



30 DAYS *of* PRAYER FOR HOPE

Thirty reflections and requests for prayer
from the Hope Unlimited campuses in Brazil

HOPE
Unlimited
for children

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Day 1: Felix

by Corenne Smith

"Through the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within us, carefully guard the precious truth that has been entrusted to you."

2 Timothy 1:14



Felix and Corenne

I got the door to hear the words I always dread: "Tia (aunt), I'm coming to say goodbye." I knew I was supposed to be happy for Felix. He was happy because the judge was re-integrating him back to his family. But you can imagine my concern, knowing the sister who had worked hard to gain guardianship was already a single mom, and only 18. But at least she had a stable job as a waitress, and had moved into a larger apartment to meet the judge's requirement that Felix have his own room. The fear of any "foster parent" is that moment when you have to let go; and for us, it happens a lot.

Felix was never a problem. He was always available to help or even do cartwheels with Bella in the corridor just to keep her happy. He worked hard in school. But if he left, would he continue to go to school? Would he just be used as a baby sitter for his sister? Would he fall into bad company?

Yes, he stayed in touch with me on Facebook, but telling me he's "good" is not the same as looking into his eyes and seeing that they are clear and drug free, seeing that his clothes are clean, and getting the sense that his soul is being cared for.

Last July Bella and I visited Felix. How excited I was to see that he, now 16, had an internship at a restaurant after school; and that the owner was a kind, gentle woman with kids of her own, who also employed Felix's two older sisters! Having gone through so much, the three siblings had found each other, were living together, and were making good choices.

Thank you, Jesus, for guardian angels like the woman who was giving them "registered" work—honest work with signed documents—and who cares enough to make sure Felix is going to school each day and has time to do his homework.

I'm sad that Felix works on Sundays and can't go to church; but I have to trust that his soul and heart are in the Lord's hands. Please pray for all our kids, given to us for what seems like only a moment. Felix was with us for three years. I'll always consider him one of mine, and I thank God for the time I had him, and for the young man he is going to be.

Father, we thank you for Felix—for the privilege of having him with us and for his profession of faith in you. We pray that you will guard his heart, and hold him close to you.

Day 2: Rhai

by Corenne Smith

"I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth."

Psalm 121:3



Rhai

My first memory of this skinny, small-for-his-age kid is being kicked out of a friendly soccer game for his temper. As he sat on the sidelines fuming, Rhai refused to talk to me. I also remember him strutting his stuff down the corridors of the mall on one of our birthday outings. Phil asked him, nicely, to pull up his pants and not wear his baseball cap sideways, which conveyed the message, "I'm bad, probably part of a gang, and not to be messed with." Although he grudgingly complied, 20 minutes later his cap was on sideways again. Such blatant disrespect towards us rarely happens.

Sitting in my living room across from this kind, gentle, compassionate, incredibly intuitive, and Godly young man, who would think it could be the same kid? He's been working for the past three years at a company converting vehicles to run on natural gas (and is now a manager). But back in the day, I remember him thriving in our Barber Certification course.

Michelle, his instructor, had taken Rhai under her wing. She and her husband helped him find his first apartment, invited him to attend church with them, and, when her son was born, asked Rhai to be his Godparent. Little did he know what a responsibility that would become...

Rhai's dream is to be married and have his own family. He dated a pastor's daughter, but she found somebody else and his heart was broken. This rejection could have derailed him, but it did not. Instead, he focused his very real pain into quietly helping his alumni friends who needed extra encouragement. Somebody's always using his couch, so perhaps it's no surprise that he wants to be a psychologist. This month he's filling out college applications.

Please pray for Rhai, and for all our graduates who are trailblazing on their own. It is hard enough to get through college with a family supporting you. The odds are so against Rhai. Pray that the Lord will help him to stay focused; and, when the time is right, bring the right woman into life.

Meanwhile, his story doesn't end here. Please join us tomorrow for the continuation...

Father, we thank you for Felix—for the privilege of having him with us and for his profession of faith in you. We pray that you will guard his heart, and hold him close to you.

Day 3: Michelle

by Corenne Smith

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me."

Psalm 23:4



Michelle

Michelle, our cosmetology course instructor, is Miss Congeniality. She's a great teacher and takes a real interest in her students. When she and her husband took young graduate Rhai under their wing (remember him from yesterday's prayer?)—even asking him to be their baby's Godfather—they could not have predicted what was going to happen.

Michelle's pregnancy was high-risk, and she was bedridden for the final trimester. Shortly after the baby was born, her apartment flooded and all the furnishings were destroyed. Rhai not only helped the family clean up the mess, but used his own money, from one of his first paychecks, to buy the baby a new crib!

Then Michelle fell and needed knee surgery. While she was at the hospital, it was discovered that she had thyroid cancer. The throat incision was extensive—from one ear to the other—but the cancer was removed, and she began chemo. Meanwhile, her older daughter, 15, started having severe skin infections over her entire body and was finally asked to stay home from school. Although still uncertain, there is a pending diagnosis of lupus.

On disability, struggling with post-partum depression, and facing enormous medical bills, Michelle planned to take her own life. Her husband found out and, not knowing what to do, frantically reached out to Rhai. This resulted in two wonderful outcomes. First, Rhai almost literally talked her back from the edge. He told Michelle how much she meant to him and so many other children and how much her life had value. In the process, Rhai discovered what it feels like to use your life as an instrument to help others.

Today, Michelle is back at work, and Rhai has decided to pursue psychology, having discovered that he enjoys listening and helping those in need talk things through.

How many of us are like Michelle? We are loving, capable people who bless so many people, but sometimes we find it hard to feel blessed. The minute we're unable to serve, we feel useless. I learned an incredible lesson watching these two, as the teacher/student roles were reversed.

Pray for all of our dedicated staff who are not working for the salary or benefits, but because they want to be a part of something bigger than themselves. None of them have much by our standards, yet they feel blessed enough to want to bless others.

Father, we thank you for Michelle and all of our staff who have made sacrifices to serve at Hope. Help us to keep each of them in our prayers as they go through valleys in their personal lives.

Day 4: Jonas

by Corenne Smith

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and cleanses us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9



Jonas

I'm always mystified when Jonas texts me. He was tough as nails when he first arrived, but a year later he had transformed into a charming 15-year-old. He started doing well in school, and he quickly picked up the violin, even traveling with our little band. I remember pondering deep things with him one day, while he watered the lawn. I told him I saw leadership qualities in him and that God had a special call on his life.

Then, one day, something snapped. He got into a fight with another boy and ran away. A few days later Phil went looking for him, deep into the "boca." Although he got a tearful hug, it was clear that Jonas was already trafficking for the bosses. The next day, the bosses sent Phil a warning to not come back. Soon, Jonas started posting pictures of himself holding bundles of cash. It was surreal to see these pictures and recognize my young Jonas.

At first Jonas stayed in relationship via social media. Then things went silent. It turns out that he had killed somebody in a drug war and was in prison. Through a prison pastor who also volunteered with us, we got news about Jonas. It was rarely good.

Because the murder happened when he was just 16, the law required that he be released at 20. But just two weeks before his official release, Jonas managed to escape. Why the self-destructive behavior?

Since then, Jonas has texted me several times. Just this week he sent me a message on Facebook that he is going to be a Dad. The baby is due this April, and he says he's ecstatic. But he's not employed, and he won't be able to get a formal job because he's a fugitive.

So, what's next? Is he going to die a drug dealer, like his father? I pray for him. I believe in redemption, and I want to believe his baby will have a different life. With each text he sends, I'm conflicted: joyful that he's reaching out and has not forgotten us but sad that his life is such a mess and that his sins have affected so many other lives.

Jonas has heard the Word. Pray that he accepts Christ as his savior. Pray that this new baby will have a different life. Pray that this new little life will—finally—be the impetus for true transformation.

Jesus was crucified between two criminals. God wanted us to know that his death on the cross could erase their sins as well. Christ died for Jonas. If only he would accept that.

Father, we pray for Jonas and others like him who believe there's no hope. Help them to turn their eyes to you and accept your gift of forgiveness.

Day 5: Emeliano

by Corenne Smith

"For you will be treated as you treat others. The standard you use in judging others is the standard by which you will be judged."

Matthew 7:2



Weekly house parent "Date Night" after all the children are asleep. Emeliano is in the back, in orange.

Life is messy. And people in ministry are broken, impulsive and struggling—just like everyone else. Several of our staff are former street kids, and have struggled with addiction. For some, their only "crime" was to be orphaned. Others have had more sordid pasts. And we live together—neighbors, on one campus, all of us broken in one way or another, as we try to meet the needs of the broken children we serve as best we can. And sometimes it gets messy.

