

Beautiful Memories

El Salvador was visited recently by the Memory Project, and they came bearing gifts.

March 2, 2007 - El Salvador

One of the tragedies of an abandoned child is that they lose not only their hope for the future but also their sense of history. Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos works tirelessly to restore hope in our children and now, with the help of Ben Schumaker and his Memory Project, we are also securing their history.

In 2004, while visiting Guatemala, Ben heard a talk given by a young man who had grown up in an orphanage. The man spoke solemnly on the missing pieces of his childhood. He explained that, when you have so little growing up, you lack the precious keepsakes – photos, pictures, childhood toys – that secure your place in history, serving as tangible memories to carry with you always. He explained that oftentimes orphans have no keepsakes and so, as their own memories inevitably fade, they often feel that their childhood does too.

Inspired, Ben returned to the United States and founded the Memory Project. The project collects photos of children in orphanages around the world and sends them to high school and college art students across the USA who use them to create beautiful portraits.

The project is genius in two ways: firstly, it supplies precious keepsakes for children who would otherwise have no record of their childhood; and secondly, it encourages privileged children from the first world to really consider the reality of life in other parts of the world. These students, after staring into the eyes of a distant orphan for weeks on end, often begin to consider what life must be like for that child. They frequently form strong emotional attachments to that child, which are made evident in the heart-felt personal messages they write on the backs of their paintings.

This project is beautiful because it lets children that feel forgotten know that they are loved. It also, not incidentally, puts a face to the sadness that exists in the world. It makes that sadness real, and the plight of real people cannot so easily be ignored.

Recently, we at NPH El Salvador were lucky enough to be visited by Ben and Abha of the Memory Project. They had returned to deliver the long-awaited portraits – a task that took many long days to complete as each child needed to be found, given their portrait and explanation, and photographed with their painting.

Responses varied greatly from child to child. Some beamed instantly. Others took it awkwardly, sneaking away to a quiet corner to absorb it in private. All were grateful.

Ben is also working with the other NPH homes and hopes to be involved on an ongoing basis. He expresses a desire to return on a yearly basis with new portraits for every child so that they can have a progressive collection of memories.

On behalf of all the children and staff of NPH I would like to extend a huge thank you to both Ben and his partner Abha who work tirelessly, often tediously, to bring smiles to often forgotten children.

Cassandra Chapman

Home Correspondent

Warning: mysql_num_rows(): supplied argument is not a valid MySQL result resource in [/www/nphinternational/ml/include/history-back.php](#) on line 9