

**Heart's Home USA
108 St Edwards Street
Brooklyn, NY 11205**

**Letter from Judy Snyder
Manila, Philippines**

August 25, 2008

Letter #1

My Dear Sponsors,

Wow. Where to start? I guess the beginning is always a good place.... First of all, I just wanted to tell you how grateful and appreciative I am for your support...whether it be spiritually or financially, or both. So, THANK YOU! :-)

I'll start with my orientation weeks in NY.

Ok, so some of you may know that I'm not a city girl, so needless to say going to NY for 2 weeks...I wasn't quite sure how I was going to be with that. So how was I going to be in the Philippine's capital...one of the largest cities in the world for 14 months? That was beyond me!

But while I was in Brooklyn, I realized that it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. I got to live with a community of about 8-9 French people (really nice and funny folks), and 3 other Americans (it was their orientation weeks also). We had a lot of teachings about Heart's Home and what it's about, and what's to be expected. Also some things just basically to help out with the prayer life and practical points on the mission.

We got to go to the International Center for a Culture of Compassion located upstate NY for a few days. The mission of this Center is to explore and share Heart's Home's spirit of compassion. It was really nice. It had mountains and fields and woods and ahhh...so nice. There we met the founder of HH...Fr. Theiry. We each had time set aside to personally talk with him (he meets all the missionaries of HH). He is a really nice man. And we met some other volunteers there...a sister of HH, a lay consecrated of HH (who did a mission in the Philippines), and a seminarian with HH, and another guy who just came back from a mission in Argentina. It was very good to be there...a nice break from the city.

We also went out on Apostolate (when we go out and visit people). My first Apostolate was to the women's shelter with Sr. Regine, a young French sister living with the Heart's Home in Brooklyn. It was interesting. I didn't know quite what to say; so I just listened to what Sr. Regine and the women said.

Another Apostolate I went on was to a center that was similar to a nursing home. There I met an elderly lady named Joan. As I was walking by her for the first time, I thought I heard her say something. So I turned to her and walked closer. One of the first things out of her mouth to me was "I'm frightened". Taken aback, I wasn't sure how to respond to this. As she kept repeating this and asking where she was and how did she get there, and that she was scared. She asked where God was and she said that she just wanted to die...I tried to reassure her that she was in a good place where the

people loved her and would take good care of her, and that her family probably brought her there and that God was right there. I think she might've been suffering from alzheimers. After spending some time with her, I had to leave. She looked at me, held my hand, and said, "God Bless you...thank you for listening to me and comforting me." Right then it really hit me what Heart's Home is about. The comforting, the loving and compassionate presence.

Joan might've forgotten who I was 10 mins. later, but I know that I will remember her for a long time. After meeting Joan, a few other volunteers and myself prayed the rosary with some of the residents there. Afterwards we talked to them. One of them (her name escapes me- sorry), an elderly women, and I were talking and I found out that she used to do ballet dancing. She asked if I danced...I told her that I wasn't very good at it, but I liked to.

She then told me, "You have the personality of a dancer." I wasn't quite sure how to take this. Then we started talking about her sister (who was sleeping next to her- also a resident there). And I found out that she played piano. Again the lady told me, "You have the personality of a piano player." I had the feeling that whatever the occupation was that we would talk about, I would have the personality for...

Our sending forth Mass was beautiful...where we had a special Blessing and was presented a rosary, and had a little reception/presentation of HH afterwards.

Then the next day I headed off to the Philippines.

My flight here was ok. The flight to Japan was delayed by 3 hrs. because of weather. So anyone with a connecting flight to Manila ended up missing the connecting flight. So we ended up staying in a hotel over-night in Tokyo. Which was ok...we got free food...and got to try Japanese food.

So the next morning we headed off to the Philippines. The people I was with were really nice and were even helping me to learn Tagalog.

So a bit about my first 2 weeks here...

The people are very friendly. They like to sing, joke, and smile. The children are great! They like to do the above and also dance and play...and are very patient with me and my trying to learn what they are trying to tell me. By the way, yes, in the Philippines, they do speak English, but where I am (Navotas), their English is limited...some very limited. So please pray that I can learn Tagalog. Thanks!

The living conditions....

