

David Tomlinson
Saint Francis Vicarage
Burnhope
Newton Aycliffe
Co. Durham
DL5 7ER

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Dear Friends,

Returning from Manila on Tuesday 27th, the long rather dull plane flight over, it seemed good to me to write a letter, a chance to share some of what I saw, and some of the lives I had the fun of sharing in, for just a few days.



The current centre, front view.

The banging on the door was insistent, really insistent, the door, a large steel barrier, reverberated with every thump - the kids had arrived. As I approached their voices carried through 'Hello Tito David' they were repeating over and over again, practicing my name, just waiting to meet Naomi's Papa. I opened the door, they went a bit shy as they realised it was me, the braver of the them, a girl called Anne-Marie carried through the plan, greeting me with the rehearsed phrase. Smiling and saying hello in return, I found their enthusiasm quickly overcame their shyness and it wasn't long before I was sat on the floor losing at Connect 4.

The centre, mainly run by Naomi, is a building that doesn't stand out, grey, brown, dusty and dirty, it huddles alongside other similar properties amongst the slums of Payatas. There are no outside windows and the steel door has proved essential for security. Inside a few low voltage lights cast a shadowy glow, and the lino, damaged in recent floods, has become ragged and torn.

Somehow though, the poverty of the area, the grimness of the environment, the dust and dirt that swirls on every eddy as the lumbering garbage trucks crawl by yards from the front door, seems eclipsed by the life of these children as they pour in. Four days a week the door was banged, four days it was thrown wide open, and for four days children laughed, ate, learned, fought, and played.

Anne-Marie, who beat me at connect four, was a regular, always there, quick with a smile and ready response. She looked seven or so with a slight build, she is eleven. She works washing plastic, from scraps to great sheets pieces are scavenged, washed, and sold on. One of five children her Dad only has one leg and can't work, the rest of the family never stop. Then I met Susie, casually I asked Ate Jeana, a local lady helping out about Susie's parents, 'they are dead' she told me with a shrug. Susie was twelve, the last to leave, the one who liked to help, angry at the world her fury would sometimes explode in tirades of screaming, sessions that over the months have slowly become less as the centre's part in who she is, has slowly become more.



An enthusiasm to learn.

That night we walked through the dark to the local neighbourhood basketball pitch, the cream of the footballing kids joined us. I

watched as Roy, whose skill at coaching was impressive to watch, turned chaos into order, the kids barefooted running, passing and dribbling. Cones were laid out, pass and turn exercises worked through, a guy high on something or other came over to ask me to take his photo, a drunk woman stumbled by just beyond the pitch wall. Roy's relationship with the kids was clearly strong, built on respect and hope for a better future. The football is Roy's main area and Naomi supports in the sharing out of snacks and water during the main day time sessions. The kids play hard, their energy seems boundless despite the smoke from the huge garbage mountain drifting lazily through our lungs.



Fruit while you colour!

Saturday was football for all, and all came, with upwards of sixty kids crowding the site, queuing for their snacks, playing with a laugh. Rela-

Roy getting the footballers organised



tionships were strengthened and conversations struck up. Jacko, a six year old jumper boy demonstrated his skill at vertical jumping, leaping six feet straight up, grabbing hold of a pillar top, hauling himself up, a six year old with muscles unusual for his age, muscles grown through leaping onto passing garbage trucks and scavenging through their contents. On being corrected he would curl into a foetal position weeping, ready for the blows that he had grown up with, a child whose learning was about surviving, rather than flourishing.

On Friday the centre hours were longer than normal allowing Amie, the volunteer teacher to hold two classes. The kids entered in with enthusiasm, the chants of A... B... C... sounded from the study room, stories were written, songs sung, the world in that afternoon

became a bit bigger, a touch more wonderful, to these kids of Payatas, dirty, grimy, smiley Payatas.

Sitting together in the cool of the evening Naomi, Roy, Amie and I dreamed. We dreamt of the day when the aspirations of the children would be more than an extra light bulb in their windowless homes; the day when the first kid would turn professional in their football and Payatas would be proud; the day when the child who wants to teach, would teach, and the other kids of the area would look to her with hope; the day when the child who simply wants to lift his family out of poverty would be able to say to his siblings, 'you go to school now, I'll pay.'

We talked of the need for a better building, one with more space, with a safe outdoor area, with natural light, and greater flexibility. We talked of the rats and mice that scurried by, of the cockroaches that were endemic, of the kids and how bright they are, if only.....

The next day Roy took me round the corner to see another place, a building for sale. Bigger than the house we lease this had scope for a roof garden, for decent staff quarters, for more space for more kids. We looked at the future together, and wondered if it could be possible.

Priced at around £6000 (slums are cheap places if you fancy a holiday home!) and needing another £3000 spending on it this was a building that could allow the trust to develop the work further. We know the need, we have proven that Naomi and Roy, in the different skills they have, can pull something together that is wonderful, perhaps now is the time to build on that understanding. They have worked hard at building relationships, having the respect and support of the area and the local neighbourhood captain who is keen to see improvements, time then for something more.

In the centre of Manila I saw a large billboard piece of artwork, picturing the side of the enormous garbage heap it was captioned 'a few of my favourite things'. The message was powerful and for me this Christmas, a few of my favourite things are going to be the kids I met, the daughter whose daily life I was briefly part of, the football I played with Roy's direction, slipping over on the hard concrete as I attempted to win possession from an eleven year old girl. And out of all of those favourites, the dream of things just being a bit better, in the new centre, will top my list.

Thank you for helping make all this possible, thank you for your thoughts and prayers, for your gifts and hopes, for your questions and good wishes. All the work that has been done has been made possible because all of us have given, and I wonder if you would like to be a part of this next step? Can you help us buy this building? Can we have a favourite thing not on the garbage heap but rescuing kids from it? If so please do send a gift, made payable to 'Triple E', and to quote Naomi, "together we can change the world one life at a time."

Thanks for caring with us David



The new centre?