Emeliano and Denise came to work as house parents Christmas of 2017, along with their two wonderful children, ages 14 and 16. We first met Emeliano while visiting an adolescent drug rehab center and eventually convinced him to come and work for us. We hoped his expertise would add value with the growing number of young kids coming to us addicted to hard drugs. He had once been a user himself, but he had been clean for 15 years. Denise was a teacher.

After 13 months with us, the daily stress of being a house parent got to Emeliano. He relapsed—badly. He had to leave, and he was admitted into a long-term Christian rehab program.

When Emeliano relapsed, Denise lost not only a husband, confidant and best friend; she also lost her income, her residence and the father of her children. We now faced the quandary of what to do with his family. Do we remove them? All sin and fall short. But what was our continuing responsibility?

Many times during my travels, I encounter churches and families who are suffering because someone in ministry has fallen from grace. Each situation is different, and responses vary. We chose to embrace Denise, Rebecca, Davi and by extension, even Emeliano—a decision which was not popular with everybody. The family continues to live on campus and be part of our family, helping out wherever they can. Emeliano is allowed to visit his family for a few hours every 15 days.

Is there room to fall and be broken when you are in ministry? In ministry, you often find yourself in a "fish bowl," where everyone can see. It brings "judge not lest ye be judged" to a new level.

Pray today for everyone in ministry, all of us, around the country and overseas. Pray for compassion and grace with one other, for Satan to be kept at bay, and for unity. We are a family. We need each other.

Father, we pray for healing in this family—that this stumble will become a victory through which they can serve even more effectively. And we do ask that you will give us grace and humility, knowing that all of us are sinners.

Day 6: Nicolas

by Corenne Smith

"We love because he first loved us."

1 John 4:19



Nicolas

"It's not that they don't want you," I heard myself say to Nicolas. He was sitting on the edge of the sofa, while I knelt down beside him, trying to gaze directly into his grief-stricken eyes. I struggled for the words to finish this sentence. I understood both sides.

Nicolas 13, and his older brother, Lucas 15, came to us a couple of years ago. Lucas, with some learning delays, is always cheerful. Nicolas has a more melancholy personality. He sees the complexities of their situation and is torn. He feels responsible for his older brother, yet he longs to be part of a real family.

Each of our kids is paired with "Godparents," or a family from a church in the community. Sometimes they take them on outings, and they always bring gifts on special days like Easter and Christmas. This was the second time that Nicolas had begged to be adopted by his Godparents. Now I had to explain to him that while this family cared for him deeply, they were not ready to adopt a 13-year-old.

I dried his tears, and I gave him a bowl of ice cream. It was already a rare treat to be in Auntie's house—especially to be there having a bowl of ice cream. Finally, he looked imploringly at me, and he asked me the dreaded question, "Why can't you and Uncle Philip adopt me?" "Son, we already have," I said to him. "I know it isn't exactly the way you want, but you're a part of our extended family. That's why I'm talking to you now. I'll always be here for you. It's just that our family is a really big family." It tears me apart to have to say these words to him. I know the facts don't really matter; in a sense, it sounds to him like he's being abandoned again.

Pray today for the families who serve as "Godparents" to our kids—those who give a weekend here and there, contribute financially, help on holidays and get involved in our kids' lives.

Nicolas did go that weekend to stay with his "family." They are trying to work through this with him—trying to create stability, trying to love him without disappointing him. It takes a mature family to be able to do this. It is a calling.

Heavenly Father, thank you for each of these individuals and families who have responded to your call to be Godparents to our kids. Help them show love while they maintain boundaries and help our kids understand the depth of their commitment.

Day 7: Cristian

by Corenne Smith

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

James 1:27



Cristian

It seems like Cristian has been with us forever. He's a cute, spunky kid with a bit of a Napoleon complex and a charming smile; but he has a huge chip on his shoulder. At 14, Cristian left us to be adopted by a well-to-do Christian family. Even their children loved him and wanted him as a brother! But after a few months, Cristian decided he didn't want to stay with them. He couldn't articulate his feelings. He just didn't feel it was a fit. He felt like an outsider.

He found solace in flying his homemade kites—a competitive sport in Brazil. Which kite will be able to zig-zag, then cut up and down to sever the string of the opponent? (On the streets, it's common for kids to lace their string with a mixture of glue and tiny glass shavings. The practice is illegal and dangerous).

Rodolpho, only 10, was new and still jockeying for respect among his newfound “brothers.” Two weekends in a row he messed with Cristian's safe space: his kites. When Bella and I heard the commotion, Cristian was already in one squad car and Rodolpho in the other, clutching his leg. Apparently, Rodolpho had taken Cristian's

kite and ran. In the process, he ripped the kite.

Cristian caught up with him and took matters into his own hands, giving him a tremendous kick. Now the police were taking Cristian to file a police report with a possible overnight stay in jail, and Rodolpho was headed for a mandatory forensic exam. It sounds grave, but if this had been two brothers in their backyard, things would have been handled differently. At Hope, we have laws we have to follow, and any act of physical violence has to be reported.

To his credit, when Cristian came back he immediately apologized to Rodolpho, who continued to limp but had trouble remembering which leg was hurt.

Cristian, now 16, has about a year and a half left with us. I worry about him. While he's matured in some ways, he's still smoldering beneath the surface. He needs Jesus.

Today, please pray for those kids who are getting close to launch but aren't quite ready. Pray for the Holy Spirit to invade their hearts and influence their decisions. Help Cristian to know that in Jesus, he will always have a place where he belongs.

Father, only You can break through the walls of anger and resentment our kids have erected. May your Holy Spirit work in us and through us to point them to You.

Day 8: João Pedro

by Corenne Smith

“Therefore encourage one another and build one another up.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11



João Pedro

Getting a call in the middle of the night is never good. But when the call is from thousands of miles away, it's even worse. I was in the United States, and João Pedro was on the line from Brazil, moaning in agony, and begging for help.

He's a recent graduate, 18, and he lives alone. By the time I was able to wake up a house parent to rush to his apartment, he had already gone out to the street and flagged down a police officer who drove him to the hospital. It turned out he had a kidney stone. What a horrible feeling, to be all alone, writhing in pain and not sure who to call. But I remember getting an equally disturbing communication from him just a month ago. João Pedro had posted a picture of himself with a bottle of pills, preparing to commit suicide.

During his time with us, João Pedro was a great kid. He worked hard, read the Bible, and was such a proficient baker that he actually taught our course while our professor was on an extended sick leave. He loved to try new recipes. When he graduated, he got a job at one of Vitória's best known bakeries, where he makes cakes for high society. He has a wonderful Christian girlfriend.

So why try to kill yourself? After our pastoral team had intervened and counseled him, I later asked him why he had thought about this, when everything seemed to be going so well. “Those memories from my childhood keep coming back to haunt me, Auntie.” He wouldn't share the details, but in the still of the night the old wounds would open, and he was a little boy again—unwanted and abandoned.

João Pedro's cry for help took us by surprise. His life seemed to be going well. He didn't seem to be depressed. Although the statistics vary from country to country, suicide is on the rise everywhere. I think of our young graduates who don't have families or support systems outside of Hope, and I worry.

João Pedro seems to be doing well now, and he is even volunteering at a nearby homeless shelter. But it was a wake-up call to the need for us to really be a family and stand beside these kids after they leave.

Today, as you pray for João Pedro and the rest of our graduates, also pray for the many families in Brazil and in the U.S., who are touched by depression and suicide.

Lord, we lift up all of our kids who feel alone and abandoned. Help them to feel your presence. Give us the wisdom and strength to be the family they need.

Day 9: Bootprints in the Boca

by Corenne Smith

“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

Romans 10:15



Bootprints on the door

The view from my kitchen window at the youth ranch is beautiful. Green, lush hills, sprinkled with tall palm trees that sway in the wind, heavy with coconuts begging to be picked. But just beyond the palm trees, in the distance, I can see little houses: the “boca,” or mouth—the most dangerous part of the slum.

My neighbor, Nora, can also see my house from her window. Her son, a drug addict, hastily nailed some planks together and made this house so she could get away from the man who was beating her. She and her 12-year-old daughter, Sara, neither child nor woman, live in this one-room, one-bed shack, with the light shining through the huge gaps in the wooden slats.

There is a sink, but no plumbing. They walk three blocks to her son’s house to go to the bathroom and take showers. But they can’t take the most direct route, because the streets are “owned” by traffickers who have a longstanding grudge against her family. We had to get permission to enter the favela to visit Nora and bring her

some bags of groceries. We were hoping to convince her to allow Sara to enroll in courses at Hope Mountain, in clear view of the box they call home.

Nora’s life is controlled by men and by fear. The move to her new house was in vain, because her spurned lover followed her. She showed me the cuts and bruises on her neck where he tried to strangle her with the same chain she used to try to lock him out. His muddy footprints are still on the door where he broke it down.

