

Dear Orphanage Amigo,

Have you ever been a tourist in Mexico? If so, you were probably approached by children vendors. Maybe, like me, you were uncomfortable or even irritated by them. They are often dirty, and dressed shabbily, and selling all sorts of things—bubble gum, bracelets and bags. Sometimes they are smiling and friendly, sometimes they are sad-eyed and distant; but they are always persistent. Have you ever wondered about their stories?

Here Erika Espinoza Barrios, our subdirector, shares a story of three siblings who were forced to work on the streets, selling to tourists. Reading it made me cry and question my previous assumptions about children selling on the street.

A story worth telling

“ This is a very special story that is worth telling. Amalia, José and Daniela were picked up by the police in a taco shop at 2 a.m. The owner called the police to let them know that the children had been waiting for someone for over an hour. They were not dressed appropriately for the cold, late hour. The police contacted us directly asking us to take in the children.

Recently, about one year after they came to our Home, the children received a very peculiar visit from a lady named Monique. She had no blood tie to the children but she got permission from DIF [*Mexico's Child Protective Services*] to visit. After talking with Monique we found out the truth behind our children's story. I sat with her for hours while she told me how she came to meet José.

Monique is the manager of one of my favorite coffee shops in Ensenada, a place on First Street [*the main tourist strip in town*]. She told me that it was a very cold night when she saw José standing outside the coffee place. He



*Amalia is 12, José is 11
and Daniela is 5*

was shaking and wearing nothing but a shirt, pants and tennis shoes, holding a box of bubble gum packages that he was trying to sell to tourists. Monique approached him and invited him in, gave him a hot beverage, put a jacket over his shoulders and tried to have a conversation with him, asking why he was not wearing a sweater. She found out that he had two sisters that were in a similar condition. She let him go about his chores, but decided that she would fix this situation. She started gathering clothes, shoes, food and any donations she could get for them.

During the week she got to meet Amalia and Daniela. They were also selling things to tourists. When she found herself with many goods for them, she contacted José and told him to tell his mom so she would come and pick up everything. Monique explained to me her surprise when meeting a very well-dressed lady arriving in her car with a bunch of other kids that looked the same or worse than José, Amalia and Daniela.

Monique found herself taking care of this family, buying uniforms and school supplies, feeding them, and in times of desperation, giving them money to cover



José was forced to sell bubble gum and sing in the streets to raise money

for money they lost that they had to give back to their stepfather. She found out that the stepfather drove his pickup to First Street, parked the car and fell asleep while the kids worked to bring back money to him. She told how José was singing in the street for money. She also shared how later that same winter José had no clothes or shoes, or any of the items she had got for him; how the kids were sick, and no one cared for them. She continued on an on.

Monique then told me that one day she stopped seeing the children, and how the mother came to her crying, and telling her the kids had been taken away. Monique then went to DIF to get a permit to see her beloved kids, and DIF turned her down again and again because she was not a relative of the family. She found herself in a difficult spot, knowing that she was not going to see the kids again. She committed herself to never stop looking for them.

After thinking this through, she went again to pressure DIF. One day, she succeeded. They made her get a psychological evaluation and a social economical

evaluation. At the end, she found herself with a permit on hand to visit José, Amalia and Daniela.

Monique told me how she was very suspicious about orphanages. She had the idea in her head to complain and do something if she saw that the situation of the children was less than optimal. Monique was laughing when she told me this, because she couldn't believe what she saw. The children were healthy, well-dressed, with moisturized skin and nice hairdos; they were three super happy kids. Monique told me she cried with happiness and couldn't believe her eyes. She had never seen them in better condition than this. ”

Part of a big, busy family

For José, Amalia and Daniela, our orphanage is home. We are a big, busy family. We have many of the same activities that keep your family busy as well – school, church events, kids' sports, doctor's visits and occasional special outings. **We have a pressing need:** our kids desperately need reliable transportation for their everyday childhood activities.

Currently, we have one worn-out fifteen-passenger van. It is being used from 6 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, taking our ten middle and high school students to and from school. The schools are about twelve miles away, down the long, windy dangerous hill. There are sharp curves and canyons on the side of the hill.



Our current van almost maxed out with thirteen kids

We urgently need two good, used, low mileage, 15-passenger vans. The vans need to be economical, but also have capacity. Each van will cost around \$20,000. This includes licensing and importation fees. This is a special appeal. One hundred percent of your gifts will go to purchasing the vans.

Why do we need two vans? For many of our outings there are more than fifteen children who want to go. When we go to watch our boys playing soccer, almost the entire orphanage likes to show up to root for their 'brothers'. When there are special field trips to the movies or the pool, everyone wants to join in. How do we deal with it now? Squeezing people closer, some sitting on the floor and on each others'

laps.... whatever it takes. Not the safe way we would like.

Why should you respond quickly? Our one van is almost completely worn out. For example, there is a problem with the driver's side window so that there is little protection when it rains.

Would you help us buy two vans? My heart breaks to think of Jose, Amalia and Daniela forced to sell on the cold streets. But now they, and many other children have safe, loving, warm childhoods at our home. We desperately need the vans to continue to give them simple daily activities and experiences. Thank you so much for your consideration, prayers and generosity. Muchas gracias to you, our amigos!!



*'Truly I tell you,
whatever you did for
one of the least of these
brothers and sisters of
mine, you did for me.'
Matthew 25:40*

Con mucho gratitud,

Patty Meadows

Patty Meadows

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P.S. Our only van is falling apart in front of our eyes! Please help us get safe transportation for the children's daily activities.

P.P.S. If you are interested in sponsoring Amalia, José or Daniela, make sure to visit www.elsauzal.org/Sponsor. Thank you for your generous loving heart!