



Tres Islas Orphanage Fund Celebrates 25th Anniversary

— by Michael J. Veselik

■ Donelle Manton was raised on a ranch in Wyoming by a father who had shrewdly counseled her, “Don’t be afraid to go; be afraid not to go.” That advice was partially responsible for how she ended up at Mazatlan’s Orfanatorio on a newspaper assignment to “photograph the children of Mexico”. The year was 1987.

While taking pictures of the kids, she asked what they were going to eat for lunch. She thought they were teasing when they answered “No se...” (I don’t know), but when she asked again and received the same answer - and then looked into their eyes - she realized that they were serious. She asked to see the kitchen and found some beans, eggs, and tortillas, but not enough to sufficiently feed 25 children...and what for dinner?

So, Donelle, and Mazatlan resident Gaudelia Cruz Hernandez went off to Pino Suarez Market where Donelle purchased what was to be her first \$250 U. S. dollars’ worth of food for the orphanage. When she returned to Mazatlan later to show the children the photographs she had taken, like déjà vu, the food situation was as dire as before. That’s when Donelle remembers becoming aware that her “assignment” was actually going to be a lot more than photographing some “awfully cute kids.”

Those visits marked the beginning of a labor of love that has been ongoing now for 25 years and half-a-million dollars (yes, one half-million U. S. dollars) in support of needy children in Mazatlan. At first she supported the children with her own earnings and with the help of family and friends. Then she held photography and poetry exhibits.

But, she was eager to do more, much more. She kept at, always fundraising, and eventually came the milestone when there were enough funds to provide food for the orphanage for six continuous months. What a milestone!

Today, thanks to Tres Islas’ loyal donors, the



Fund helps support 114 youngsters in five Mazatlan orphanages: Orfanatorio Mazatlan, Salvation Army Children’s Home, Fr. Tovar’s Home for Boys Hogar San Pablo, Ciudad de los Ninos and FloreSer.

Manton likens her life’s work to a favorite Mother Teresa quote, “I am a little pencil in the hand of a writing God.” She says she has been “incredibly” blessed in her life and credits her parents for wanting her before she was born and giving her a life of love, acceptance and opportu-

nities, and for instilling her with the empathy and compassion that would move her to see that these children would know that someone cared about them. Also, Gaudelia Cruz Hernandez, who was with her on that first trip to Pino Suarez and has continued to purchase the orphanage’s groceries, medical and school supplies, assist with construction project needs, as well as conducting tours of all the orphanages. And her husband, Tom, for being 100% behind her from the time they met. He provides all technical support, is webmaster, assists in annual report preparation, and setting up Spring Mission Week, among other duties. And she insists on crediting the Pacific Pearl for always getting the word out.

This month around 30 donors will gather in Mazatlan to make improvements to the children’s homes, the orphanages, and to spend time with the children. Donelle says Spring Mission Weeks give donors the opportunity to verify how their donations are being stewarded – a priority she established when she created the fund.

Tres Islas Fund is grateful to every donor and welcomes new participation. Experiencing the fruits of the work of the Fund – like witnessing promising young adults named valedictorian of their high school, or graduating from college – eager young people who have been given opportunity and are now pursuing their dreams—feels like full-circle to the woman who realized that her “assignment” was to be a tool in the hands of a higher-power.

To learn more how you may participate please visit www.orphanagefunds.org.