

# Casas por Cristo

means

## I LOVE YOU



My friend's daughter Maylee was walking around saying "Casas por Cristo." When her mom asked her if she knew what that meant she said, "Yes, it means I love you." The more I think about it, the more I think she's absolutely right.

## A Life Remembered

In Oct. '08 Mark Murray, one of our former Casas por Cristo staff and family passed away. I first met Mark the summer of '04 at the Grand Canyon. He was on the Helitack and Search and Rescue Crew and he had this larger than life job of hanging from helicopters and rescuing hikers out of one of God's most beautiful creations. The Canyon was his playground and one of the first things I knew about him was how much he loved his job. Even in the short amount of time I'd known him, it seemed to be what he was made to do. For this reason, when Mark decided to leave the job that he loved to come and work for Casas por Cristo, I was blown away. To me *nothing* could be further from what he was currently doing. I'll never forget what he told me when I asked him how he could leave saving people's lives at the Grand Canyon to build houses in one of the poorest cities in Mexico. He said that although he was saving people physically, the most important way he could ever save a life was to help someone know of and accept Christ's love and forgiveness; and that's what he was moving here to do.

Mark had been a firefighter his entire life. What I'm just beginning to realize however, was that his calling to save people from fires didn't end when he left the Grand Canyon. Although I thought that building houses couldn't be further from fighting fires, Mark knew that his calling was bigger than just saving people from fires physically. He knew that the only real way to save someone was to show them God's love, and only this could save a life for eternity. Jude 23 says "save others by snatching them from the fire." **Mark was a firefighter; of course he left everything he knew to follow this calling, even when it presented itself in a different form than he'd ever known.**



As I looked out over the city of Juarez one night, I realized that because of Mark's work in Mexico, there are over 30 new lights shining from homes he helped build. Mark helped save lives on both sides of the border as he shared Christ's love with all he came in contact with. It won't be until he meets each person in heaven that he will truly know how many lives he helped save on this Earth and for eternity. As I was unpacking some of the things that Mark left behind I came across a prayer card from the fellowship of Christian firefighters that he belonged to. As I read this now, I realize that this prayer overflowed into all of Mark's work, whether he was fighting fires, rescuing people from the Grand Canyon, or handing the keys of a home to a family.

"When I am called to duty, God wherever flames may rage, give me the strength to save some life whatever its age. Help me embrace a little child before it is too late, or save an older person from a most uncertain fate. Enable me to be alert and hear the weakest shout, and quickly and efficiently to put the fire out. And if according to my fate, my days should come to end, please bless with your protecting hand, my family and my friends."

You are missed Mark. God used you to save more lives than any of us will ever know. Thank you for following God's calling no matter where the journey led.

## In The Midst of a Miracle

In November of 2006 I built a home for Modesta Martinez and her family. This project started like any other; however, what would come about as a result of it has played an instrumental role in my growing faith in God and His work. As we prepared to build a home for this family we stood in Modesta's current home, surrounded by buckets



arranged on the floor to catch the water that was dripping through the holes in her roof. She told us that she had moved to Juarez from the United States just eight years ago and that she had been cold for the past eight years. As I started to consider what she was saying, I realized that when I get really cold, I don't warm up until I stand in front of a fireplace or get into a hot bath; something to warm up my bones. Modesta and her family don't have that luxury. For that reason when the temperature drops they get bitterly cold. And in eight years she has never warmed up.

As I walked away from this conversation I knew that God was telling me to go buy a heater for this family. Although we have mostly warm weather year round, we do have a season of winter and for families with no source of heat, this can be a time of life or death. God turned the idea of buying a heater for one family into a request in my newsletter asking if anyone would like to be involved in this project to buy heaters for all of the families that I would build for that year. The response I received was unlike anything I ever expected - \$5,000 in donations and 166 heaters which not only provided for the families I built for, but for every family that our ministry built for through March of 2007!

