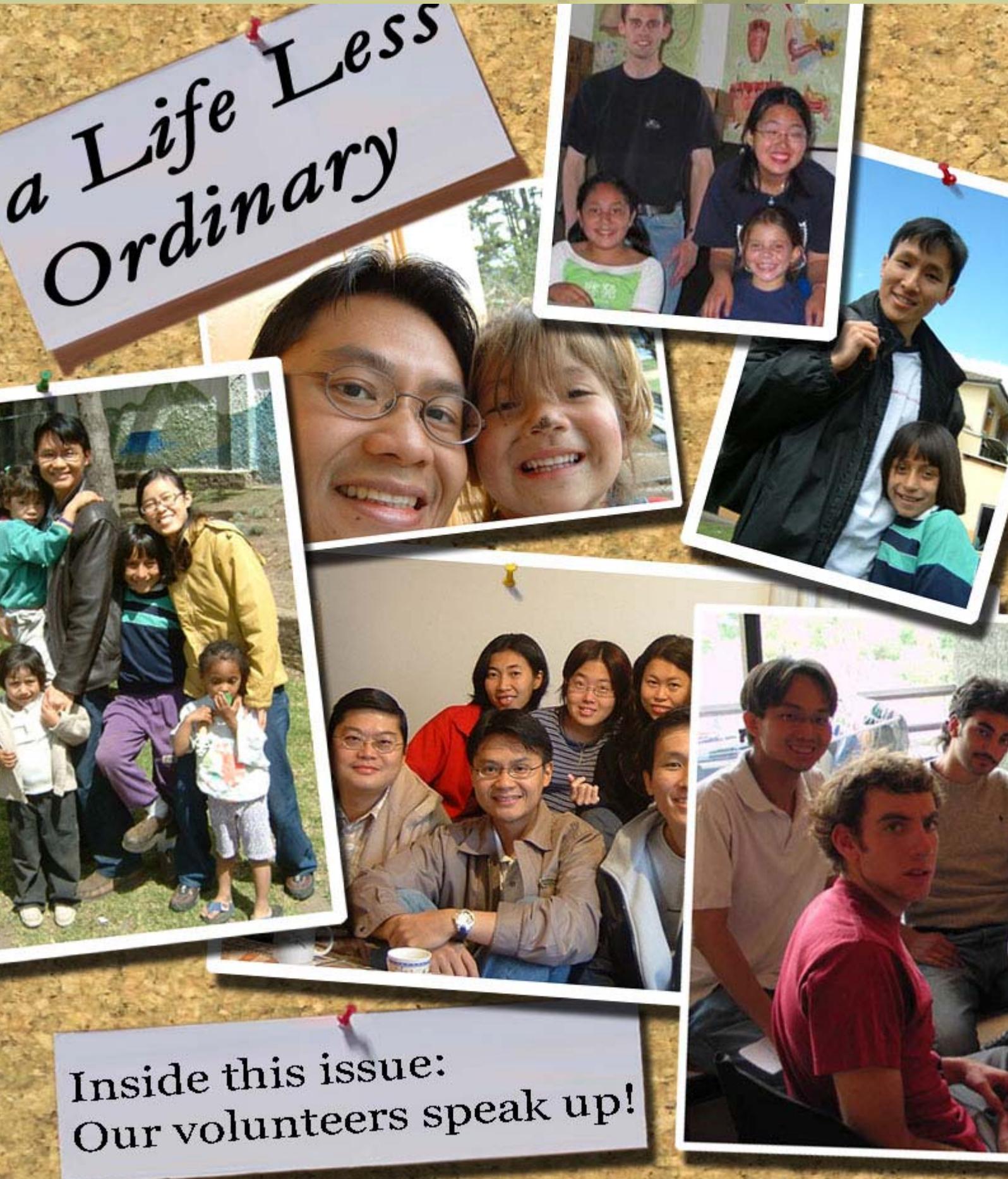


INSIGHT

South America

A publication of Generation ACTS Club International

Vol. 3



a Life Less Ordinary

Inside this issue:
Our volunteers speak up!

