



Building a Future for

We adoptive parents face a number of unique and sometimes challenging circumstances. We all want what is best for our kids and despite the fact there are various studies and resources for adoptive families, the reality is that we each have to address these things in a manner that is personalized for our unique family.

Being the parent of two children from Guatemala, one of our unique challenges in parenting is how to communicate not only the dynamics of intercountry adoption, but also the realities of poverty and how they relate to our children's history. My family has always believed in being as straightforward as possible with our children, but this is not so simple when dealing with issues of global socioeconomics and exploitation, how they connect with our children's lives, and have it all connect properly for young children.

"Giving Back" to our children's birth country is something that many believe is a voluntary obligation. While I am not sure I agree with the principle that we owe a debt to the country that gave us so much, I do believe more selfishly that it is something essential to our children's upbringing, sense of self, and preparation for their futures.

My nature has always been one where it is difficult for me to enjoy the success I have achieved without knowing I am doing a good

amount for those less fortunate. Throughout the years it has taken many forms, both adoption and non-adoption oriented. For years I was the chief writer for the Guatadopt.com website. While the main thing we did was provide accurate information and free assistance to those in the adoption process, the site had a focus on educating people about Guatemala. As a result, we were involved in raising funds for a variety of charitable purposes, culminating in the creation of our own, now defunct, non-profit to provide meals to orphans in the country. Another thing we did was promote the work of other non-profits.

Behrhorst Partners for Development was one such organization we loved to promote. It had all the characteristics we were looking for — established, secure, good grassroots work being done, the dollars actually go to the work, and its basis is around providing sustainable solutions for those most in need in Guatemala. When I was invited to join the board of directors two years ago, I was honored by the opportunity.

Last June, I decided to bring my 11-year-old daughter, Isabel, with me to Guatemala for our bi-annual board meeting. It had been a number of years since she had been back to Guatemala and seen her former foster family, with whom we have remained close. But at 11 years old, I also thought it was the right time for her to see firsthand what she had

been learning for years about poverty in her birth country. Before Behrhorst Partners for Development begins its board meetings, we always visit one of our partner communities and this was something of immense value for her.

As I am sure everyone reading this knows, it is not easy to tell what is going on in the mind of an 11-year-old. Throughout the visit, I was keenly focused on Isabel but unable to tell how she was digesting everything. As she walked through a roomful of children from the village giving away rubberband bracelets she had made for them, it became clear to me that on one hand she was making the connection between her history and these children who looked like her. But on the other hand, it was also clear that like myself, this was a foreign world for her.

As our visit moved from more formal activities in the community's central area to where the people actually lived, I could see more clicking in her brain. As Isabel walked around, seeing the water and sanitation systems Behrhorst Partners for Development installed, the properly vented stoves installed in each of the small cinder block homes, and just the overall environment that people call home, she really started to digest how fortunate we are and why it is her dad is always preaching about the need to help others. At this point in the visit, my heart warmed as I realized the



Guatemala's Children By Kevin Kreutner

experience wasn't only helping her understanding of her own history, it was helping her understanding of humanity.

Behrhorst Partners for Development's work is something I am extremely proud of. It is an organization based not on pity, but respect. The program is based on reducing the causes of chronic childhood malnutrition in rural, indigenous Mayan communities, where approximately 60 percent of all children suffer from growth stunting, delayed mental development and other impacts of malnutrition. Every time I am in one of the communities with all of the children, I see my own kids in their eyes. As I look at them, I feel heartened by knowing in all likelihood, some of those children will live a full life because of our work. And then comes the realization that some of them likely will fall to curable disease and that there are countless more communities in need of the partnership Behrhorst Partners for Development provides.

There are few people in the world who don't feel good about helping others. It is a foundation of every great religion throughout history and an innate human reaction. For adoptive families, it can also serve other purposes. For those of us who are passionate about the underlying causes of poverty in places like Guatemala, it helps to ease some of the internal struggles about the personal gain that blessed us because of someone else's poverty.

We can't ignore the reality of that. But more importantly, being involved with organizations like Behrhorst Partners for Development can also be an amazing way to educate, prepare and introduce our children to larger issues they will address as they mature.

Michelle Gallo visited a Behrhorst Partners for Development community with her Guatemalan son and felt similarly stating, "I love that Behrhorst Partners for Development allowed us to come visit villages we helped raise money for. It made a huge impact on our son Dominic to see firsthand the needs in his birth country and how he was able to help."

Another adoptive parent, Michelle Hanavan adds, "Behrhorst Partners for Development has been an important part of our family for two reasons. First, we have been able to use Behrhorst's programs to create awareness of the needs and issues of rural Guatemala's to our five children, all of whom are adopted from Guatemala. Second, it has been a trusted way for our family to give back to our children's birth country for programs which focus on the health and well-being of women, children and families."

The best quote I can offer up comes directly from my daughter Isabel, who just started her first journalism class. I asked her to write me a paragraph about our visit. "My journey to Guatemala was a great experience, especially

for my age. I didn't realize how beautiful the world can be. When I saw the village, it opened up a whole new world to me. The people have completely different lives than we do and work so hard to keep their village together. Now I know how beautiful Guatemala can be." Nicely said Isabel!

So while the primary objective in any charitable contribution is obviously the work done by the organization, for adoptive families it can mean much more. And it is a way that allows each of us the ability to explain and experience the realities of birth countries at a time and level of our choosing. Not everyone would be comfortable taking their kid to a village as I did. Nonetheless, there is no doubt in my mind that each of us needs to be proactive with our children and giving back is one great way to do so.

Kevin Kreutner and his wife Sheila live in Salisbury, Md., with their two children, Isabel and Samuel, from Guatemala. An executive recruiter in the food industry by trade, Kreutner has been extremely active in the Guatemalan adoption community through his work on Guatadopt.com, as well as with groups like Focus on Adoption, Families Without Borders and The Do Good Charitable Foundation. Today, Kreutner is a member of the Behrhorst Partners for Development Board of Directors where he has been working on the organization's branding and marketing communications.