



The Inspiration of ONE

BY KEN HORN

John Bueno's many years of fruitful ministry clearly illustrate the significance of one person — in this case, a small boy — in building God's Kingdom. Bueno relates the following life-changing episode in his life:

"In 1962, about a year after Lois and I arrived in El Salvador as young missionaries, I was driving back into town from a trip out in the country. It was about midnight, and I stopped at one of the few traffic lights in San Salvador at that time. A young boy about 6 years old was standing at the corner selling newspapers.

"It doesn't take much of a business mind to figure out that nobody buys newspapers at midnight. I rolled down the window and asked, 'How many papers do you have left?'

"I have three,' he said.

"I'll buy them,' I replied.

"I bought the three newspapers and you would have thought I had given that boy a million dollars. He jumped for joy and made a beeline — presumably for home. He probably couldn't go home until he had sold those papers. They may have represented his profit for the day.

"My first reaction was that it didn't take much to make that boy happy. Then I realized that tomorrow he would be back and start the process all over again. Who knew whether someone would buy his remaining papers at the end of the day? That boy faced a daily struggle for the rest of his life. So did countless children like him. It's a vicious poverty cycle in many countries.

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“I thought, *What can I do for these kids? First, I'll show them that Christ loves them. Second, we'll help them get out of their poverty.* I knew from the beginning Lois and I weren't just to feed the poor and hungry. We would teach them how to provide for themselves and help others.”

Through his encounter with that young boy late one night, the Lord birthed in Bueno's heart a burden to educate needy kids, many of whom were living on the streets.

“We started a school at the church with three makeshift classrooms, using benches and tables made with used lumber. The school opened with 81 boys and girls in six grades. We basically brought children off the streets to give them an education.

“I realized that if we could communicate the love of Jesus Christ effectively, those children could have hope and a purpose in life. With a Christ-centered elementary education, they could break out of the poverty cycle.”

The school grew and others were started. They named the network of schools Liceo Cristiano (Christian Schools). Soon a school system developed, and today 37 campuses are operated by Salvadoran leadership that includes 900 faculty and staff. Of the 22,000 students now enrolled, about 5,000 receive financial assistance from the United States through Latin America ChildCare.

In 2003, Bueno was invited to El Salvador for the school system's 40th anniversary celebration at a soccer stadium attended by 40,000 current and former students.

El Salvador's minister of education gave the speech that afternoon. A former student, he testified to what the school had done for him in his early years. He could have been one of those kids selling newspapers on the corner, but now he is the minister of education for the entire nation.

In the course of 40 years, about 630,000 children have been through the Christian school program in El Salvador alone — 630,000 children in a country of 6 million people. These schools have made a significant impact in children, families and an entire nation.

Each student is a life — created by God with potential to be developed for His glory. At a recent school graduation in El Salvador, Bueno met a former student, Eelin Auxiliadora Romero Valle. She has overcome more than her share of obstacles.

Traditionally, most of the children from her village did not finish elementary school, and Eelin was born with a disability. But she was determined. She attended a small village school for four years before receiving an opportunity to attend Liceo Cristiano.

Eelin went all the way through the school program, graduating from Liceo Cristiano High School. She went on to a university where she recently completed a doctorate in a specialized field of law.

Eelin has a vivacious personality and a compassionate heart toward children who desperately need the same opportunity she was given. She is a shining example of what God will accomplish in a person's life when, with His help, we will see in that person the potential of what he or she can become.

“I have often thought about the little boy from whom I bought three newspapers late one night,” says Bueno. “In a significant way, God used one boy to provide the inspiration that has changed the destiny of hundreds of thousands of children.” **tpe**



KEN HORN is managing editor of *Today's Pentecostal Evangel*.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.



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