

Story of a return visit to the orphanage

An adopted son's story of his return visit to the orphanage

2002 Orphanage Hospicio de San Jose

Manila, Philippines

By James L Badham

866 South 140 East

Farmington, UT 84087

In my early years I did not think much about being adopted, although as early as I can remember I knew that I was. My parents had always been very up-front with my brother and I about being adopted but let us know that they loved us the same. As we grew older our lives were no different than any other American child.

I attended grade school, high school, and then college. I was an average student through those years, except that I realized early on in my life that music came very easy to me, which has now become one of my most cherished gifts that the Lord has blessed me with.

From a very early age I knew that I was going to serve a mission. This is when life began to become very interesting and I received some of the toughest challenges up to that point in my life that I had ever received.

I had received my mission call to San Pedro Sula Honduras in Central America. I was to enter the MTC in August 1990. Part of the process to prepare for a foreign mission was to send in an application to the U.S. Embassy to acquire a passport. I was dismayed to find out only a month before I was to enter the MTC that for complicated reasons and a few overlooked technicalities I was not a U.S. citizen. A letter was sent stating the following, "Adoption by U.S. citizens does not confer your citizenship". I remember feeling like this matter was way beyond my understanding and wondered how I would ever get to the location the Lord had called me to serve in. I prayed for guidance and I recall the scripture 1 Nephi 3:7 that we are all so familiar with, begin to take shape in my own life. I knew that I had been called and that I would go, because the Lord had prepared the way. I always felt that my labors specific to the mission field began with this trial to get there.

Over a period of three weeks I made many trips back and forth from Bountiful to the office of immigration in Salt Lake City to find out what needed to be done. Everyday with a prayer that something would happen. As the time drew near to the time when I would enter into the MTC the conclusion was drawn that I needed to go through the two-year process like everyone else to become a citizen. I was exhausted and distraught feeling almost hopeless. It was then that a wonderful man, whom I believe the Lord sent at those last moments to be of service in a way that no other could during this time in my life. His name was Victor Lawrence. He had been one of my Sunday school teachers in my youth and also a close friend. His profession as an attorney along with his efforts made it possible for me to become a naturalized citizen while I was in the MTC, allowing me to get my U.S. passport and then my visa in Honduras. I have always felt that this was one of the greater miracles in my own life. While serving in my mission I had experiences that testified to me of our Heavenly Father's divine plan and how each of us individually participate in the plan specific to what the Lord needs us to do. I have always been fond of saying that I had experiences that were very specific to myself and my companion being in a particular place at a particular time with particular people. I have maintained contact with companions in Honduras with the deep mutual conviction and feeling that we had a very close relationship in the pre-existence and chose to serve together when our time came on this Earth.

I returned from my mission in 1992. In March of 1993, I was sealed to my lovely wife, Jennifer, a woman blessed with the gift of faith. She is a beautiful woman, inside and out and my best friend. We have three precious children. Tanner 8, Tyler 6, and Marissa 4. Jennifer conceived in December 2001 and we were due to have our fourth child in late August, early September 2002. In April 2002 at 19 1/2 weeks we found out that Jennifer had lost the baby. That day was a very emotional day for us, especially for Jennifer. I was amazed when I heard Jennifer say to me that after a few days of grief she said that while kneeling in prayer she saw the Savior in the garden, bleeding from every pore and knew that her pain had been suffered for. At that moment the burden of grief was lifted. My testimony was strengthened that day, as was hers in the divine nature of the Atonement. I counted my blessings once more in a profound way with the knowledge that my wife of such great faith had received such an experience and that I was blessed to be her eternal companion.

The misfortune of a miscarriage sparked in our minds the possibility of adoption. The idea of adopting had passed both our minds frequently, but we never considered it seriously until I took a business trip at the end of August going through the beginning of September to South East Asia. Since I was in the area I decided that at the tail end of my trip, which occurred over Labor Day weekend, I would travel back through the Philippines and visit the Orphanage from which I was adopted 31 years ago.

I remember getting off the plane in awe, thinking to myself that never in my wildest imagination did I think I would have had the opportunity to return to the Philippines, yet here I was in the land of my heritage. While walking to the luggage carousel to get my suitcase, I felt an incredibly strong impression that I knew could only come from one place, which said to me to be prepared to have a great deal of information revealed to me during these next couple of days while I was there.

I was able to spend two precious days at Hospicio de San Jose. My mother many years ago when I was old enough to understand had given me what resembled a birth certificate written up by the orphanage. It contained information on being found in the turning cradle and the note pinned to me indicating my name as "Baby Pradas". In the bottom left hand corner there was a dull black and white picture of the front of the Orphanage. You could barely make out the words on the building where it said, "Hospicio de San Jose, Established in 1810". This is all I had for many years, until the day the taxi pulled up and I saw this place with my own eyes, in color. I felt a warm feeling come over me and a confirmation that I had truly been blessed to be able to return to this place of humble beginnings.

