



**Letter from Judy Snyder
Sponsor letter # 3**

Heart's Home in Manila, Philippines

January 20, 2009

My Dear Sponsors,

Maligayang Pasko (Merry Christmas) at Manigong Bagong Taon (and a Prosperous New Year)!
I apologize for the delay of this letter- but I do hope your Christmas and New Years were wonderful!

Let me try to go back in time a little bit first.

Back in Oct. our parish put on a Halloween party, which kindof surprised me. TP (Tahanang Puso/Heart's Home) were to be the judges for the costume contest. There were scary, not-so-scary and some very interesting costumes! And, of course, there was music and dancing. Mostly ballroom dancing. Some of the TP community danced (including me); even though we didn't know what we were doing (they tried to teach us), we had fun!

At a church about 1 1/2 hours away (St. Domingo in Quezon City), they had their annual procession of Our Lady of La Naval. Back when the Filipinos and Spanish were fighting the Dutch on the sea, the Dutch greatly outnumbered them. So the Filipinos and Spanish (on land and on sea) prayed desperately to Our Lady for help. Constant prayers- especially the Rosary- were being prayed by the soldiers on the sea and the people at home. They defeated the Dutch. To this they give credit to Our Lady. So each year they have a procession in her honor. They had many saint statues go through the streets, then finally a large statue of her and Baby Jesus. It ended in the church. Many people attended this event. When the statue of Our Lady of La Naval came at last in the church, confetti fell and people waved handkerchiefs in the air, cheering. It was quite a sight to see!

One of the things that amuses me about here is how they treat foreigners. Many times as we walk in the street, people call out "Hey, what's your name?" or "Hi!" or many other things. And most of the time when we stop to speak to someone, a group of people (mostly children) gather 'round us. Sometimes I feel like a celebrity; especially when they ask for our autograph (which has happened twice)! Is this how Jesus felt?

They seem to be such a relaxed, laid-back and joking kind of people.

Many times when walking the children grab our hands, walk with us a bit, then are like "Bye!" And many times they take our hand and touch their foreheads with it- a sign of respect in the Philippines (usually used with people such as priests, sisters, elders, others in authority, etc.).

Speaking of celebrities, I feel like I met one myself...Her name is Mary Mae and she's about 7 years old. Before coming here, I saw her picture on the Heart's Home web-site. She was holding a fish in each hand with a big smile on her face. It was one of my favorite pictures on the web-site. When I

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found out that that picture was taken in the Philippines, I was so excited! I couldn't wait to meet this girl! She's a little bit older now than she was in the picture, but she's just as cute! So when I finally got to meet her (she lives with her family near the fish port), I was so happy! I talked to her and her friend Jon Jon a little bit. And her mother and her and some others recently came over to our house to celebrate her mother's birthday.

Another close friend of ours is named Ate (pronounced a-tay...meaning older sister, or just another form of respect) Ami. She's in her late 30's and comes over often. When we share breakfast with her, she seems to get a kick out of whenever I eat. Sometimes I won't be doing anything special and she will just start laughing at me...maybe it might be because I like to mix things together that she finds so amusing...who knows? But we take turns being the "laughingstock" at our table. Most of the time she just tells us that she's happy.

Another friend of ours that we visit is Nanay (mother) Emeraldalda. I've only visited her a couple of times, but she seems to be so happy each time. Last time she told us that she loves us as we were leaving.

Another lady that we buy fruit from often is Ate Nancy. Marianne and I visited her once in her house to see her new grandson Vincent. Ever since then I feel a bit more close to her, since we talked and she shared some of her life with us. She is such a kind and generous person. For example, she had given me a bunch of bananas free one time...which I'm sure she could use the money. She's quiet-spoken and has a very good heart.

One of the things we do here is welcome people (especially the children) into our home in the afternoon. First we pray the Rosary with them, then they do different activities such as draw, reading, playing games or with toys. Our neighbors often come to our door wanting medicine for their wounds. And more often than not, either they don't need the medicine (or band-aide that they request), or there's really no wound...Or sometimes we just don't have the medicine they need (in other words, they'd be better off seeing a doctor!).

