Hector would receive a scholarship in the arts for his talent in drawing if he applied himself in other areas as well.

Recently, we had to share the sad news with them that a younger brother had been murdered, stabbed many times and his small body thrown into an empty field not far from his shack of a home on the river bank. I ask myself why we didn't get Marco as well, he would be alive today if we had, and obviously he was a neglected child also. After receiving this devastating news, Yessica and Hector are doing well.



As I have mentioned before, volunteers are essential for the running of Misión México these days. Our numbers have grown so much that it would be impossible for Alan and me to do all that needs to be done by ourselves. We are so thankful to all the wonderful volunteers who give so much of themselves for the benefit of these children. It's not an easy job, it can be quite stressful, but the more one puts in, the more one takes home with them. The rewards are not only for the children, the volunteers learn a lot about themselves during their time here. Thank you to all our volunteers.



Over the last three months, our daughter Hannah and granddaughter Charlie Jean who is just 18 months old, have been visiting us here. Hannah has been amazing, helping wherever she can, and Charlie has integrated so well with the children, even picking up a few Spanish words along the way.



The surf school www.missionsurf.com.mx has commenced with the first lessons given free to some people who help us voluntarily. Unfortunately, on the first day a student jumped off her board as she hit the sand, and broke her foot! A couple of weeks later, another student broke his leg while participating in a Karate exam, so his lessons are on hold for the time being. There are many people enquiring about the classes, which is wonderful

One of the requirements for surfing is that the student knows how to swim. As many Mexicans don't know how to swim, Jose, one of our older boys, is now offering swim lessons to prospective students. He has been working for a local pool for some time as a swim instructor and is also teaching our newer children how to swim.



Missionsurf now has T-shirts available for purchase locally. Many volunteers have been buying the t-shirts which were designed 'gratis' by our son-in-law, Paco (www.lifestudio.com.mx). We are looking forward to selling them overseas in the future to help support the refuge.

Keep an eye on our website for details!



Alan and I aren't getting any younger, Alan is 61 yrs in a few days and I am a little younger. I question myself occasionally, 'What are we doing?' 'Are we really making a difference in the lives of these children?'

The answer of course, is '**yes**', we are making a difference, but it is like the shampoo commercial on television, 'You won't see it happen overnight, but it will happen!' It definitely is a slow process and at times we feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the difficulties that we face each day. Living with so many children from such disadvantaged backgrounds requires a lot of patience, perseverance and certainly a lot of dedication. But, as we draw closer to the end of the children's school year in June, one realizes that we are changing lives, little by little.

This year we will see four of our senior students graduate. This alone is a miracle. These four young men, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds; one, suffered abuse and lived on the streets; one was a child of a drug addicted single mother who left him in institutions for most of his life; one, was a victim of people trafficking and abandonment, and the last, suffering abandonment and rejection.

All have now proved to themselves that with determination, effort and self discipline they can overcome all the obstacles that life throws at them. Of course, being accepted into a family where they feel loved and secure, where they are encouraged to dream and believe in themselves, was the foundation that was needed to set them on the right path.

At this time in their lives, they need to keep up the momentum to further their education. Three of the four want to attend University, two in business management and one as a chef. The fourth young man wants to become a surfboard shaper.

The only way to break the cycle of poverty is through education. Education is the key to open the door to opportunity. Through a solid education these young people are changing the course of destiny. Thank you to all our education sponsors who contribute to making these opportunities happen.

Advanced Education

Moacir is becoming quite the journalist where he has been writing short stories for a local Spanish magazine called 'Style'.

His first article was about our **Ten Year Anniversary** living and working with the underprivileged children of Mexico and Central America.

The second was about the vision of **MISSIONSURF** surf school and future surf culture.

And, his third was about the **Environment** and how we are helping to care for it.

His most recent article was an interview with me about being a Mum to over 50 children. As it is **Mother's Day** soon I would like to include this article in this newsletter.



★FUNDRAISING Update

A volunteer from Melbourne organized a **screening of 'Somewhere Near Tapachula'** in Melbourne last month which was a roaring success. As well as the screening a raffle was held and the music and entertainment was provided by Mexico Fiesta and a new band called Equinox. Along with the decorations, tacos and sangria, the night had a distinctly festive atmosphere. Thank you to everyone who attended.

MAWAI's pachanga party in Sydney last month enjoyed Salsa, Merengue and Cumbia and with DJ Alegria. Thank you MAWAI for your continuing fundraising efforts, sounds like the party was lots of fun.

