

Melinda's Heart of Love – part 2

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A Special Love

Making contact with many people did not prevent Melinda from establishing one very special relationship. Each day Sonia, an undersized, undernourished two-year old girl could be seen clinging to Melinda. These two grew closer and closer with each passing. Often we would see them as they walked together, sometimes sharing food or when Sonia tired, being held in Melinda's arms.

Melinda's time in Das Marinas was nearly over. Iowa with her wide-open fields deep in the heartland of America would soon be welcoming her back. A dysfunctional feeling filled Melinda during those last hours in her new community for she was struggling with the feeling that she was living in two distinctly different worlds. These two worlds existed almost a lifetime away from each other. It was not yet clear in her thinking how she was going to connect those worlds but already her heart had found some answers.

On this particular day, our final day in the community, Melinda held Sonia, the little girl with big eyes and a dirty face. Her hands and body offered physical comfort and shelter; an expression of the maternal heart that each child has a right to experience. Evident on Melinda's face was the realization that soon she would be leaving this vulnerable child.

Melinda moved with a deliberate purpose, it was as if with each step she was pouring her love into the child's invisible storage tank. Her steps bore a hope that the little one would draw from this tank in the days and months ahead. This was her last chance to see and hug little Sonia and she had no way of explaining her upcoming departure. Sonia, who had been lifted by Melissa's love would soon be dropped and leaving such a vacuum in the child's life was almost too much for Melinda to bear.

At one point during our closing afternoon, while hundreds of community members and volunteers mixed in noisy celebration of the bridges opening, Melinda and I received a spontaneous inspiration. Without speaking we walked towards a van that was parked on the side of the road. We had memories of crowding into this van, filling it with the sounds of conversations, song and laughter but this was not the time for conversation, song and laughter. The dam of emotions was about to burst. This was to be the quiet sanctuary where we would let the waters flow.

Away from the crowds, the chaotic sounds and the children's animated faces we found our chance. We had a sense this was going to happen but we could never have anticipated its intensity. The silence that had filled the van was suddenly attacked, the floodgates were open, and we wept.

Unrestrained, an unfamiliar force of emotion shook our bodies. Varied levels of pained sounds forced their way out of our throats. A moment of silence, followed by quiet sobs and then than thunderous sobs

of torrential force. The cycle of sounds continued, silence, sobs and then the torrents, on and on till the water and emotions were all drained out of us.

Without power, without focus, we left the van, wiped our noses and eyes and melted back into the crowd.



The Power of Tears

Why did we weep that way? It is not easy to know for sure but some thoughts speak true to my heart.

Melinda's heart felt out into the Sonia's future so she wept. Clearly the challenges of poverty and a broken family would weigh heavily on Sonia. The doors that an education open would prematurely slam shut because of Sonia's lack of what would be called 'pocket' money in Iowa. Sonia's presence served as an emotional catalyst opening us to the bitter realization that children in thousands of other communities needed love, care and attention.



Some of the tears that rushed out of our eyes came as we realized over and over again that we were not enough, so much more needed to be done. Yet, mixed in with our tears of sorrow and frustration were those of gratitude for we were realizing how much our lives were blessed by this community and its people.

While we were free to go back to our 'life', Sonia and others were faced with hardships unfitting their age. I think some of the tears we offered were about the unfairness of it all. Melinda was determined to do something about this.

Love in Action

Melinda returned home to Iowa where she refused to let the memory of Das Marinas die. She reached out to her community and shared her experiences in the Philippines, especially highlighting the situation of the children in 'our' community and why they needed modest financial support to stay in school.

Telling a neighbor that the amount needed to keep a child in school for a year was less than it cost to pay for a month's worth of coffee worked. Her message was simple and direct as she found ways to link her experience to the local lives of those in Iowa. When the good people of Iowa understand how they could help, they did.

A scholarship fund was set up for the children of Das Marinas and those that lived in Melinda's hometown were directly responsible for helping get that fund going. Melinda transformed those tears shed in Das Marinas into an action plan that resulted in Sonia and many other children having a chance to share a brighter future.

Melinda's actions served as spiritual version of the International Bridge of Love. It is a bridge that goes well beyond the physical limitations of cement and steel. This is a bridge that crossed an ocean and improved the quality of life in two diverse communities. The main instrument to create this bridge is a heart filled with the creative power of love.

Through the creative power of love we also can build bridges. Let's give it a try. This is not the end, it's only the beginning again.