There are 3 of us in the HH's community (3 more to come in Oct.). Olivier (from India), Sophie (from France), and myself. We live in what some would consider a small house...but compared to some around us, I consider it quite big...especially compared to those we visit on Apostolate. We do have electricity, and running water. We recycle our water...our left-over water from the laundry (hand-washed) and rinsing water (in tubs) is used to "flush" the toilet. We don't have a fridge, so we have to be careful of the amount of food that we cook. And we have a small stove-like thing. One burner, no oven. We each have a mosquito net over our beds.

Navotas (a suburb-like area of Manila) is notorious for flooding. So when it rains, it pours in the Philippines. And since I came during their raining season, it poured *a lot*. It rained everyday for about the first 5 days I was here. I believe we even got the effects of a typhoon a few days ago....I figured to enjoy the rain before the dry season hits. Which I learned that the Philippines has 2 seasons...dry and rainy.

The first day that I arrived, I got to meet a lot of the children. The first one I met was an adorable boy of 8 years. named Rico. Him and about 2 or 3 girls were there at HH (Tahanang Puso in Tagalog).

They were at first shy, but it didn't take them long to overcome their shyness and play. They played hide-and-seek with us. I found out quickly that these children love to climb. Climb what? You may ask. People.

We celebrated 2 birthdays that first night also (they love birthdays). Actually, they love just to celebrate and to be with each other. It's a beautiful thing. Almost every night (and everything can be heard through the walls of our house) our neighbors singing karaoke can be heard. Well, there are lots of people in a small place. So it's not hard to hear things.

Today was celebrated Nation's Heroes Day for the Philippines. At the house, we had about 10-15 kids and 2 moms there singing and dancing. And all of us ended up singing our own country's national anthem in our native tongues. It was really neat. The children not only sang theirs well, but sang it loud.

Now for the Apostolates....

My first one here was with the Missionaries of Charity Sisters (the MC Sisters). They have a place (one for elderly people and one for children in need) where we come to visit once a week. They have children there who are mal-nourished, disabled, abandoned, or are just being cared for until someone adopts them or their parents are able to care for them.

The other day, after Mass there, we got to help feed some of the children there...boy, was that interesting! They have probably about 50 + kids there. There was this one cute little girl of about 2 years walking around in a walker-seat thing, and I came up to her and she just reached her arms up to me to pick her up. So I picked her up and she just clung to me. One of the sisters came up to me and said that the little girl likes to cling to people, and will not let you go. I soon found this to be true.

After helping to feed this one little boy of about 4 or 5 years, I helped walk him down the hallway a little bit and we played a little until I had to leave. I ended up putting him in a crib (his bed), and we counted together...in Tagalog and English. Well, my knowledge in Tagalog got me only to 5, but he helped me with the rest....

Another Apostolate took us to a garbage dump. Now this place amazed me. People lived on the garbage, had their houses right on top of it...houses that were one-room shacks. But yet they had a basketball hoop and were playing basketball, and they even had a church and a school and a playground. The school and playground were recently donated by some foreigners and a local minister. It was like a community of 100 families living there. The people there collected plastic to get money so they can eat.

And there are some other places that we visit that for their house they literally like put some wood up and tied a tarp to it. Most people to me, although they seem to have their problems (as everyone does), seem to keep a smiling face to them. I think to qualify to be a Filipino, you have to be able to smile.

Oh, and the friendliness is amazing...they often call out hello to you in the streets and most of the time when you smile at them, they smile back...or lift their eyebrows. The Filipinos communicate a lot with their facial expressions... they lift their eyebrows to acknowledge or to say yes and they point with their mouths. When I see this, I can't help but to be amused and wonder at the reactions of people if they came to the USA and did this....

It seems that a lot of the people I meet in my neighborhood are excited to see an American there. Apparently not a lot of tourists come to visit the slum areas...and in Navotas, there are a lot of slum areas. I'm the first American to come to the Philippines as a HH missionary. And apparently not a lot of Americans visit Navotas. Manila seems to be having quite a western influence on them. There are some songs I'll hear and be like "hey, I know that song". And their dress is similar also. A few that I've spoken to want to come to the USA. I told them that they have a beautiful country here themselves.

And I think one of the most beautiful things that I've seen so far in the past 2 weeks is the people here.
Thanks again for your support! You are in my prayers.

In Christ's Loving Peace,
Judy

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