Lourdes Hill College in Brisbane organised an Easter morning tea and is hosting an awareness event in July at which one of our volunteers will be attending to talk to the students about life at Misión México and the children they are supporting.

Our **Misión México Easter Egg Appeal** this year raised lots of donations and support – thank you to everyone who helped put the appeal together and to those of you who purchased 'eggs'! Hope you all enjoyed a wonderful Easter.

In April, Moacir and I were invited to the United States by John Mather from the **Peace and Justice Center (www.peacejusticecenter.org)** in Phoenix, Arizona to show the movie 'Somewhere Near Tapachula'. We attended schools and churches and also had meetings in Arizona and California. It was very encouraging to see so many who were touched by the movie and Moacir's testimony. Moacir is living proof of what can happen when a child is given the opportunity to achieve. Misión México exists because of the wonderful support of so many so this trip was an opportunity to thank those who have helped us grow. Thank you John, Diane and John, for your wonderful support, hospitality and friendship.



Our supporting committee in Canberra, **Mission Mexico (Australia) Inc**, held a **BBQ at Magnet Mart** last month to raise money for us. A great deal of effort was put in by all members and despite poor weather, fun was had and money was raised so thank you very much for organising.

The Cinco de Mayo celebrations in Canberra were a 'true gastronomical delight'. A small presentation about Misión México was presented by one of our committee members, Raquel Salmeron, and Somewhere Near Tapachula DVDs were sold to guests. Thank you to everyone who donated and helped make the event a success.

Misión México now has a Facebook page;
please join us at:
www.facebook.com/MisionMexicoChildren
and share with your friends.



If you're keen to support Misión México through fundraising please email **info@lovelifehope.com** for ideas and information.

Fundraising can also be organized through **Everyday Hero:**

www.everydayhero.com.au/charityview?charity=736
Several individuals in Australia are running marathons and raising money for us through **Everyday Hero**. Good luck and thank you so much, great initiatives!



Grants

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the Australian Embassy in Mexico for giving us a grant to cover the children's playground area (which was generously donated to us by the Rotary last year – thank you again!!) with shade sails, thus giving the children a sun safe area to play. This is the second grant that the Embassy has given us; the first was to help furnish the new refuge. Thank you so much Australia!!



Guzman y Gomez now has a store in Brisbane.
You can enjoy all their yummy Mexican foods in Fortitude Valley.
Enjoy!



Welcome and thank you to our two new sponsors; **Wavecation** (www.wavecation.com) and **Human Chemistry** (www.humanchemistry.com/community) in Sydney, Australia. Please check out their websites and support them to support Misión México.



Santos Wish, one of our dear long term sponsors, have launched beautiful beach tank tops, and are donating 50% of the proceeds to us, which is wonderful! They also donate 50cents from every **Santos Wish** item sold. Please visit their website for more information and support **Santos Wish** to support our children www.santoswish.com/charity-projects



To all those Mums out there, *Happy Mother's Day!*

To all our wonderful supporters, **THANK YOU!!!**
We couldn't exist without you.
God bless you all.

Pam and Alan Skuse

Misión México is proudly sponsored by:



Being a full-time mother is one of the highest salaried jobs in my field, since the payment is pure love.

~Mildred B. Vermont

This quote describes perfectly the life of Pam Skuse (a.k.a Mum), a mother who has dedicated three quarters of her life to be exactly that: a mother. As a full time job, it is something that Pam, or Mum as I like to call her, has a lot of experience with. Not only during the time she invested in her own six children back in Australia but also in her current life, here in Mexico, as President of a non-profit organisation where she cares for over 50 children in need on a day to day basis.

Pam and her husband, Alan (Dad), have lived a happy marriage for almost 40 years. They raised their children and now have grandchildren. After having raised their own children in their homeland Australia, they decided to take on an even bigger challenge: to be the parents of abused, neglected and orphaned kids in Tapachula, Chiapas, Mexico. How did this all come about? This little interview with Pam takes us through the very interesting journey she and Alan embarked upon 10 years ago. Let's meet Misión México's mum.

Moacir: Mum, thanks for taking the time to do this interview. It's a great honour for me to be doing this; I admire and love your work, and think that your story is highly interesting and moving. Let's start from the beginning, shall we?
Why did you choose Tapachula as the place where you would create a home of love?