Nora’s did enroll Sara in a course, but then withdrew her, because she decided it was too dangerous for her to walk alone. But we’ve formed a relationship, and the journey has begun. As we walk back through the muddy streets, we get shouts of greeting from various house windows—people who have taken courses at Hope.

Many of our day students come from desperate situations. But each morning at the ranch starts with them holding hands in an enormous circle, praying for a new day and the potential it brings. Classes start with a devotional, and on Wednesday they pause for chapel. Students who need help get baskets of food, and last year everybody got a turkey at Christmas. We do what we can for our neighbors.

Each house I see out my kitchen window has a family. A story. Some are poor, but dignified—perhaps invalids without healthcare. Most are a tangled, knotted mess, like the backside of a tapestry. We want to be there for all of them.

Lord, you have woven us into their lives for a purpose. Help us be part of your plan to make something beautiful out of the ugliness. That is our prayer today.

Day 10: The Road Less Traveled

by Corenne Smith

“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

Galatians 6:9



Laura and her family

Laura Alte has made two trips to Brazil to volunteer at Hope. Last year, she brought her entire family. And she is amazing. She married Alan, adopting his daughter Shannon (who dreams of working for Hope someday). They had three kids of their own. Then, due to a trauma in their extended family, they suddenly became the guardians of three more children under the age of 10! Laura owns a very complex business. Alan travels for the military. Their house recently flooded. Laura could be stressed to distraction, but she manages to get dinner on the table each evening and the kids arrive at school and church on time. And, she still manages to love on Hope's kids.

This year, much of our time has been spent making new friends and visiting old friends in the churches that support us here in the United States. Although I'm conflicted being away from Brazil, at each and every church I am amazed by the people who connect with us—really connect. People like Laura who have family members who have gone through circumstances similar to those of our boys and girls in Brazil. And yet, they still have the heart to become involved with us!

How many times have I sat next to a woman about my age at the pot luck following the service to hear that her son is in prison, or daughter is addicted to drugs? How many grandparents do I meet who have custody of their young grandchildren? There is brokenness that we share, and from that comes compassion. Kindred hearts. Encouragement to keep up the good fight, because we have all learned that transformation does not come quickly or easily. I needed this time in the States. I needed to meet the people who are the backbone of what we do. It makes the Body of Christ real.

I think of all Hope's supporters as part of our family. Today, please pray for one another. For all the parents with children that have learning differences, behavior problems, health issues, addictions. For all the grandparents raising a second generation. For family members who are in prison. Yet, God has filled you with so much love, it even spills over to touch the lives of children in Brazil. You are definitely on the road less traveled, but know that Christ is with you on that journey. Be of good courage. Don't ever give up hope.

Heavenly Father, thank you for those who are called to step up and become parents to those who have none. Give them the compassion and grace and patience required to get through the tough times, which have not prevented them from being Your hands and feet.

Day 11: Marcos

by Corenne Smith

“For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11



Students bought Marcos presents to celebrate his new baby: a pretend cake made of rolled-up diapers!

It's pretty flattering when someone offers to take a significant pay cut to work for you. But that's the dedication of Marcos. He ran our auto body repair course until 2006, when economic woes forced us to cut back. He went on to get a job at Renault, practicing what he used to teach, but for a much higher salary.

In 2012, out of the blue, Marcos called Philip. “You won't believe this, but most of my colleagues here are my former students. They make good salaries, support their families, and are making lives for themselves. Many are following Christ,” he said. “When I go to other auto body shops—same thing: I see my former students. The course changed their lives. We need to find a way to start it up again.” He said he saw this as a mission field and would be willing to take a cut in pay to restart the course.

The rest is history. Marcos gave Renault six months' notice. They were sorry to see him go, but they were very supportive of his mission at Hope. Today Renault remains one of our biggest employers of graduates.

Marcos considers his classroom his mission field and every student a member of his flock. Like any good pastor, he keeps in contact with each one, even making hospital visits for medical emergencies. Whoever heard of an instructor who makes hospital visits?

Marcos now has a new challenge: the state recently asked that we take adolescent prisoners into our vocational courses as their final step before being re-integrated into the community. The majority are in Marcos' class. It has been challenging.

It's too soon to share the long-term results, but Marcos recently asked a few of the incarcerated youth to share some personal prayer requests with all of you. Here are a few he received:

- “Pray for harmony at home. It is very difficult to hear about the fights that happen in our families when we can do nothing about it.”
- “Pray for us to have a vision for our futures and the hope of being restored.”
- “Pray for a new life and an opportunity to work that is honest and restores our dignity.”
- “Pray that God will touch the hearts of employers to give us a chance to work and to start life fresh.”

Marcos also has a personal prayer request. He asks that you pray for him and some issues he faces in the community church he attends with his family. Anything Marcos. Yes, we will pray for you.

Lord, we lift up these young prisoners in prayer. We pray that hope will not die within their hearts and that they will come to know transformation through Christ. Pray that they will receive new life, and life abundantly. And finally, we pray for the situation Marcos is facing with his church, and we give thanks for every teacher at Hope, working for souls and not salaries.

Day 12: Alex

by Corenne Smith

“I have come that you might have life and have it to the fullest.”

John 10:10



Alex

You know that feeling when someone listens to you so intently you feel their stare will bore holes in you? Even as a teenager, that's the way Alex was in church. His tattered and well-highlighted Bible first caught my attention. Then I observed how earnestly he wanted to learn everything he could about the Word.

His nature is not intense; it's joyful, and he is extremely optimistic. He has a twinkle in his eye and a contagious smile. Of all the courses we offer, Alex chose to specialize in carpentry, saying, "If it was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for me!"

After graduating in Campinas, Philip learned he was looking for a specialized course in inlaid wood. It so happened that a master carpenter was teaching that very course at Hope Mountain in Vitória, 1200 miles away. Philip arranged a 6-month internship for Alex.

During his internship, Alex met Ana Paula, and they got married. He bought land on a hilltop with an uninterrupted view of Hope Mountain, and he built his home. Later, Alex started his own kitchen cabinet business called "My Dream," so named because his dream had always been to own his own carpentry shop.

When Ana Paula became pregnant, everything seemed perfect. But then tragedy struck at nine months, and Ana Paula was rushed to critical care. She not only lost the baby, but spent nearly a week in a coma, her own life in the balance. Alex, grief-stricken, prayed for his wife to live, while agonizing about how to tell her they lost their child. The joyful Alex now sobbed before the Lord, asking for his mercy. He confided his biggest fear: that upon hearing the news of their loss, Ana's faith would be shaken to the core, and she would lose her faith in God.

Eventually she regained consciousness, and the doctor let Alex visit briefly, warning him to say nothing about losing the baby until she regained her strength. Alex took her hand, but before he could say anything, she said, "I already know. We need to leave it in the Lord's hands." Alex cries relating the story of his indescribable relief.

Two years later, Emanuel was born. He's now my beautiful, roly-poly three-year-old "grandchild," whom Alex dotes over. Alex's home/workshop is near the Mountain, so we often drop by.

My heart is full because of Alex, Ana and Emanuel. They are an example of many of our young families who have courageously started their own businesses. Imagine the stress of learning how to bid, train apprentices and pay bills.

Today, pray that all our young graduates will find success and joy in their personal and professional lives, and that they always have the courage to put God first in their lives. Pray especially for those that have fledgling businesses. Pray that they will always have the courage to be honest in their businesses and for Christian mentors.

Day 13: Fernando, part 1

by Philip Smith

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.”

Jeremiah 29:13



Fernando in 2006

Fernando was a legendary House Parent Coordinator in Campinas. After many years, he left to head up his family's trucking business in Rio de Janeiro. That was a decade ago, but my heart never really released him from service. He was a kid whisperer.

For two years, I engaged in efforts to woo Fernando back, even visiting his home in Rio. But he had a comfortable income, his daughter was in her last year of law school, and his son was gaining notoriety in a semi-pro soccer league. He was not keen on trading this for the stress of living on-campus, on call 24 hours a day. I'd almost given up. It had been six months since I last reached out, but something prompted me to pester him one last time. I texted, half-jokingly, “Fernando, are you finally ready to stop fleeing from God's call?”

His response was short: “Watch this.” Five minutes later, I found myself crying.

He sent me a video clip from a televised church service. A visiting pastor, who did not know Fernando, was saying, “I sense God has a special mission for someone here, someone who has been rejecting His call to return to ministry.” He then walked among the parishioners and laid his hand on someone's shoulder, who followed him back to the front of the church. It was Fernando! Fernando recalls how he knew God was making a personalized shout out to him, but like a child trying to hide from his parents, he had purposefully tried to become invisible to avoid being called out.