Why be a volunteer

an interview with
Quek Ailay and Serene Cha

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. -Verses 13 and 14 of the 4th Chapter of The Book of James, New International Version Bible

In the business of the modern lifestyle, many people fail to notice the axiomatic wisdom that is described in the quotation above. They go through life pursuing all kinds of materialistic pursuits, until they come face to face with that one appointment that they will never be late for – death. And it is at that point of time that one comes to the inevitable realization that he can bring none of the spoils of materialism to what lies beyond his grave.

The brilliant genius Albert Einstein had this to say: “A life directed chiefly towards the fulfillment of personal desires sooner or later always leads to bitter disappointment. Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.” This is the reason that Generation ACTS Club International (Singapore) focuses very much on promoting and developing the spirit of volunteerism and altruism. We believe strongly that a lifestyle of fulfillment is a lifestyle of altruistic service towards others, without expectations of profitable financial returns for our endeavors.

In our branch in Lima-Peru, we have a program called La Vida Maxima, which literally means “the full life”. It involves teaching English and other life skills to various volunteers as well as potential volunteers, so that the quantity and quality of volunteerism in Peru can be increased. In this regard, we are working with the volunteers of two major project partners, La Casa de Panchita and Mision Integral, as well various university students and youths. We have five volunteers from Singapore who are here in Peru to oversee these projects and to volunteer as trainers and teachers in these projects. We posed some questions to two of the volunteers from Singapore, Ailay and Serene, to find out more about their experience as volunteers.

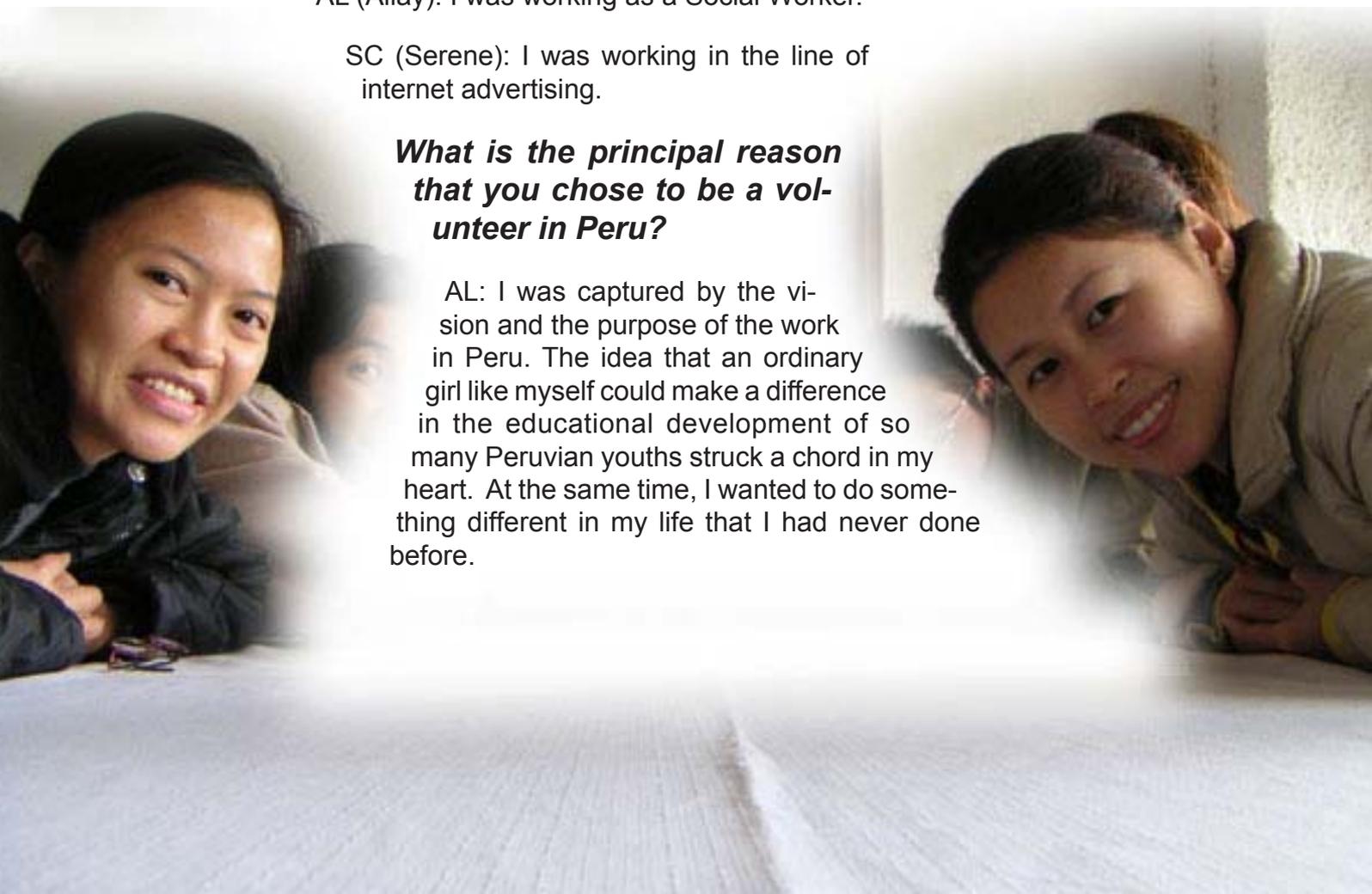
What were you working as in Singapore before you came over to Peru?