Pam: Well, firstly, Dad and I had our six children whom we raised in a warm family environment. Our children had grown up and we found ourselves reflecting on our lives at that point in time, and what we saw was that, it had been a very fortunate life in many ways. We had a lovely family, an honest way of living and all the values we practised had been instilled into our children during their growth. Our life had not been easy but we had been blessed. We shared our thoughts on all this and remembered the people who weren't as fortunate in this world, and that's when we decided that it was time for us to give something back. Just prior to that time, our daughter Brooke had been in Mexico, in Tapachula to be exact, doing voluntary work at an orphanage. On her return she shared some amazing stories of her time in this foreign land, and with this she ignited the desire in both Dad and me to share a

little of our lives with those less fortunate. Not long after, we made the decision to visit the same place and do a similar type of work.

We arrived in Mexico in November 2000 to work as volunteers for a period of 12 months, however, the orphanage shut down halfway through our stay. By that time we were very conscious of the great need there was in this city, especially for the young street children who had suffered so much. The children we were looking after had grown in our hearts; we couldn't let them go back to the streets and to their lives of abuse and violence. It was then that Dad and I were faced with one of the most difficult decisions we had ever had to make: that is; to go back to Australia and let this kids go back to their lives of suffering, or to sacrifice our family, our home and our lives to stay here and help. We decided to stay and give the children a second chance at life. Today, it has been 10 years and we have been able to help over 300 children. Dad (Alan) and I do not regret our decision because what we are doing is really making a difference, and that's what it is all about.

Moacir: I'm so glad you decided to stay Mum. Imagine where I'd be if you didn't.
Tell me, how has it been being a mother to over 50 children?

Pam: It's been amazing and challenging! Dad and I had raised our six children and when we came here we started off with 7, and ever since, the numbers have grown, now with an average of around 50. Right now we have 52 children, from 4 years of age to 22! Obviously, during the last ten years there have been a lot of challenges for us, it has not been easy, I can tell you that much. Every child we receive comes with a lot of emotional baggage, and it's something that's difficult to leave behind. Each child has a story and it takes them time to adjust to their new lives. Also, we work with many teenagers, and as we all know, that's a very difficult phase in life; they're all trying to find their place in this world. We want to help them find the right place. It's a constant struggle, always challenging. However, during the process of giving these kids a better life, we have come to know them well. We see them as our sons and daughters, and we love them. We believe in them and we want them to grow in all areas of their lives.

Moacir: Aw Mum, you are like a mum to me. Did you know that?

Pam: I am your mum.

Moacir: I know. Tell me: as a mum, what are some of the major challenges you have faced in life?

Pam: One of the major challenges has to be, being on call 24/7. When you are a mother there is not much time out or holidays or shifts. If a need arises, you must be there to take care of it. When you have over 50 children, the demand is much greater as someone always needs something. During my time in Mexico there have been countless difficulties, but this is to be expected when you work with street children. They need to be educated, taught values etc. They need to learn to have dreams and to aspire to be better. It's a constant struggle. These kids have never had anyone to care for them and therefore there's a lot that they need to learn. It's like starting from scratch. It is definitely a job that requires perseverance, patience and a lot of love. Being a mother, in general, is one of the most difficult jobs there is, and possibly the major challenge that one can face. Also, it's the one no one prepares you for, except of course, the example of one's own mother. No one is actually trained to be a mother; it isn't a university degree...even though it possibly should be!!! At least it should be valued as such!

Moacir: Imagine that: Master's Degree in Motherhood, I don't think even that would be enough. What motivates you to keep going?

Mum: The rewards of course! That is, to see the kids we help grow and develop in all areas of their lives. Ex-street children, whose lives were full of violence and abuse, now go to school and are getting good grades. They are learning to have good moral values and now have dreams for a bright future. These kids had lost all hope in life, but now, after being here at Misión México, they have a great passion for it. We have a lot of great athletes, children interested in the arts and young people who want to be doctors, teachers, architects, detectives and scientists ... even wrestlers and princesses! We have teenagers about to finish high school and who will be going to University. Things like that are satisfying. Generally, the transformation that the kids go through when they come to live at Misión México is very motivating. To see them achieving the goals that they set and to know that we are part of it; it is priceless. All the positive results are a good reason to keep going. Truthfully, it is the love we have for these children that motivates us, these young people have won our hearts over and in difficult times it is that love and the hope we have of giving them a better life that keeps us moving forward.

Additionally, I believe that if we all gave a little of ourselves, or the blessings we have, to help others in need, this world would be a much better place. That's our dream: to create a better world, for these children and for humanity. That's the promise that started it all.

Moacir: Thank you Mum; I am so thankful that you have come into my life!