The pastor asked Fernando if he'd been avoiding God's call and if he was ready to dedicate his life to ministry. Fernando nodded, and then he kneeled. As the congregation extended their hands, the pastor led them in a prayer, consecrating Fernando's decision to return to ministry.

But still he resisted. He admits to being very stubborn, and the next day he told his wife, “You know, we can do ministry anywhere, even right here. If God really is calling us to Hope Mountain specifically, maybe Philip will reach out again, at least with a “Hi.”

Two days later, they were in line at the grocery store when Fernando's phone dinged, alerting him to a text. There was my message—my words almost identical to those spoken by the pastor! Tears streaming down his cheeks, he handed his phone to his wife to read.

Needless to say, the rest is history. Fernando has already been a tremendous blessing, and he will continue to play a key role in defining the Hope ministry for many years to come. Tomorrow, hear a little bit about Fernando's calling.

Today, let us praise God for showing his power and ability to intervene in our lives in such a clear and personal way. Ask God to help us be mindful when He is speaking to us and to send others to help clarify our path when we need confirmation. Please say a special prayer for Him to continue to send us talented and loving workers for our harvest of children.

Day 14: Fernando, part 2

by Philip Smith

"I have come that you might have life and have it to the fullest."

John 10:10



Fernando and his wife, Silvia

Fernando, the House Parents Coordinator we prayed for yesterday, recently spoke at a staff meeting of particularly discouraged house parents. It happens. I wasn't in the meeting, but what I can say is the same slump-shouldered house parents left the meeting with their heads high, giving high fives, and ready to face another day. I asked Fernando to summarize what he had said, and this is what he sent me:

"I was watching the behavior of some of the boys; how their moods change constantly. Sometimes they go to sleep happy with life, and the next day they wake up sulking and don't want to talk. It's... intriguing at best.

As I talked with them, I realized that for us, what would only be a dream at night—for them could trigger a past trauma. And for them, their sleep is often tormented and filled with painful memories.

I remembered Ciao, a 15-year-old who saw his father behead his mother in front of him. And Jorge, 12, who was with us on a recent hike when, looking down on the female prison from a ledge, one of the boys joked, "Throw a bomb down there and BOOM!" Jorge answered, "No! My mother is in there!"

I can imagine him at night lying in his bed, thinking about his mother in prison, and his father in another prison, and his brothers and sisters spread out in other shelters. This is a 12-year-old kid I'm talking about, who is living with people—us—previously unknown to him, in a place far away from anything reminiscent of his childhood.

That's why we always have to put on our armor of mercy and compassion, not frustration. Our eyes have to always reflect the love of our Father, even when we are disciplining these young souls. We have to remember that even a simple dream may bring a flood of painful memories from the past. And maybe they are just acting out the way they saw their parents do. Parents who resolved everything with violence, or self-medicated with more drugs.

A few months ago, I congratulated a former student, Renan, about his beautiful family. I was shocked when he looked down and said it was because he had my family as his model. What a responsibility. It makes everything worthwhile.

And Diego, who posted a picture when his team won a championship. Imagine how surprised I was to see the caption, "Uncle Fernando taught me much more than soccer, he taught me how to be a father." He shared his moment of fame with me.

When Renan came to visit me during the holidays, even I was amazed at how lovingly he treated his 3-year-old daughter. My heart was so full, seeing before my eyes the cycle of violence and poverty had been broken. He was not repeating the story of his parents.

Seeing them working, taking care of their children, modeling love as the form of correction to their own children. It makes what we are doing all worth it. Seeing the difference. The transformation. These kids had no life expectancy. They dared to see themselves as professionals, parents, men and women. They were reached by God's love, through a place called Hope Unlimited. Let's go out and keep doing what we do best.

Today, pray that all our young graduates will find success and joy in their personal and professional lives, and that they always have the courage to put God first in their lives. Pray especially for those that have fledgling businesses. Pray that they will always have the courage to be honest in their businesses and for Christian mentors.

Day 15: Roger

by Corenne Smith

“The Lord makes firm the steps of the one who delights in him; though he may stumble, he will not fall, for the Lord upholds him with his hand.”

Psalms 37:23



Roger, wearing red, on his first day of work at his new job

Where Roger came from is not nearly as important as where he is going. He has a plan. He's smart, cute, compassionate, and willing to put out the effort. That doesn't mean he was always cooperative about chores, or didn't tease his housemates. He's a teenage boy.

His past would cause most of us to be in therapy for years. His mother died when he was three and his father disappeared after a price was put on his head. A neighbor took him and his brother in, and they cared for him until he was 12, but then decided it was too much and sent him to us. By then he had already been used as a drug runner and trafficker.

Even after his older brother ran away, Roger remained firm, taking his studies seriously, planning to be a doctor or businessman. He learned to play the saxophone, and he won a place at a private school. Roger was the picture of success.

At one point, the government started a campaign to get older kids adopted. Roger was one of the kids featured on TV. I cringed to see him advertised on television, but I wanted the best for him. A wonderful couple took Roger in, and they asked him to be their son. But after a few months Roger asked to come back, simply and cheerfully saying it was not what he wanted.

As a mother of two adopted kids, I cried watching the mother and father dropping him off. Her heart was breaking. And so was mine. Their intentions were good, and they had given their hearts to him. It left us all bewildered, speculating as to why he would want to give up his own room, bike, a pet bird, and all the attention a mother and father could give. I wasn't even flattered that he wanted to come back, because my heart hurt so much for them, and for Roger.

That was almost two years ago, and he's never looked back. He seems genuinely happy. He's in the final stages of our program. He has completed his two internships and has been offered a job, at a higher-than-average starting salary. He is also studying English and plans to finish his college studies in the United States. I do believe he's going to be someone very special.

I love this big kid. When he comes up behind me and wraps his big arms around me and easily rests his chin on the top of my head, I just glow inside. Maybe I worry too much; but I pray for him... just in case.

Just as you pray for your own children, pray for Roger, and pray for all of our graduates as they leave the nest and look for that special someone to start a family. Pray for them to be able to open up and enter into a relationship with their whole hearts and that the intimacy of trusting someone will not be too much for them.

Day 16: New Kid in Town

by Philip Smith

“How **sweet** are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”

Psalm 119:103



Today's prayer is for the children as they arrive. Philip's memory of one recent arrival, Janaina, summarizes it well.

Janaina, eight years old, had been with us only two months. Not only did she not talk, but she seemed incapable of smiling. Her mother had abandoned her and her little sister in front of a church. The police took them to a government orphanage in São Paulo. There, her loss was compounded further: her little sister, only three years old, was adopted and taken away.

Tonight, I was determined to make her smile. Every month, Corenne and I accompany the birthday children on a special outing. The evening starts at the park with a walk around the lake, followed by fresh fruit juices. Then we go to the mall to visit the video arcade, music store, see a movie, and finally—the highlight of the evening—McDonald's!

We were at the video arcade. All the girls were playing and chattering excitedly... except Janaina. She had no interest in the games; she just stood at the entrance, staring off at something in the distance. When I looked, all I could see was a gum ball machine. Either her mind was a million miles away, or she was truly fascinated by those bright red gum balls!

We were walking toward our next activity when I felt a little tug on my sleeve. Looking down, I caught Janaina's imploring eyes, and then she surprised us all: "Uncle Philip, can you buy me one of those rubber balls?" All the girls gathered around in amazement. "She talked! She talked!"

I took Janaina by the hand, and we walked back toward the red vending machine. Usually I make sure to treat every child the same. But at that moment I felt like buying the whole gum ball machine for her. I stuck in a coin, and the ball spun around and around inside the machine, and finally the bright red gum ball popped out!

I wondered how long Janaina had dreamed about getting one of those red gum balls. I guess she had been waiting to talk until she needed to communicate something really important. This, for her, was clearly urgent.

When Janaina finally had that ball in her hand, her face lit up with a smile from ear to ear; a smile that seemed to say, now everything will be all right.

Please pray for our kids who feel ripped away from the only homes they have ever known, and pray especially for those who lose contact with siblings in the process. It is agonizing to see the terror in a new child's face. Pray for friends, for bonding, and for them to build trust and not walls. Pray for them to hear the Holy Spirit whispering that they are His, and they are loved.

Day 17: Second Chance

by Corenne Smith

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.”

Matthew 6:20



A Hope Thrift Store and attached coffee shop

Every non-profit dreams of being fully funded. To be relieved of the pressure of the (gulp) “ask.” Our offices were on a main road in a good part of town, and we often received donations we could not use. Why not open a thrift store? It seemed to work. Then we got more strategic about it, actively soliciting donations. First there was one store. Then two. Then someone thought, what about people who are remodeling their homes? What do they do with their old cabinets or tiles? A larger space was rented, and another type of thrift store was born.

