

## Following our heart can bring change in the world.

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By Bob Miller

My wakeup call was a divorce. Feeling depressed, I needed a break where I would not be thinking about myself. The little voice in my head said, "Vacation as a volunteer in Mexico." Finding the names of two organizations in Guadalajara that use volunteers, I arrived to find one of them no longer existed. At the other I was told, "No, we have more volunteers than we can use." With that rejection, I began walking down the street and into a bookstore where I asked a lady if she might know where I could volunteer. She said, "Funny you ask. In today's newspaper is a list of organizations looking for help. Pointing at the list, she said, "I know the lady with this orphanage, she always need help."



At the orphanage, seventy year old Señora Hilda was telling me about the 120 children they had, yet I saw only one little boy about 10 years old sitting alone on the steps. She explained the rest were in the nursery, infirmary or school. To the little one she said, "Give our guest a tour and teach him more Spanish." I spent an hour getting to know the only child in the orphanage.

That emotion filled week touched my heart deeper than any other experience in my life. I kept returning for two years at which time I began adoption of two brothers, Eduardo and Arturo, who had been there 8 years. During the five year adoption process, my sons wanted to visit their childhood friends. When we did, I watched a development gap grow between my sons, now in a family and their friends who were still in institutions. That voice in my head asked, "How can we get more children out of institutions and into real families?" It was the seed for a new project, a way to address poverty, which is a major reason children are in institutions. Typical government or private efforts to address poverty provide only narrowly focused activities like giving welfare support, water, food, a school, sanitation or job training. These provide temporary relief, but leave the deeper sickness of poverty in place. Communities like that are not sustainable and fail to thrive. They become dependent on aid and may even become breeding grounds for revolution.

We saw the need for communities with economic, ecological and social sustainability. True sustainability creates conditions with a decent quality of life, citizens being valued equally and having opportunities to grow. It creates communities that contribute to the larger society rather than being a drain on it. Our new framework – Sustainable Family Communities, incorporates both material and social sustainability, a comprehensive solution. Phase one is beginning on land donated in Mexico.

We begin with community owned businesses using all profits for new homes, healthcare, education, job training and other services – not given as charity, but built, earned and paid for by the workers themselves. Once the community is "built-out," some of the continuing profits will go to start the next community. Those two communities will help to start the third; those three, the fourth, etc. It becomes a self-replicating network of communities, without government aid or ongoing donations.

We invite you to join us in this meaningful undertaking to reduce poverty in our world.

By the way, four years ago, my youngest son Eduardo, now 33 and father of my granddaughter, asked, "Dad, do you remember that first day you came to the orphanage? Why do you suppose that one 10 year old had not gone to school?" As I thought back to that day, it occurred to me, "That was you! Why didn't you go to school?" He said, "I really don't know, but that morning something told me that I had to stay there, so I hid while the others left, then later I was found by Señora Hilda." It is as though he had been told, "You stay here today. The person who is going to adopt you doesn't know it yet, but is being guided to this country, this city and this orphanage. And he is a little slow sometimes, so we are going to get all of the other children out of here so he will be sure to meet you." I know that voice in my head telling me where to vacation was the same voice that guided Eduardo to be there waiting for me. It changed our lives and now is beginning to change the world. Are you listening?

Bob Miller is the executive director of the nonprofit, Our Family Orphan Communities, Inc. which is doing the Sustainable Family Communities project. With the synchronistic events continuing to this day, he knows that he is on a spiritual path, being pulled toward the vision he is to help accomplish.

[www.SustainableFamilyCommunities.org](http://www.SustainableFamilyCommunities.org), [www.OrphanCommunities.org](http://www.OrphanCommunities.org).

[bobm@SustainableFamilyCommunities.org](mailto:bobm@SustainableFamilyCommunities.org).