AL (Ailay): I was working as a Social Worker.

SC (Serene): I was working in the line of internet advertising.

What is the principal reason that you chose to be a volunteer in Peru?

AL: I was captured by the vision and the purpose of the work in Peru. The idea that an ordinary girl like myself could make a difference in the educational development of so many Peruvian youths struck a chord in my heart. At the same time, I wanted to do something different in my life that I had never done before.



SC: Because I knew that by nature, I did not have a big heart for people and I was getting too comfortable in Singapore. Something inside me was crying out to do something more meaningful. What better opportunity was there to train myself to have a bigger heart for people than to be a volunteer in a country like Peru, where one-third of the people live in poverty?

What is the most fulfilling aspect about your experience as a volunteer here in Peru? Can you tell us what is the most memorable incident that happened during your volunteering experience?

AL: The experience of learning to communicate in a new language, meeting people from another culture and learning to live among them and to share a part of my life with them. The most memorable thing here is to see many unfortunate children that are under-educated and under-provided. It is sad to see many street kids who are deprived of education and labouring in the streets even at the tender age of three. The sight is always a constant reminder of our privileged status in a developed country like Singapore and the need for more volunteers to offer their services in a country like Peru .

SC: To know that what you're doing is truly helping the people in practical ways to live better lives. It motivates me to know that I'm not just giving them a fish but teaching them how to fish for themselves. Hmm, the most memorable incident... a young seventeen year old girl came to our house to take an evaluation test to attend our English classes. After she was done, she told us that she didn't have enough money to pay her bus fare home, which only costs about S\$0.50. She had to borrow from us. She filled in our registration form and we discovered that her house does not even have a proper address as it is located in one of the shanty towns where people build their own houses with their own hands along the hills. She was so poor that she didn't even have the money for daily survival, let alone for proper education. She could have been a genius in school but I guess nobody would ever know. These are the things that we take for granted in Singapore.



Peru is a beautiful country that never fails to thrill her visitors with her great variety of cultures, climates and culinary delights. But you would just be touching the tip of the iceberg if you were merely exposed to her tourist appeal. You can only experience the heart of Peru when you choose to get involved with the people in its communities. That is why visiting Peru will leave you with memories that will linger on for many precious moments, but volunteering in Peru will leave you with memories that will last you a lifetime. ■

MY PRIVILEGE

BY DAVID LEE

It was a hot Saturday afternoon when we reached Plaza Renca. The whole bus journey took us about an hour, cutting across four municipals. Upon arrival, we were greeted by Mauricio, a volunteer with Hogar de Cristo (a well-known non-government, non-profit organization in Chile).

He brought us to the “Centro Abierto”, a multi-purpose activity center similar to our Community Centres in Singapore. Mauricio gave us a short tour of the place. We were particularly interested to find out about the classrooms which we’d be having our English classes with the children. We were excited and thrilled at the prospect of teaching two groups of children: one with ages between nine to eleven, and the other between twelve to fourteen. Each class would have a size of about twenty students.

My first impression was: “Gosh! How are we going to handle them?” I remembered teaching a class of kindergarten pupils for six months when I was in Malaysia quite a number of years ago. It was a tough assignment. The current sessions are definitely different and more challenging as we are teaching Chilean children; children who speak a dialect of Spanish which is often different from the standard Castilian.