Although sometimes the children can be quite naughty, I will admit they are just so darn cute and when they call your name and come running up to you and hug you...well, there's nothing like it....

Oh, and they love to help you to cook! Often when they see you coming home with a plastic bag (no matter what's in the bag or what time of day it is), they ask, "Cooking ako?" ("I cook?") or "Sino luto?" ("Who's cooking?"). They are, for the most part, very good helpers when they cook with us.

It's moments like the ones mentioned above that help remind me of why I'm here.

One of my favorite things we, as a community, do here is at Night Prayer during the Liturgy of the Hours, while Jesus is Exposed; we read the Gospel for the next day in our native languages. It's so neat for me to hear this. It reminds me that we come from all parts of the world, live here together, and try to live out the same mission here.

Please pray for a priest friend of ours- who's helped TP for the past several years- Fr. Vincent. He's been very sick recently. He was working on a different Philippine island, but had to go back to Europe (he's originally from France).

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And also please pray for another close friend of TP- a girl of 23 years named Inday. She's struggling with trying to go to school to be a teacher, has hardly any money and works hard. Her family's very poor, her brother's (Julias, 25) in jail for a serious crime he didn't commit. And her youngest brother (Bunso, 16) has been in jail a couple of times for taking rugby (a common drug here). And other family struggles and other struggles have taken place. So not only pray for all the people here, but please keep her and her family especially in your prayers. Even through all this, she's still a happy person to be around. Amazing, simply amazing. Like many people here. The people I know here are wonderful people, and some kids I just want to adopt (especially Joven, an 8 year old who has just stolen my heart).

A place we often go to for our day of rest is in Manila at the St. Columban Father's house. Well, it's for the administrative staff and retired priests to live there. They generously let us stay the night and we get to meet lots of priests and sisters and lay missionaries and seminarians from all over the world. It's lots of fun to meet up with our friends there almost every week.

Now onto Christmas.

As you may know, Christmas preparing starts here in late Sept. TP started in Dec. We had the children help us decorate the house, which they seemed to enjoy very much. We attended some Christmas parties, did some other preparations and tried to prepare ourselves for Jesus' Birthday.

There were groups of carolers (mostly children) at our door that went from place to place. They would sing, then usually received money. But we gave candy instead.

For our parish Christmas party, a raffle took place, and we won lots of rice (probably about 10 or 20 lbs worth)! Knowing that we didn't need this much- we ended up dividing it and giving it to some of our friends at the fish port. They seemed grateful to receive the rice, which is a very common food here in the Philippines. I'm learning different ways you can prepare rice!

One of the Christmas traditions here is the Simbang Gabi. In the provinces (places outside of Manila), the farmers would go to this early morning Mass (4 am) before eating breakfast and attending to the farms. This dawn Mass is 9 days before Christmas, thus being Novena Masses.

It is believed by Filipinos that if you attend all 9 Masses, that you make a wish and it'll come true. I am proud to say that I attended 8 of the 9 Masses, but ashamed to say that only 2 of them were dawn Masses. The other ones were at 9:30pm (and 1 at 8pm) the night before (anticipated Masses).

Every time, the church was filled with many, many people. I mean, usually on Sundays there's lots of people attending Mass, but these Masses had lots and lots of people there.

Christmas time was very pleasant for our community. We exchanged gifts, sang some Christmas songs, ate delicious food, attended Mass and shared some time with our friends.

New Year's Eve couldn't be a quiet time if anybody wanted it to be! I can't tell you how many firecrackers/fireworks went off. Nor can I tell you how any of us are able to still hear! One thing about some Filipinos- they seem to like noise!

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In early Jan., to take a break, we went to an island called Talim island. It was very nice to get away from the hustle and bustle of city life to breathe some fresh air, see green and mountains and to meet a nice community (St. Damiano), who welcomed us and were very nice to us. There were many friendly people there.

Thanks again for all your prayers and support! I hope your new year is very Blessed and happy and full of little pleasant surprises!

In Christ's Loving Peace,
Judy



The Heart's Home community

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