Our growth was not without pain. One late night we got a call from a pay phone. It was a street person who knew us well. He told us our thrift store had been leveled to the ground. And it was. The high-rise construction next door had weakened the dirt around our structure, and ours literally imploded, taking all the contents with it. After years of litigation, we learned that the builders actually wanted two more feet on which to build, and our landlord’s attorney admitted to being paid off. We are still awaiting a final settlement.

We now have five thrift stores in Campinas and a Starbucks-style coffeehouse. Together, they bring in 30% of our annual budget in Brazil. Pretty amazing. Groups coming down have learned to bring extra suitcases filled with gently used clothes, jewelry, eyeglasses or even knick-knacks. Any “imported” item brings a special price!

American Baptist Women of Pennsylvania and Delaware are raising funds to open our first thrift store in Vitória in 2020. We are already hunting for the perfect spot to hang our shingle bearing the very fitting name chosen for our thrift stores: “Second Chance.”

Why do our thrift stores deserve to be featured in 30 Days of Prayer? Finances are one of the biggest stressors for everybody, board and staff alike. And raising more funds in Brazil is just good missiology. The giving cycle is also good—wealthier donors feel good about putting un-needed items to good use, and folks who are struggling get things they may not have been able to afford. The funding pays the bills and strengthens our autonomy. Win, win, win.

I confess, we spend a major amount of time worrying about this issue when we should have faith that the Lord will let the manna fall each day, in the amounts we need. Whether it is a check or a gently used pair of shoes, it is all a wonderful blessing. It provides for our children and helps relieve our stress—their anxious surrogate parents.

Today we want to thank God for all our generous contributors—those who bring us used items and those who invested in the development of our thrift stores—and boldly ask Him to continue to send us what we need.

Day 18: Stepping Out

by Philip Smith

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:9



Estefania

As valedictorian of her graduating class, Estefania made a speech which summarized her past life, her future aspirations, and her very real anxiety about leaving.

“I never thought I would be able to overcome the things that happened in my life: the grief of being separated from my siblings and the daily struggles of getting by. I was very angry at life because of the loss and bad memories. I finally reached the bottom of the well, knowing I’d reached my human limit of endurance, and thinking there was no more hope.

That’s when the City of Youth entered my life. It was here that I received attention and care from wonderful people, for the first time in my life. It was here that I received the love of a father, a mother, friends, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters... something that I’d never known.

It was here that strangers, even without knowing me, helped me to recognize my own abilities and potential; helped me understand that we can’t always do what we like in life and that we should always seek God’s will.

It was here that I finally learned that not only do we live because of forgiveness, but we live to forgive. Finally, and most importantly, it was here that I accepted Jesus as my Savior, and from that point forward, everything began to change. I’ll always be grateful for everything you’ve done for me, and for everything you are still doing. But now I’ve reached a very difficult moment in my life. I am graduating! I’m sad that soon I have to leave.

I always knew the moment was coming, but I did not expect it to come so soon. I confess that I am fearful. But I am thankful for the uncles and aunts here who helped me believe in myself. I learned to put all my trust in God, and I know that even after I leave, He will be with me, the solution for everything.

To my fellow students here, who are not yet ready to graduate, I say this: take advantage of every opportunity, because tomorrow it could be too late. Please believe me when I say that God has a plan for your lives!”

Estefania always wanted to work with children. Perhaps because she struggled so hard to keep her own siblings together and was not able to do so. Perhaps just because that was always her gift. No other graduate doted over Marc and Bella the way she did! Today she is a college graduate and an avid cyclist, and as a full-time teacher, she is thrilled to be using her life to bless children every day.

We have a song in our heart for the successes of those who know what it means to be His and let Him take control of their futures. But today, let’s spend a moment in prayer for the children who are anxious about launching into the world without the support of a nuclear family. Pray they will feel the presence of the Holy Spirit guiding them and comforting them in their most anxious and lonely hours.

Day 19: Natalia, part 1

by Corenne Smith

“For I am the Lord who heals you.”

Exodus 15:26



Natalia, Jardelho, and their children

We arrived together. New to the Hope family. I was Philip's new girlfriend, soon to be fiancée. Natalia, 12, had just been sent to our program from another state. For some reason, we connected. She understood my communication. Exaggerated hand gestures accompanied by infantile “Spanglish.” Thus, she became my interpreter, of sorts.

Publicly she was always outspoken and articulate. She journaled everything. She wrote poetry. She loved liturgical dance. She wanted to be a missionary doctor, and she started college right after she graduated.

Jardelho, one of our graduates, adored her. He was working for Hope 1200 miles away as head house parent of Hope Mountain in Vitória. She was dating someone else, but he continued to pray for her heart to change so she would marry him. And she did.

After serving together in Vitória for some years, they moved back to Campinas. I remember the day their first child was born. Jardelho was filling out some paperwork when he suddenly started to weep. “What’s wrong?” Natalia asked. He showed her the paperwork for the birth certificate. There was a place to fill in the names of close relatives. He had been abandoned as a child. Through his tears, he explained that he had no names to fill in. “What are you talking about?” Natalia asked. “Hope Unlimited is our family. Our son has more uncles and aunts than 10 children combined!”

Today they have three kids, and they are living on campus and serving as our Residential Staff Coordinators. Their youngest had a stroke in utero and has some learning differences.

If there was ever a child of Hope Unlimited—in fact a poster child—she is it. We are her family. Last month, Natalia, now 35, was feeling ill. By the time she got to the hospital, she was unconscious. They diagnosed her as having had a stroke. After a week in ICU, she is now home and seems to be recovering well. We remain unsure of the cause. What we do know is they need us to love on them as any extended family would. If you would like to send a card to Natalia, you can do so by writing to the Hope office.

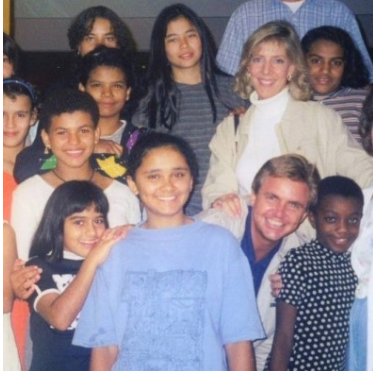
If you are reading this—a supporter of Hope—you are part of her family. Please pray for Natalia as you would one of your own family members. Pray for restored health for her and for the doctors to find the root of the issue. And pray for Jardelho, who took her illness very hard. He loves her so much, and he can't imagine raising their three children without a mother.

Day 20: Natalia, part 2

by Corenne Smith

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Lamentations 3:22-23



Natalia in 1996

As I prayed for Natalia yesterday and reflected on our relationship, it dawned on me that when we talk about our success stories it may seem the transformation is immediate. But in reality, it is a generational ministry. Just like with biological children, it takes years and years of investment. Only through time can you tell if the Father will say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant.” Patience. Not one of my stronger qualities. I became nostalgic remembering the young Natalia.

The “Interact” youth clubs are part of Rotary International, and they are usually made up of the sons and daughters of Rotarians. However, our own Interact Club kids have had unique opportunities to cross over to the “other side” of Brazil’s great divide—the “caste” system, briefly stepping into the world of youth born to wealth and privilege.

Almost 15 years ago, our youth participated in a state-wide gathering of Interact students. After introductions, the emcee asked for a volunteer to describe what Interact was all about. After a long silence, our little Natalia, then 15, stood up and walked forward.

When he saw her, the emcee seemed concerned. Her slightly darker skin tone indicated someone outside of Brazil’s wealthy upper class, someone who may have had an inferior education. After a whispered exchange, the emcee addressed the audience once again, “Please remember to be polite to your colleagues and encourage them when they speak.” With that admonition, he motioned for his assistant to give her the microphone.

Natalia took the microphone with great confidence and poise: “The Interact Club is an international association of youth service organizations, each sponsored by a Rotary club. It is comprised of youngsters between the ages of 14 and 18 in over seventy-five countries who work together to better their communities, help those in need, and promote world peace...” Her spontaneous response was as articulate as a narrative from a brochure.

When she finished speaking, the room erupted in clapping, whistling, and cheers. Strangely overwhelmed with thankfulness and pride, I quickly ducked out to the lobby, where I let the tears flow freely. As many years as I’ve been in ministry, having had scores of similar experiences, one would think I’d get less emotional. As the conference progressed, anyone seeing my runny eyes probably assumed I had a bad case of pink eye, as our twenty-two Interact Club members continued to dominate the conference with their creative and articulate ideas and suggestions!