After meeting with Sister Enriqueta Legaste the Catholic directress of the orphanage I was introduced to a sister who was there 31 years ago when I was a little baby. Sister Felicitas Escoto. She escorted me around the Orphanage. I had the opportunity to visit the nursery. It was here that I felt the spirit of the Lord begin to impress upon me the feelings of his love, preparation, and planning in my own life. Within the nursery were the very cribs where I laid and was drawn from, by a mother so impressed to take one particular sickly child. I immediately fell in love with these little ones, and as was my mother told

the very same words, that I must not fall in love with the children, because it would hurt too much to leave them. I had the opportunity to hold and play with these little ones and feel a closeness to them as though they had been mine from their beginnings. I realized at this time that a permanent result of being exposed to Gospel principles had instilled in me the ability to feel a profound love for these individuals. I found myself pondering frequently as I wandered the orphanage, that these children were our Heavenly Father's children. I contrasted my life as it was now to what it might have been. One thought passed my mind frequently that indeed I had been blessed to be adopted into an American family residing in the United States where opportunity flourishes, but even more so to be adopted into a family with membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Saints where opportunity is eternal. At one time the sisters took me to the wall where written on the wall are the words "Abandoned Babies Here". The sisters had just previously inquired about my upbringing, upon which I replied that I was a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or as they might know it, a Mormon. I sensed a little concern, but upon seeing this wall, the still small voice came to me and told me to testify to them of the living Christ, that he was my Savior, and that I knew he lived. Upon doing this, the sense of concern seemed to be washed away and with tears in their eyes they both embraced me and then said our son has come home.

While I was there I was also introduced to Terry Salamante, the woman to whom my mother had written to about doing a mother search. She spent a lot of time with me and asked questions about the Church I belonged to as well as how I felt about searching for my mother. She told me that it was not uncommon for an adoptee to feel regret because they were unable to find a mother or because their mother had abandoned them. I felt a wave of emotion and the still small voice come to me again. I told her that if I ever found my mother that I would express to her that she had done the right thing, with hopes of consoling her. If I never found her in this life, I would feel no regret because I had been blessed more abundantly than words could speak. The Gospel had and still does fulfill my needs so far as to remove any regret or doubt in my life.

I had by chance the opportunity to have lunch on the second day that I visited with all the Catholic sisters that watched over the orphanage. While there they began asking questions about the church I belonged to. It was at this time that I was impressed upon to share with them my testimony of the Restored Gospel. I felt like a missionary again, sharing a summary of all the discussions. I felt the spirit tell me that they could feel something but did not quite understand it. I pictured the Nephites in the Book of Mormon hearing a voice but not understanding it.

*"And it came to pass that while they were thus conversing one with another, they heard a voice as if it came out of heaven; and they cast their eyes round about, for they understood not the voice which they heard; and it was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding it being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn. And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not.*

*And again the third time they did hear the voice, and did open their ears to hear it; and their eyes were towards the sound thereof; and they did look steadfastly towards heaven, from whence the sound came.”*

*(Book of Mormon | 3 Nephi 11:3 - 5)*

I wondered when the time would be that they would open their ears to hear it. On this second (last) day I spent more time in the nursery and held many of the little children. My eyes filled with tears knowing that not long ago it was me who was held by another feeling the same thing.

It was time for me to leave. I stood and faced the front of Hospicio de San Jose and pondered on the short visit and experiences that I just had. I envisioned individuals from this place at the doors of the Temple and pictured them making eternal covenants with our Heavenly Father. With a great range of emotion in my heart and tears in my eyes once again the Holy Ghost came and comforted me and I felt confirmation that in this life things are revealed to us that carry from generation to generation. The individuals of this orphanage had heard my testimony of the Restored Gospel and felt the influence of the Holy Ghost. The impression felt so many years ago by my mother to ask for me in place of another, had led me down a road back to where she found me to testify of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father's Plan.

Upon my return Jennifer and I immediately began the process of trying to find out all we could about adoption. During this process, we felt impressed upon to do a fundraiser that would ultimately provide a Christmas for the children of Hospicio de San Jose. I feel so blessed to have a wife who is full of love and would often tell me that she felt the children of Hospicio de San Jose were her own. Working with many wards and the community we were able to raise a significant amount of money for the orphanage. I was able to work through my mission president who works with the Humanitarian services of the Church, who directed us to individuals that put us in contact with Elder and Sister Pinder, serving as humanitarian country directors in the Philippines. Again we felt the Lord impress upon us the truthfulness of the Restored Gospel as we witnessed the actions and willingness of Elder and Sister Pinder along with others serving in the Philippines to coordinate what we had set out to do. It was nothing short of being divinely miraculous. Elder Pinder updated us with every chance that he could via email. In one email he provided he said, (quote) “It is hard to put into words, my feelings, so all I can say is it was one of the best days, not only of our mission, but of our lives”(unquote). I would have to add that even though we were not there, it was one of the best days of our lives as well, knowing what had occurred.

After reading the latest update from Elder Pinder with regards to the Christmas party that was held at Hospicio de San Jose, I knelt in prayer and thanked Heavenly Father for this marvelous opportunity that I (we) had just participated in. Through all of this along with all the experiences that I have had I realize more than ever that in our Heavenly Father's Plan, no matter how big or small, we have divinely appointed callings in our lives. We fulfill these callings for the benefit of our brethren as well as for our own soul. I have learned

that our Heavenly Father's love has no boundaries therefore neither should ours. I have learned that the Lord's ways are not my ways and that I should never try to second guess the Lord or try to fit Him into my agenda to suppose that what I have decided is His will or is an act of righteousness for the best of those around me. I have learned to really appreciate my family from this experience, both immediate and my extended. I have slowly had revealed to me the role that each of the members of my family play in my life and how priceless it is. The Holy Ghost has reminded me countless times of the time we stood in the Celestial Room in the Salt Lake Temple and were told by Elder Backman of the Quorum of the Seventy to look into the mirrors. He said that it was a representation of infinite generations behind us and ahead of us and that those relations build the link to eternity. We now have this great opportunity to adopt a child into our family from the same orphanage that I came from. Again I see our Heavenly Father's boundless love stretch across the world to include yet another one of his children in the covenant that he has made with his people. My opportunity and blessing has now become the opportunity and blessing for another. "And how great shall be your joy, if ye should bring but one soul unto Christ". Adopting a child into our family is exactly that!