

True stories from the Barrio: ...Our Top Stories from 2019

Well, it's been another year. And there is a lot of news to tell, since this year has been interesting to say the least ...

In addition to the loss of an eight-year-old girl in one of our church families, we are sad to say that on our last trip to the U.S., a lot of the youth that we are working with fell into some pretty heavy addictions... So, since there is nothing like working with teenagers who are trying to come off crystal meth, it has definitely been quite a year!

Anyway, there is so much to say... but we are going to feature just a few events in order to give you a glance of what we've been up to...



Karina & Jonathan, now 6 and 3 years old

Rest for the Weary...!? Our trip up to Michigan...!

First of all, we should tell you that we had a great time playing in the snow while on our missionary retreat in southern Michigan this December.

... We *do* want to send special thanks to everyone who helped us in getting there !!!



And in other news: Here are our stories from Mexico!!

Our friend Jasmine

You might remember this young lady from quite a few of our newsletters...!

Many of you know that Jasmine lost her 8-year-old daughter this year, on top of losing her 15-year-old son to a familial abuse situation early last year... We have also told you that even as she's grieving the loss of these two children, she's still taking care of her five others... including her eighteen-month old baby -- and three-year-old little girl.

... What we haven't told you is that Jasmine has been living with even more financial strain than usual, since she is fighting to pay off a debt of ten thousand pesos from all of the medical care that her daughter "Yurlette" received when she died. The bad thing is that she has no regular job, so she has no choice but to try to pay things off in exactly the same way she brings money home to her family... by doing juggling acts at a local street corner.

Life's real surprise came, though, when Jasmine found out that on top of everything else, she was pregnant again.



Upon discovering the news, we have to tell you that both Jasmine and her husband were totally shocked, and did not think they could keep the baby. In fact by the time we found her, Jasmine was only a step away from doing some sort of home abortion - in part because she had been literally near death during some of her other pregnancies, and in part because she knew she had to carry her older son on her back while juggling to make ends meet.

So as we talked to the family that day we knew that we had come to the end of our own wisdom, and to the place where all we could do was beg for the life of their child, telling them that if God was sending another baby, then *He* was the one who had to know what He was doing.



*Yurlette died in August
due to spina bifida*

... Anyway, though, the good thing was that it only took a little begging. We aren't sure what we said exactly, but within the hour, Jasmine had really softened... She confessed that she did want the baby, and even said she might give it the middle name "Yurlette" if it were a girl(!).

We should also tell you that the family *did* try to keep working at the street corner to do their juggling, but God loved that baby so much that He actually caused the traffic light to break down there at the intersection!

So to make a long story short we are now in the process of trying to help Jasmine start a tamale business...! But please do keep praying !

Marlene

... We wanted to feature some other folks, including Jasmine's daughter, whom you may also remember from when she was a little girl!

Anyway, to make a long story short, "Marlene" has grown up and taken some hard turns since both her brother and sister died.

In fact, so many things happened so quickly in Marlene's life that by the time Kim managed to catch up with her at age fifteen, Marlene had already had three husbands, two miscarriages, tried drugs, and suffered from two separate overdoses on marijuana and crystal meth.



Alarmingly, this young girl's weight had actually gone down to eighty pounds at one point because of her addictions... She was also suffering from heart problems due to the crystal meth she was using. So of course Kim was shaking in her boots when she began to try and face the idea of working with the new teenage Marlene.

To be sure, Kim did make a mistake by saying, "Oh my gosh, she looks terrible...!" when she saw how underweight Marlene had become. That afternoon, though, the Lord convicted Kim, and told her to call back and say that she thought Marlene was a beautiful young lady... So Kim called and said just that! ... And the very next day Marlene came to church and asked for prayer.

...That was the start of a very interesting relationship between Kim and Marlene, which has definitely had its ups and downs! We won't give a lot of details, but we are happy to say that she is off crystal meth now *and* rapidly gaining weight! ... So please keep praying!