P.S.: A year after I wrote this, Alan, the President of the City of Youth’s Interact Club, was elected to represent Interact at a global conference in Florida, sponsored by Disneyland. The next year our founding Interact president, Golbery, traveled to New Jersey to be honored as “Rotarian of the Year” by the New Jersey Rotary district—the youngest award recipient in district history. If any kids from the “other side” judged our youth as not their equal... they were absolutely right!

Father, we thank you for all of our students like Natalia whose lives have been transformed and who have the courage to speak out. We thank you that they are living examples of the work that we are doing at Hope; and we thank you for those who recognize their outstanding qualities and encourage them. Thank you for helping them to thrive.

Day 21: Hope's Heroes

by Jeremy Stanley

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35



A house mom and 2 sons

I flew into São Paulo to visit Hope Unlimited, which was started as an answer to the hopelessness of street children. Most have been so severely traumatized, abused, and taken advantage of that they can barely grasp the concept of "home" or "family." Imagine yourself at 8, 10, 12 years old, and all you've seen or known of adults is physical abuse. Sexual perversion. Rape. This is your absolute and definitive frame of reference.

The kids live 12 to a house. The "house parents" are the only stability these kids have known. I can't imagine the daily overwhelming, emotional landslides, having to deal with issues and complications most of us cannot begin to understand. I stand in awe at such humility, love and commitment. I have often asked myself if I would be willing to do anything at this level. Would you? Don't be quick to answer; I think the implications are more staggering than you think.

You see these kids, happy, smiling, full of joy... and then you think of what they've been through in coming to that place. The horror, the terror, the shame, the abandonment. We were told stories of how kids, 10 or 11 years old, were given to a witch doctor and locked in a closet for 40 days. Stories of rape, stories of incest, stories of abuse and abandonment.

Looking into the eyes of these kids, you would not know their dark past, their pain, their suffering and their hurt. But I know many are still struggling to cope. There are those, I'm sure, who wake up in the middle of the night in a panic, suffering nightmares of what was...

But let us leave it there. For this is not about un-ending depravity and despair. There is a bright light shining through all the muck, the sludge, the refuse.

These house parents have given every part of themselves for those that have lost any chance of regaining themselves. They have poured themselves out, they have sacrificed, they have cried. They have given HOPE. They have given it to those from whom it was violently ripped away. It is a stunning capture of grace and beauty. Of redemption. Of love.

Through the compassion and love and selflessness of these people, and through the joy in the faces of these children, I am affirmed even more in my belief in God. It is at once overwhelming, captivating and intensely beautiful. I challenge you to consider the weight of this sacrifice. I, for one, am forever changed by it.

Father, we thank you for our house parent heroes. It is easy for us to talk about loving one another as you love us, but our house parents truly understand the challenge of that kind of love. Thank you for their hearts for you and for our children

Day 22: The Good Fight

by Philip Smith

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."

2 Timothy 4:17



Henrique and the girls

Henrique and Simone were newlyweds when they accepted the call as residential coordinators. During that time, they had Samuel. Later, they tragically miscarried at 8 months. Through it all they kept loving and parenting their special flock of former street girls, modeling how to deal with joys, celebrations, and pain.

Henrique left to pursue a degree in Sociology, but his farewell speech clearly shows the heart shared by all our house parents.

"When Simone and I arrived at the Girls Ranch as the new Residential Coordinators, we anticipated many trials. We were right. Many times we cried, without anyone knowing except our Lord Jesus. Many times, we were tempted to give up. But then, the next moment, we'd be rejoicing at the victories of girls who had surrendered themselves at the feet of Jesus. And we'd remember why God brought us here.

Today we can say with complete certainty "We fought the good fight." We fought for the lives of every girl that crossed our path! There were times I ran like crazy, chasing after girls who ran away, through the fields around the ranch—not so our numbers would go up or not go down, but so lives wouldn't be lost. At other times, we rescued girls just by sharing about our family and our love for one another. Sometimes that was enough to make the girls desire a life like ours and accept Jesus.

This is why I say we fought the good fight. We never once stopped fighting the enemy, the principalities and powers, defending the precious lives the Lord Jesus entrusted to our care.

I also have peace in saying "We have finished the race." We did what we were sent to do: to share the unconditional love of Christ for the wounded, lost and sick. Not for our glory, but so that the girls would become women committed to the Gospel and to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was God who brought us to the City of Youth. And though we are sad, we know it is God who is closing this door. Today, with all the love Christ put in our hearts, we say goodbye to you. And we say this: the distance will not bring the love we have for you to an end, but only make it increase."

We prayed for the Lord to raise up house parents for our kids, and He answered with Henrique and Simone. Today Henrique has graduated with a law degree and fights for Children's Rights, but we still consider them a part of our extended family. Even more beautiful than their goodbye speech is the welcome speech they will hear one day: "Well done, good and faithful servants."

Father, continue to provide couples with a special calling to this ministry, who are willing to be loving parents to our not always lovable children. Our prayer extends to encompass heroic house parents and foster parents serving in every corner of the globe. Encourage them during tough times, and give them the extra strength they need.

Day 23: Beauty Inside Out

by Philip Smith

“She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.”

Proverbs 3:15-18



It's easy to see how a girl can be made to feel dirty, used and ugly—from the inside out. When the girls lived on the street, they had little exposure to function and beauty. Their value was as someone else's commodity. The slums are saturated with shoddy, dilapidated shacks. Street children are filthy, malnourished and inappropriately dressed.

How do you help tender souls feel valued and beautiful, and convince them of their worth as human beings because they were created in the image of our Maker? It starts by washing them, dressing them in clean clothes, and nourishing their minds and bodies and hearts. In this way we show Christ's love, the foundation from which everything else makes sense.

Slowly they learn about real beauty. They see the difference between the world's notion of beauty, which includes sex appeal and materialism, and God's notion, which includes strong hands and a giving spirit. And then they ask a teacher to instruct them in making clothes, learning healthy habits, cleanliness and grooming, suited to properly adorn their new lives.

That's what your partnership fosters. Surely, God finds the shepherding of a little girl's heart a beautiful use of our time and resources.

Please pray that we will be able to perform a makeover of the heart and restore the inner beauty of every one of our precious girls. Pray for the millions of girls still on the streets, being treated as commodities—that they may come to understand their true worth in God.

Father, we thank you for each one of these girls who are so precious to you. You have created each of them in your image. We pray for the opportunity to show them your love and to help them understand that each is uniquely and wonderfully made.

Day 24: Voice of a Child

by Philip Smith

“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

Matthew 19:14



Boys praying in chapel

The voice of a child. A voice lifted in prayer to the One who created that very special and very precious life. A voice lifted in praise, in pain, in wonder and in gratitude. A voice lifted in prayer for an estranged family member, for friends who are still on the streets, for strength for an overwhelmingly difficult life, for peace, for love. A prayer of thanks for the very air that we breathe.

We can all take a lesson from the prayer of a child. Their honesty, innocence, humility, and love for our Lord is inspiring. Every Sunday during chapel at the City of Youth, the children place little scraps of paper in the offering basket. Having no money, this is their tithe.

Every Monday, the church deacons read each prayer and pray over the requests. The following prayers were translated from those little pieces of paper. As you read through these, please join each child in their special prayer.

- Hello, my blessed God. How are you up there in Heaven? I hope you are in peace. I have come to thank you for the air we breathe and for taking care of us. (Guilermie)
- Lord Jesus Christ, give me strength so I can worship you forever. Bless the City of Youth so that many children can have the opportunity to have a new life in Christ and in society. Thank you for making this place blessed by you. (Robson)
- Lord my God... despite the bad circumstances that I have lived, I thank you, because I know that better days will come. (Carmela)
- Lord, bless the life of my mother. She needs the Lord in her life, and I believe that you can change her life. And if it is your will, let my little sister be adopted. May that happen. I love you Lord Jesus. (Glaucia)
- God, I want to ask you to bless the house parents in every shelter on earth. If it is possible, Lord, may we sleep in peace every day. (Anderson)
- Lord Jesus, I want to thank you for another day of life, and for every life here. (Simone)
- God, thank you so much for everything you did for me. Protect my family. God, give me the opportunity to come face to face with the person I hurt so that I can ask forgiveness. (Diego)
- Help me pray for my family, because my faith is insufficient for this. (Joao)

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonderful gift of these prayers, and for the faith with which they were offered up. So many children have been wounded emotionally as well as physically, growing up with holes only You can fill. We pray each such child would find Your solace and Divine restoration of everything that they lost.

Day 25: Celebration of Life

by Philip Smith

"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift."

2 Corinthians 9:15



Christmas bicycle

I like to imagine the celebration which took place in Heaven the day each of our children was born, as the angels rejoiced for that new life! Sadly, many children coming through our door never had their birthdays commemorated here on earth, or even remembered. Some don't even have birth certificates to show the date.