Any fears of miscommunication soon dissipated. We had a good time talking and being with them. Their way of addressing us as “Tio” (uncle) or “Tia” (auntie) was very affectionate and made us feel even more welcomed. We left home after spending about one and a half hours there. We couldn’t wait to come back for our first English lesson with the children





After the first class, we realized that it'd take more than English to last the whole one-hour lesson. They got really restless and disinterested very quickly, especially the younger class. We had to think of ways to capture their attention before their minds wander off to other places like the basketball court (for playing soccer, especially the boys). So, apart from the normal class materials, we came up with songs, games and different fun activities for the subsequent classes.

One example was during the third session, we decided to use "Color Esperanza" by Diego Torres as the song for the lesson "Left, Right". The children were ecstatic when we played the song and soon we were dancing to the beat while "chanting" "Left, Right, Left, Right, Forward, Backward, Forward, Backward."

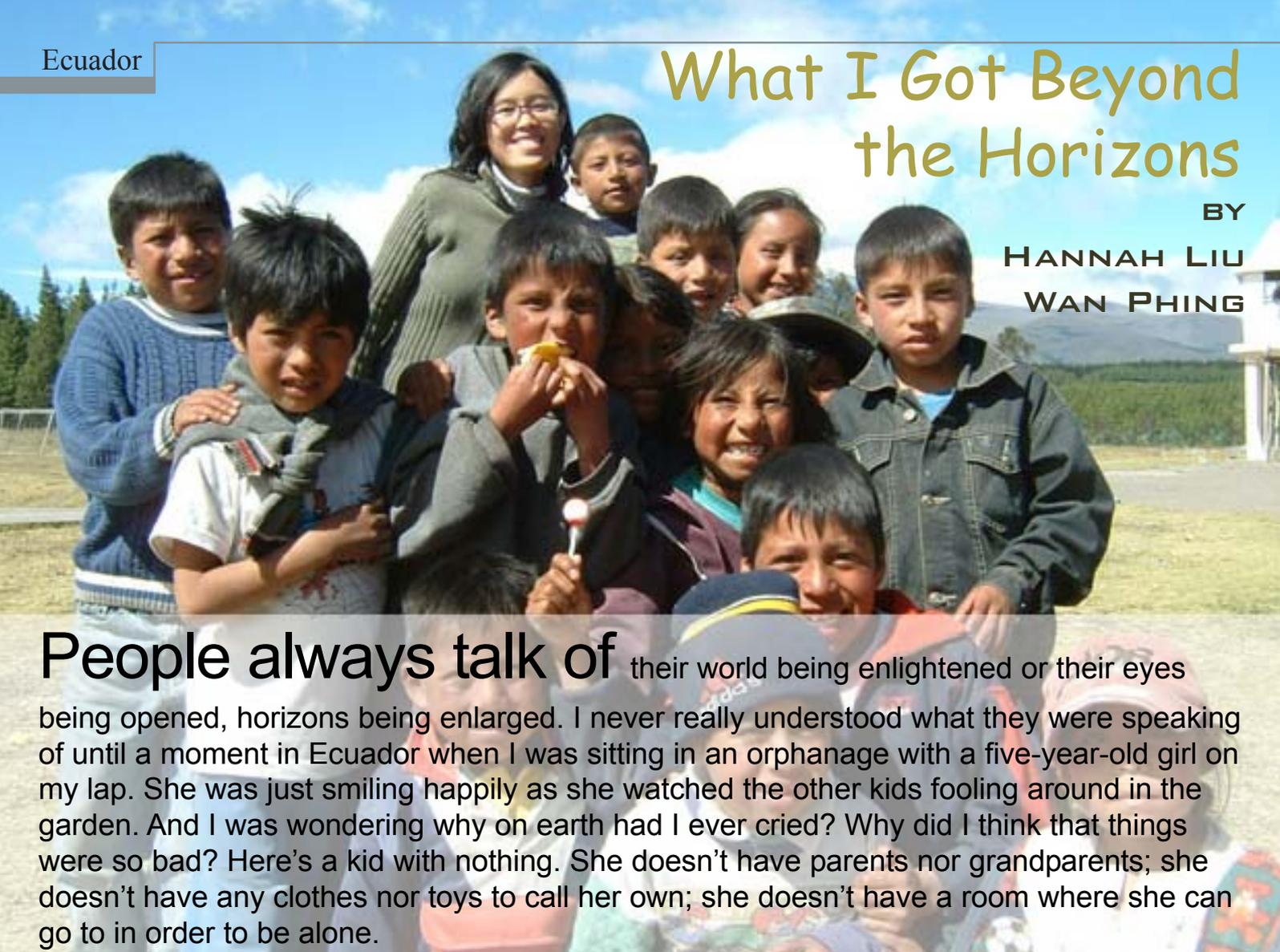
At the point of writing this article, we had already completed five sessions with Hogar de Cristo. I really look forward to teaching there every Saturday. I feel overjoyed each time when I see them conversing basic English phrases like "How are you?... My name is... What time is it?" It is not a feeling of self-accomplishment but rather a sense of gladness, knowing that they are learning something which would be useful some point later in their lives. That you are given the chance to be a part of that process is in itself an immense privilege. ■