Cesar



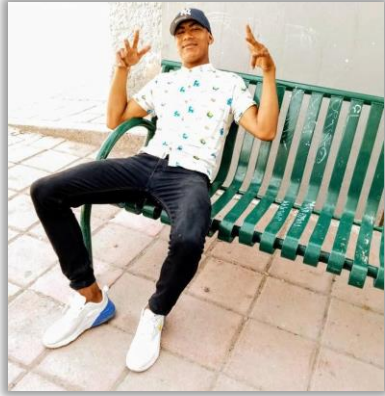
Here's another story for you ... This is a good one about our friend, Cesar... so good that he's definitely won himself a spot here !

This young man started out a few years ago as one of the terrors of our kids program...(!) He tried drugs at around age 12, and by the time he was fifteen, Cesar found that life was rapidly closing in on him.

...Until the day he decided to change. To everyone's surprise one evening, this young man actually showed up sober to one of our outreach activities and motioned Kim over, asking for prayer. Hearing the seriousness in his voice, Kim turned, promising to bring Larry as quickly as possible.

Unfortunately, though, the crowd pressed in that night so we couldn't get back to Cesar for a while, and when we returned to the spot where he'd been, he was gone.

That was probably a good thing, as it turned out... Since two days later Cesar decided to walk for some fifteen miles in the middle of a rainstorm, against the advice of his family and with only the clothes on his back, in order to check himself into a Christian rehabilitation center.



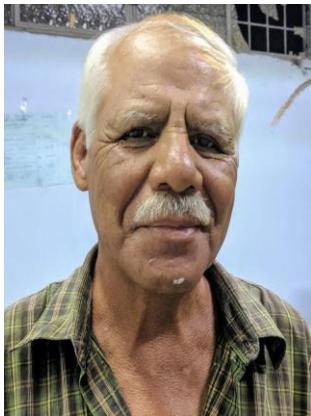
Anyway, the thing you probably need to know is that the center where Cesar had chosen to stay that day was actually a voluntary one... meaning that he could have left at any time to go back to his addictions.

But this young man did no such thing. In fact, he chose to remain in the rehab. for almost 2 years, rising in rank and beginning to teach others... And then suddenly when time had passed, we ran into him in the neighborhood! ...He'd returned!

Now we will say that it took some "adjusting" for Cesar to find himself once he was back on the street...! So after pulling him off of some park benches on particularly long nights, we challenged him to live for the Lord even *outside* the rehab center...!

...It took prayer, but things finally began to click, so we are happy to tell you that Cesar is now drug-free, working, and contributing to his family... Please pray that God would strengthen him more and more!

Victor Manuel



...Last but not least we wanted to feature an older gentleman by the name of Victor Manuel.

You may or may not remember Victor since he appeared as a side character in our last letter, but he's the grandfather to blame for the accidental death of Jasmine's son, apparently due to an abuse situation during which in a drunken moment, he could not stay his hand.

Wrecked from his own childhood, Victor has not had any legal action taken against him because the case remains unproven, since the extended family framed the grandson for suicide in order to avoid problems.

Anyway, we could certainly raise a whole lot of legal questions here, but what we really want to share with you is that after the incident, Victor started coming to church... In fact, he is there often before the service, kneeling in front of the altar and quietly asking for forgiveness from God.

... And though we won't say there haven't been a few bumps along the road as we've ministered to him, Victor is definitely coming along. Certainly the best thing of all is that he is considering checking himself into a place where he can receive the attention he needs... But until he does, we know that God is quietly working in him as he sits in the back of the church, usually only a few feet from Jasmine, who by the grace of God overcomes her resentment towards him just to be in the service.



So, in summary... thank you for praying.

And to close, we know we don't have to tell you that ministry in the barrio isn't easy.

But where else can you find a service where an accidental murderer and the mother of the victim sit for hours in the same room, where two divorced people often sit side by side in a church, and where crystal meth addicts crowd around the door, trying hard not to show that what's being said inside is by far the most important thing in their lives...?

Anyway, it's not a simple thing, and to be honest, we are having to learn as we go... to let ourselves feel... to hurt for people, and most of all to risk loving them... which can be pretty painful at times.

... And we know there is no real formula or easy way to do it.

But thankfully, there is One who makes a way...

...And it's a good thing.

... Because there are so many out there, searching... to find their way.



"See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland..."
Isaiah 43: 19



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