That's why we make a big deal about celebrating birthdays. Each child gets his or her own party, with an individual birthday cake to share. Then, the month's birthday kids go on a special outing to the mall, with lots of fun activities.

When Corenne and I can go, it is always a special treat. Many of our children have never been to a mall before, or ridden an escalator, or had a McDonald's treat. Every outing leaves us with some special memory—like the boy who, seeing the rising vapor, blew on his ice cream cone to cool it off.

I remember one birthday outing in particular. It was December, and Santa was at the mall. Our girls watched him intently from a distance. They'd never experienced sitting on Santa's lap growing up, and now they were getting too old.

I saw the youngest, Jacqueline, looking at Santa with a special longing. As we turned to walk away, she sprinted over and whispered something in his ear.

Later Santa pulled me aside, saying, "She wants a bicycle." I felt my anxiety grow. I didn't want our girls to have any more disappointments in their young lives; but we have to treat all our children equally, and we can't get something special for just one.

In those early days, things were always tight. Our seventy girls shared twelve pairs of donated roller blades—and they were happy to have them. Those with small feet stuffed socks in the toe, the ones with bigger feet left the laces open a bit. The thought of enough bicycles for them to share seemed a long way off.

As we were leaving, Jacqueline took my hand and looked up at me with her big, innocent eyes. "Santa won't really bring me what I asked for, will he?" Her question showed she knew the impossibility, but her eyes were full of hope. It broke my heart to say, "Probably not, sweetheart."

Our children know what it means to have nothing, and they dare not set their expectations too high. They are happy to have a warm bed, food to eat and house parents who love them. However, any parent wants to make Christmas magical, and we enjoy giving each child some small toys at Christmas—always wishing we could give more.

Maybe, this time, we could. I decided to send a letter out to our local supporters, mentioning Jacqueline's wish for a bicycle. We prayed over the letters and took them down to the post office. By Christmas, we had received 12 brand new bicycles... and on Christmas morning, Jacqueline got her wish!

A birthday outing with a large group of children can get expensive, but we always find a way to make it happen. When we are hosting visiting work teams, we often add birthday outings to the itinerary so they can help pay for it and share in the special experience!

Father, we thank you for the privilege of celebrating birthdays with our children, and we lift up those who have never experienced a birthday celebration and may not even know when they were born. In the midst of their loneliness and abandonment, in your still, small voice, whisper to them that they are precious and loved.

Day 26: Answered Prayers

by Philip Smith

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

1 John 1:9



Dalva with one of her daughters,
Gabriela

We have failed you. Too often, we ask for your prayers, but we fail to report back when they are miraculously answered. I guess we just take it for granted! I recently came across a letter written by Dalva, who has worked for us for several years now, and I remembered the original request for prayer we sent out which—thanks to our faithful prayer warriors—made that letter possible. I include both below.

Original prayer request, sent in 2010: This year, the graduate church is praying and fasting for Dalva. Six of her 13 children are part of our Hope family. Dalva is an alcoholic and a drug addict, and her children were taken from her because of neglect and abuse.

Dalva's plywood shack is filthy, with holes in the walls and roof, and no plumbing... This year, the entire graduate church community has adopted Dalva as a cause. They've welcomed her into their church family, and they plan to help clean and remodel her home and support her in becoming sober. Please join the graduate church in their prayers for Dalva and attempts to see her restored. Pray He will

continue to work in the life of this woman and her family...

The answer to that prayer a year later. (This letter was written by Dalva in her sixth months at a Christian drug rehabilitation program. It is translated verbatim.)

My Dear Pastor Derli,

The peace of the Lord be with you and your entire family. I sit here at 7:25 PM, remembering as if it was yesterday the day the Lord extended his hands to me through a servant of God, a Christian man sent to help me.

I don't have words to thank you for what you did and still do for me and for my children. It is because of the love our Lord Jesus Christ placed in your soul that I am able to speak to you as a fellow child of the living God. May He bless you and multiply in your life. May He exalt you more and more for the love you showed me. The Bible says that whoever helps the poor helps God. Faith without works is dead. And you showed your love for God when you pulled me out from the midst of pigs and made me to sit with the princes.

I am joyful in the presence of God, and I want to share this happiness with you. Yesterday I attended the church service. It was wonderful, full of God's power. I am learning to worship. I read the Bible every day, and I pray often, both on my knees and in my heart. I pray for you, and I pray that God will continue to take care of your ministry.

I am well. I won't give up. 2 Cor. 5:17 says that I am a new creation, the old things have passed away, and all is made new! And I believe this.

Give this message to my children: Your mother loves you. I thank God every day for the great love in your hearts even though I do not deserve it. I will leave here soon, a new Dalva restored by God, and your mother's home will now be a house of prayer. I leave this scripture, that speaks of the day you took me out of the mire. It says, "Let us love one another, for love is of God, and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God." (1 John 4:7)

God be with you! Sister Dalva

Father, we thank you for your faithfulness and for the love You have put in the hearts of our children who, despite all they have suffered, are able to forgive their parents and not give up on them

Day 27: The Perfect Life

by Corenne Smith

“Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

Isaiah 40:30-31



The Smith Family

Each morning I get up at 5am, go to the gym, shower, come home and put a hot breakfast on the table. We sit, chat and start the day together with prayer. I check that the homework and lunches are in the backpacks before my kids head off to school.

Well, that's the way it plays out in my head. The true, unexaggerated reality is one parent is traveling, there are tears over lost homework, someone does not want to eat breakfast, and there is overturned furniture to dodge while dashing to the car, toast in hand, because the hamster was loose.

No one wants chaos. But people like me get distracted by what's in front of them. The present. To the point of forgetting about the future. I remember Bella, when she was seven, pleading with me to stay during her 90-minute ballet lesson. “But other mothers leave their kids,” I said, to which she replied, “Yes, but their mommies know what time it's over!” She was right; I usually tried to cram too much of life into that 90-minute interval.

Alas, we're not as consistent as we should be in devotions, homework gets lost, the car is usually on empty, and I have even been known to show up at the wrong church to speak.

Since returning from Brazil in August, I have spoken in seven different states while Phil has been back and forth to Brazil, Ethiopia, Uganda, Europe, and several places in the U.S. Marc, 16, has been in a couple different schools, and Bella, 11, tries her hardest to keep us all on task.

When you see all the needs in the world, it seems almost selfish to ask for prayer. We are not hungry. We are blessed. But we do need prayer.

Phil is at the helm of Hope Unlimited for Children, backed by a fantastic board. The incredible U.S. team wears many hats to make sure that all the bases are covered so that our staff and children in Brazil have what they need to make the program work. The path which led each one to work with us is a journey that only God could have ordained. It is a calling, not a job, or they surely would have found something else easier to do!

But God has called us, and we need to make sure that we walk in the path of God's leading, not our own.

Please pray for all of us on the U.S. team. Pray for vision, direction, compassion. Pray for unity, boldness, and patience. And, boldly, we ask you to pray for us, the Smiths; especially our kids, as we prepare to transition back to Brazil. We know that it is only by the grace of God—and your partnership—that we are privileged and honored to serve in this very blessed way

Day 28: Josue and Amos

by Corenne Smith

“Truly I tell you. Unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Matthew 18:3



Josue and Amos

Having kids with extreme special needs did not seem to be a good idea. We work with many kids who have had violent pasts. They can be “impulsive” (choosing my words carefully). How could we ensure their safety? Nevertheless, Phil found himself in the position of accepting Josue or being held in contempt of the court and going to jail.

Josue was 12 when he came to us, still in diapers, unable to eat by himself, highly aggressive, and on lots of medications. We told the Children’s Council we were not a good fit for him. After all, we had tough street kids. Their response: Take him or go to jail. He needed a full-time aid, and no extra funds came with him. There was nothing we could do but figure it out one day at a time. Each house parent took a turn caring for him. In time, we taught him to eat by himself. We weaned him from many of his medications. Soon he was taking care of his basic bathing needs. I couldn’t believe it when Josue’s personality started to shine through. He’s funny and loves to dance—and from my two-left-foot perspective, he’s pretty good. Josue

started attending a special school where he learned more executive function skills.

We learned that his mother, also developmentally delayed, died during childbirth of a younger sibling and Josue had spent most of his young life tied up to a post like a dog because he needed 24-hour supervision and his dad didn’t know how to care for him. Then Amos, his younger brother, even more developmentally delayed, was sent to us. Amos could not talk and he had no self-help skills. Today he eats by himself, communicates his wants, laughs, expresses anger and frustration, and clearly feels safe in his surroundings. He even “sings” or rocks back and forth in time to the music.