“That you are given the chance to be a part of that process is in itself an immense privilege.”



What I Got Beyond the Horizons

BY

HANNAH LIU
WAN PHINGA group of about ten children and one woman are smiling and posing for a photo outdoors. The woman is in the back row, wearing a green sweater and glasses. The children are of various ages, some are eating snacks like a lollipop. They are in a grassy area with trees and a building in the background under a blue sky with light clouds.

People always talk of their world being enlightened or their eyes being opened, horizons being enlarged. I never really understood what they were speaking of until a moment in Ecuador when I was sitting in an orphanage with a five-year-old girl on my lap. She was just smiling happily as she watched the other kids fooling around in the garden. And I was wondering why on earth had I ever cried? Why did I think that things were so bad? Here's a kid with nothing. She doesn't have parents nor grandparents; she doesn't have any clothes nor toys to call her own; she doesn't have a room where she can go to in order to be alone.

I reflected on my life, and all the lame reasons I had for thinking that life was so bad. I realized at that moment how amazing life is. The happiness that girl shared with me at that moment made my eyes truly open wider, it made me appreciate those little things, like her smile, and her tiny fingers wrapped around my thumb, and it made me appreciate life.

Back in June 2003, when I told my family and friends that I was headed to Ecuador, some were apprehensive or even thought that I was crazy because I was about to walk away from a very comfortable and sheltered life towards political and economic instability. My sister even told me that she had nightmares of me being a victim of the crimes there, but I wasn't worried.

I was open and ready to experience everything, and besides I thought it was really exciting to be part of a dream and history in the making. What I didn't know was that I was about to go to one of the most amazing places I had ever experienced in my life.

Ecuador is extremely difficult to be squeezed into a sentence or paragraph... It is by nature an immense and highly stimulating culture and country. Immediately, you are immersed into this incredible, unique swirl of folklore, color, and romance. Indeed, Ecuador is a country with a troubled past, but also a rich culture. Recently, more and more volunteers and even tourists are discovering Ecuador. As a long-term volunteer, I firmly believe that the best way to experience a country is to live like the locals, travel like the locals and eat like the locals. And in a big part of the local scene, there are many neglected or abandoned children.

I volunteer at an orphanage in Quito, Ecuador. The children are at the center because they had been abandoned, resulting from irresponsibility or poverty. I usually find myself tossing and playing with kids, jumping around with them and having them beg me to carry and swing them. We play games. The kids enjoy the games for a while, and then we skip, run and hop around the garden, burning some of their seemingly unlimited energy. There are no toys other than some dolls that the kids play with and then got tired of, so I have to be really creative in creating activities to teach them English.

However, more importantly, the children just want to be held. Besides their childlike mischief, they are so sweet and tender, and it hurts me to think of the void in their young lives caused by not receiving enough love. These children are so young, I think. They thrive under circumstances that we deem unlivable, and yet, they smile at me as if they were the happiest children on earth. They always look forward to our coming and spending time with them.

