

Ten Years

Micah Project August 2008 Update

Today is my tenth anniversary in Honduras. . . ten years exactly from the day I packed a few things in a couple of suitcases and left my life in the United States behind.

I moved to Honduras in August of 1998 to start an educational program for street kids in Casa Alianza's crisis center. I had worked with Casa Alianza (Covenant House) for a few months in 1993 as a senior in Wheaton College's HNGR program. When I met my first street kid through their programs back then, I knew that this would be my life's work.

A little over two months after moving to Honduras permanently in 1998, though, hurricane Mitch swept through Central America, creating massive destruction and loss of life. The bridges, homes and businesses of Tegucigalpa seemed to fold before the flood waters as if they were made of matchsticks. You couldn't be in Honduras without trying to do something—anything—to help those who had become *damnificados*, homeless victims of the hurricane.

Villa Linda Miller wasn't my idea. In fact, it almost seems like God's idea of a practical joke. *Let's take this green, 26 year-old, recently-arrived boy, whose never laid one block on top of another or mixed a batch of cement or done anything even remotely like community organizing, and let's use him to build a new community of 165 homes. Ha ha!* On second thought, I'm pretty sure that God used someone as inexperienced as me to build Villa Linda Miller in order that all witnesses to the event would be ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED that it was God who was in control and not man. Isn't that how He always works, after all???

As I began to meet daily with the hurricane victims, generous people from all over the world began to donate to us. In the beginning, it was just simple things. . . funds from my home church to buy mattresses and gas stoves for families that were crammed onto the floors of churches and schools. But by February of 1999, we were able to purchase the beautiful rolling land that would become Villa Linda Miller. Through grit, determination and unity, the families of Villa Linda Miller raised their own community out of land that used to be an arid and over-grazed cow pasture. Today, they have a beautiful school for their children to study in, a clinic to get well in, and a church to worship in. The kids that have the run of the community are too young to even remember hurricane Mitch; but many of the adults say that it was the best thing to ever happen to them because it brought them to a beautiful new place.

During the busy year of planning Villa Linda Miller in 1999, God started to disquiet my heart again. After hurricane Mitch, the problem of street kids in Tegucigalpa only increased, as more children were driven into poverty by the tragedy. But after all that God was doing through Villa Linda Miller, my perspective on the work had changed. Yes, working with street kids must involve feeding and clothing them, educating them and helping them to detox from their addictions to yellow glue. But first and foremost, it must be about reintroducing them to God. . . the One who created their inmost beings, but had since been displaced in their lives by the bondage of a broken world. If God can take a tragedy

like hurricane Mitch and make a beautiful thing like Villa Linda Miller, surely he can take the violent and tragic young lives of these boys and turn them into something beautiful—something that glorifies Him—as well? With that, the Micah Project was born.

When we opened our group home in January of 2000, I had no idea what was in store for me. Walking alongside young men as they struggle to come out of addiction and the incredible evil that they encounter on the streets is a terrifying and yet glorious experience. So often, throughout the years of Micah, we have asked ourselves *is this really possible? Can these kids really be transformed?*—only to have God move again and again in their hearts to bring transformation. So often, their lives seem to be on the brink of utter chaos... only to be reigned back in again by God's loving hand. Back in 1999, did I think it was possible that these lost little boys would one day graduate from college and become leaders in Honduras? Actually, after seeing all that God had done for Villa Linda Miller, I was convinced that He could do anything. Even so, I am constantly surprised by the way those same guys are becoming confident, well-spoken, purposeful and compassionate men of God.

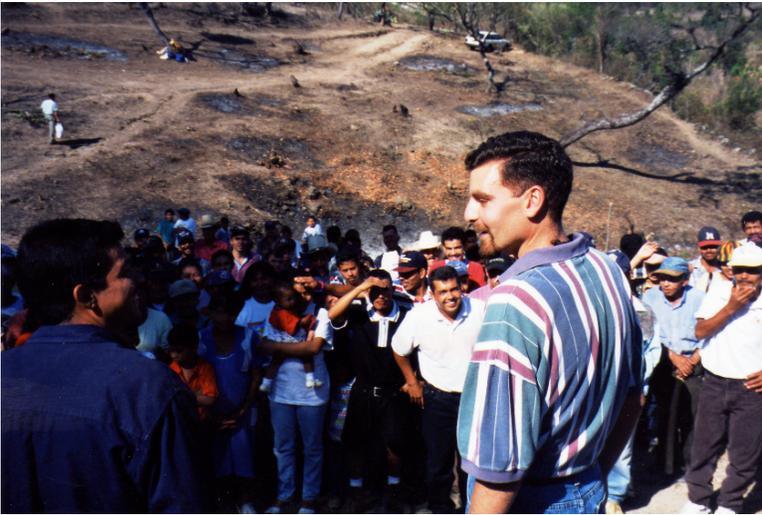
2008 has been a different year for me. You'd think eight years of living in the Micah House would get routine, but God has a way of bringing a freshness to it year by year. In some ways, it has been a harder year, as some of the violence and addiction of the streets has once again invaded our home. But these very things have reminded me to open my eyes and see that this work, with these kids, is on the frontlines of the battle between good and evil. And—lest I forget---the Mighty Champion is fighting on our behalf!

Maybe it's because this ten year marker has made me reflective, but I admit that, lately, I've been overtaken by overwhelming moments of gratitude that almost bring me to my knees. I told the guys at our Sunday evening worship time that I wouldn't trade my life with anybody else's. I'm thankful that God chose to use *me* in this work, when He certainly could have chosen someone smarter, better-trained, more organized, etc., etc., etc. I am thankful that He has given me a life where I get to see His mighty hand transform lives on a daily basis. I am even thankful that he has given me a ministry that often includes tears and sorrow and uncertainty, because these are the only things that make me remember to fly back to His arms and cling to Him for dear life.

If anything, large amounts of gratitude and contentment can lull us into neutral...to staying exactly where we are because it is such an awesome place to be. But I dream that one or two of our young men will take over the Micah Project and use all that God has taught them to keep transforming the next generation of Hondurans... and in the process, make me obsolete. But for now, every morning when I open my eyes, I thank Him for allowing me to do His work in Honduras for another day.

Gracias,

Michael Miller



Left: Meeting with the people of Villa Linda Miller, the month that we purchased the land. ~ February 1999

Right: Standing with the original Micah boys in 2000. Back row, left to right: Noel, David, Miguel, Olvin, Danilo. Front row: Roger, Marvin and Tino. (Jarvin is taking the picture).