We never dreamed we would be a shelter for developmentally disabled teenagers, but God had a plan. Having the boys as part of our family has brought out the tender, nurturing side of our other young men. They are kind. They are patient. They are furiously protective. If a new kid messes with either Amos or Josue, there are consequences to pay, even when that means the “protector” also has to pay a consequence. Josue and Amos are ministering to our boys in their unique way and touching their hearts with unconditional love. They will be more loving and attentive dads when that time comes because of their relationships with these two brothers.

Today Josue is technically 21, and he should have been released from our custody when he was 18. Tiago, director of our program in Vitória has personally assumed his legal guardianship so he can stay. Each time he goes to court, he says, “If you can show me that you have a better living situation for him, we will release him.” But so far, there is nothing—not by a long shot.

Today, please pray for our special needs kids. We are not the perfect environment for them, but we do what we can and we are always trying to improve. Pray for the Lord to send us teachers who will help us to learn how to better care for these young guys. We thank God for each of them and the joy they have brought to our lives.

Day 29: Chiq & Bela Salon

by Arlene Sengstack

“Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established.”

Proverbs 16:3



Eduarda and Tamires

Have you ever dreamed about opening your own business, only to give up before you start? That's why I am so impressed with Eduarda, 21 and Tamires, 18. They did not give up, and they are operating in the black.

Their salon is at the top of the road that leads to Hope Mountain. Location, location, location. They have an inviting glass front door that says “Chiq & Bela,” and if they're not busy with clients, one will greet you personally and offer you coffee when you walk in. Tamires's and Eduarda's warm smiles and matching pink t-shirts make you feel welcome, and the soft pink walls and clean décor somehow give you confidence in their professionalism, despite their youth.

Eduarda grew up in the boca, the most dangerous part of the slum. Her fiancé persuaded her to sign up for courses at “The Mountain” to help them achieve their dream of escaping poverty. Over the next two years, Eduarda took every available course in cosmetology, and she dreamt of the day she would have her own salon.

She met Tamires at Hope, another cosmetology student. Initially rivals, they grew to respect each other's abilities and ambition. Instead of seeking jobs when they graduated, they decided to join forces and start their own salon. With one styling chair, a mirror, and a hair washing station bought secondhand, they opened their doors last summer.

Today they have a full complement of equipment and attractive sofa chairs in the waiting room. It costs about 8 bucks for a mani and pedi, and a haircut will cost you about \$5. Their rent is about \$75. Utilities another \$75. Their steady client base has enabled them to support their parents and the entire household.

Both are incredibly grateful to have had the chance to take these life-transforming professional courses which they could never have afforded. Their salon's location provides steady client traffic, including ladies on mission teams visiting Hope, who love the chance to escape painting to get pampered for an hour or so! The girls invariably ask for prayer before they leave, and it's always a special time.

We're proud of all our graduates, especially those brave enough to start their own businesses. And we're so grateful for all who've believed in them, whose investments in the courses—less than \$2 a day per student—make it possible to transform so many lives.

Father, thank you for the courage of Eduarda and Tamires and their testimonies to their families and community. Let this little salon, at the top of our road, be a beacon of hope to others in distress, guiding them our way. Thank you for entrusting us with this task and letting us take part in so many stories of transformation.

Day 30: Free at Last

by Laura Becker-Lewke

“Lord, when did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?”

Matthew 25:39



After a comfortable life working professionally as a lawyer, followed by several years of raising four children and caring for an elderly mother, God called me back to the world of work.

Like too many Christians, I'd always played it safe—volunteering in every capacity but not venturing out to connect directly with a population that suffers. Shortly after coming on board with Hope, Philip insisted I visit the ministry firsthand. I could write 30 prayers based on my five days there! I'll share just one memory.

Philip invited me to the children's prison, which is directly across the valley from Hope Mountain. Led upstairs, the guards swung open the heavy iron doors. All I could see at first was rows of outstretched arms coming through bars along the corridor. I approached one of the cells and peered through the darkness to see about 12 teenagers. My eyes adjusted further, and I could make out concrete slabs protruding from the walls. These were beds, but I counted only 8 of them. I

wondered where the other 4 boys slept, as the floors were soaking wet from spigots in the corner where the boys bathed, next to a filthy latrine. I couldn't imagine any one of my own 3 boys living like that for one hour—let alone days, weeks, or years.

In my former life as a lawyer it would have been easy to see these teens as criminals, duly tried and convicted. They definitely looked mean, mostly shirtless, with scars, missing teeth, and homemade tattoos. But I knew they'd never experienced any other way of life. Since the day they were born, all they'd known was abandonment, poverty, abuse, prostitution, and gang membership. I could not help thinking, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Through a staff translator I asked the boys if we could pray for them, and they eagerly agreed. Mustering my courage, I reached through the bars and laid my hand on their heads or shoulder, hoping to connect through physical touch. Asking their names, we prayed for each, and as we prophesied their future restoration, tears streamed down their cheeks. They were so hungry for a touch and an encouraging word. Some of them, we learned, after their release, would end up at Hope Mountain and become part of our family—another one of our own sweet, precious children. What a powerful image of “before” and “after!”

During the last four years traveling to Brazil, I've experienced many powerful moments like this and spent more time on my knees than in the rest of my life combined. Seeing the miraculous transformation of the children, the faith and dedication of the staff, and the chaos and hard times the Smiths and others have been willing to accept over 29 years—all this renews my faith on a daily basis.

And this is why I support Hope. Not just as Executive Director, but—along with my husband—as a prayer warrior, connector, volunteer, and donor. Supporting ministries in faraway places can be messy and unpredictable, with ups and downs and challenges. I used to pray the Lord's prayer and ask for daily bread, but I was really relying upon my own strength and talents—not God's. Now when I pray, I mean it from the bottom of my heart. God calls us to serve and follow Him—not to be comfortable and in control.

Lord, our hearts break for children in prison, feeling alone, forgotten, and hopeless. Give them your comfort, and raise up prayer warriors to minister to them in prison, so these children can come to know Your truth and be set free even in captivity. And help us trust in you. Help us follow Your call without needing to know what tomorrow, next week, or next year looks like, and surrender comfort and control knowing You are with us on the journey, and that only in surrendering to You can we experience freedom.



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What Now?

by Corenne Smith

“Pure and faultless religion is this, to take care of the widows and orphans in their distress...”

James 1:27

Today is Orphan Sunday. People around the world will pray for the 153 million orphans and abandoned children. The numbers are staggering and can leave us feeling helpless—unless you see the face and know the personality and history of just one, and realize that God can use you to change the outcome of that story. Is that even possible?

Over the last three weeks, Hope graduate Joice, 32, has been with me in the U.S. She's been sharing her story of abuse by an uncle starting when she was 7, and then abandonment by her family at age 11.

Her story is complicated, with lots of twists, and there are still lots of tears. She remembers the violence. The betrayal. The lies. The loss. Her aunt who lived next door gave her a Bible as the authorities were taking her away. “I don't need a Bible,” she cried, “I need someone to want me!” Faith without works is dead.

She remembers her first days in a holding shelter, someone giving her a slip of paper that said, *Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened and I will give you rest.* “I didn't know God, but I told him I was very tired and I desperately needed someone—anyone—to want me.”

Now Joice is wanted. Soooo wanted. Late last night she and her three boys (one husband and two kids) knocked, and then burst into my hotel room, where I was already in bed. All four talking at once, they sat on various points of my bed. I pulled the covers up over my pj's and drank it all in. Joice's deep blue eyes full of expression as she talked about seeing Niagara Falls for the first time. Lucas, 7, climbing all over her as she spoke, hugging her, hugging me, rolling between the two of us. Giovanni, 12, leaned on his dad, his eyes dancing as he watched his mom express their experience. Daddy Jorge was also caught up in the moment, and jumped in with his own description of the “smoke” rising up from the Falls.

Love. It is family completely unbroken. Bonded. It is safe. Everyone in the room was very wanted. Sometimes the miracle isn't changing water into wine in an instance, but it is still a miracle right before our eyes if we choose to see it.

Today there is one less abandoned child in the world. I like to see it as three, because Joice's boys could've been statistics as well.

It just takes one caring person. Thank you for being that person.



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ABOUT HOPE UNLIMITED FOR CHILDREN

Hope Unlimited operates two multi-site campuses in Brazil. The “City of Youth” is in the city of Campinas, near São Paulo. The “Hope Mountain” campus is in Vitoria (the capital of the state of Espirito Santo).

Our children come to us from the streets and slums of Brazil, where they suffered abuse, abandonment, and exploitation. Many are addicted to drugs. Because of their involvement in gangs and trafficking, their life expectancy is three to five years.

Once welcomed to Hope, each child becomes an irreplaceable member of our family.

Even when they are grown and have children of their own, they know our door is always open. Since 1990, thousands of youth have found hope and been transformed.



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