Talking about time..... Here, people take time to smell the roses. I often have to take rather long bus rides to get to the orphanage. These long rides have been one of the most satisfying parts of my experience. It is nothing short of meditation. You have the time and space to reflect on who you are and what you are doing: to contemplate your place in the grand design of things. And also, sometimes on the roads, the extraordinary beauty of the land and the people is revealed in all its grandeur. I have seen some stunningly beautiful snow-capped mountains and faces of people in Ecuador. I have also made some good friends here, over the past ten months. It is the warmth that I have felt from the local community that has enabled me to overcome the immediate language and cultural challenges.

“ We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give. ”

Just a while back, amidst the language and cultural challenges, ironically, I realized that life is good. It dawned upon me that here I have the chance to utilize my own gifts and knowledge, as well as to learn more about humanity and the world than I could have ever expected. Life is definitely good. Yes, life was great for me in Singapore and I am fortunate and privileged to be a Singaporean. But there is a whole world out here - home to millions of people for whom life should be amazing. According to the choices I make and the attitude I have, my human experience can be phenomenal. I realize this happily and am inspired to take a step beyond myself and, in humility, reach out more to this world, to its millions of people. I can let life be full of joy and learning for myself, and I can make an effort to let it be so for others. These are people with whom I share my human experience: people who teach me and who learn from me. There are people who make me laugh and there are those who give to me and share with me. I cannot fight my urge to



contribute kindness and generosity to the lives of other people. It is one thing that fills my own life with gratefulness, humility, and enrichment.

All in all, I have gone beyond the horizons and come to Ecuador not only to experience and absorb the culture and land, but also to interact with and learn from the people. It is an incomparable experience. I am committed to doing what I can to share strength, goodness and compassion with the people I meet. Just as Winston Churchill had put it so beautifully:

“We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

This is a beautiful challenge. I face it daily with an open mind, open hands and an open heart. ■



ANNOUNCING THE ARRIVAL OF **GENACTS STORE!**

Yes! Its finally here! Genacts Store is pleased to announce its opening in December.

Er.... what IS Genacts Store?

We're glad you asked. Genacts Store is an internet online store with a heart. We sell exotic South American products, specifically Peruvian and Ecuadorian, to Singapore.

Why do we need yet one more online store?

Our online store is special. Yes, we do sell some hard to find products to Singaporeans, but that's not what makes us truly special. What makes Genacts Store special is that the proceeds that we gain from the sale of our products will go to the funding of the South American programmes of Generation ACTS Club International. Each time you buy a product from our store, you are in fact contributing to the materials for one underprivileged student for as much as one whole semester. We don't take a cent of the profit.

It's also possible to donate to our programmes via the store.

Stay tuned for its grand opening in early December.



Great Chilean Wines from the Finest Vineyards...delivered right to Your doorstep!

It has been said that Chile is a country where people know how to sip a good glass of wine and how to have a good time.

Now, at an affordable price range of between \$25-\$35 per bottle, you can discover for yourself the finest Chilean wine from some of the best vineyards in the world – medal winners and critics' choices.

For enquiries and placement of orders, please contact David Lee:
david@gen-acts.org

Hurry! While stocks last only!

Financial Resource Support

The youths and children who participate in our programs come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds. They are usually unable to afford the materials and resources used in quality education. You may consider making a financial contribution, either as a one time donation or on a regular basis, to sponsor resources used in the various projects. The material and stationary costs per student is about USD 50. A typical ad-hoc project requires funds ranging from USD 100-2500 or contributions in kind depending on the nature of the project.

Networking Resource Support

You can help us market our programs to your friends. We are constantly looking for partners who may be able to offer their professional experiences and know hows towards developing our projects. While our projects are largely educational in nature, some of our projects require professional contributions from various fields.

Logistical Support

We are constantly working towards improving the quality of our training methods and materials. You may contribute in this aspect by providing logistical resources such as computers, teaching and training tools, materials for training and the like.

Human Resource Support

Finally, but certainly not least, you can sign up for our ACTSpeditions programs and volunteer with us!

Support Us!



Generation ACTS Club
International

Sharing Life | Living Life | Investing Life
www.gen-acts.org

our *Vision*:

To **impact** our communities and beyond by developing the **altruistic** and **entrepreneurial** potential of our youths.

Terry Toh (Peru)
peru@gen-acts.org

David Lee (Chile)
chile@gen-acts.org

Joshua Yeo (Ecuador)
ecuador@gen-acts.org

Eugene Phang (Singapore)
friends@gen-acts.org