With such amazing results, I was excited to begin the project again this year in hopes of raising enough money to provide heaters for all 350 families that Casas would build houses for in the coming year. However, after a newsletter article and individual letters and emails, I was met with only a handful of donors. I became discouraged and began to wonder whether this was a project that the Lord wanted me to continue. With more questions than answers, I resigned to the fact that this year's donations would just be smaller than last and that I should be grateful. But after months of prayer and questions I felt God's leading and His words telling me that for this project to be a success, this year was going to have to be different. With one week left to raise money and \$2,900 donated I thought that maybe I could raise another \$100 to meet \$3,000. On a Wednesday night at 8pm I set up a cause on the social networking site 'Facebook' through which people could donate money to the project. The next morning when I checked, over \$900 had been donated. This began a turn of events that I still cannot comprehend outside of God's amazing provision. Within the next week, over \$8000 in donations poured in and I sat awestruck in the midst of something amazing.

However, as doors were opening with donations, just as many doors were shutting with finding a manufacturer or store to provide the heaters. After a week of intense research and phone calls, I sat in confusion with almost \$10,000 and no heaters. Then through a series of conversations people started beginning to suggest electric blankets rather than heaters. My first reaction was frustration. But then I began to realize that due to the dire financial situation of these families, the idea of a constant warm home throughout the winter months was an absolute impossibility. I started to begin realizing that maybe electric blankets were God's leading and that maybe it would be more practical for these families. The biggest problem with the heaters is that regardless of the brand, these families do not have the money to pay to run these heaters every night if at all. Blankets that are inexpensive to run and that have the ability to cover people with warmth seemed a more clear choice. However, despite the clarity of God's leading in switching from heaters to blankets at the last minute, I was out of time. That night at 2am as I was about to go to sleep I dropped something between my nightstand and the bed. When I turned on the light what I saw instead was the controller to my own electric blanket on my bed. I stared at this SUNBEAM controller and KNEW that this was the answer or would lead us into the answer. As I flew home to GA for Thanksgiving, my friend Amy contacted the Sunbeam Company to share our project with them.

As I started to crunch numbers I realized that in order to provide for all of our families, we needed the company to offer us their blankets for \$15 each. Feeling discouraged by this seemingly impossible figure since at retail these blankets were around \$40 each; I reluctantly answered a phone call the next morning. It was a contact at Sunbeam telling me they had a shipment of blankets with a miss-stitch and were offering them to us as \$16 each. After Amy's urging, they agreed to offer them to us each for \$16 including shipping!!! I was blown away. I have never been a part of something so large in my life. I have never seen God so real and tangible before. I had never witnessed a miracle. Now I have. The result is humbling.

As for the money raised, \$12,000 was donated. With that I was able to purchase 750 blankets, which will provide 2 each for 375 families. This is more than the amount of houses that we expect to build this year. The Sunbeam Company also said that they look forward to a future partnership with our ministry and this project. All of this resulted because a woman said that she had been cold for eight years and God said, "go." He didn't scream it; he just put an idea on my heart. I can't imagine if I had decided not to listen. Thank you God for what you're doing here. Thank you for being too big for me to put words to on paper or to even begin to comprehend. Thank you for showing me that you're real, and for involving thousands of people in this project that transcends borders.

**This is an ongoing project and if you are interested in donating for next year please make checks payable to Casas por Cristo designating HEAT FUND in the memo. Or donate through our donation page on [www.casasporcristo.org](http://www.casasporcristo.org). Make sure you donate into the heater fund.**

# Teams

Because of all the violence in Juarez and the way the media is portraying it, we have had very few groups still willing to come and build with us. Since last summer I've only built with 2 teams, and they were both this March during the Spring Break season. Because I haven't had the opportunity to lead a build in 7 months, I was excited to get out and build for a family. This Spring Break I worked with the University of GA and Vista Grande Baptist.

## The University of Georgia



After 7 months away from building I was thrilled that my first build was with my Alma Mater. My best friend David flew in to join the build and it was great to see some familiar faces and make some new friends. I had no idea going into it what an amazing week this would turn out to be. This group of 8 committed college students had to combat more obstacles to get this house complete than any build I've ever been a part of. They were more than determined to complete the work that they had been called to do and I'm so grateful that I got to join them on this build. God's hand was very obviously at work this week as He provided everything necessary for this project to

come to completion. This group of 8 college students from UGA's CCF was one of the hardest working and most determined groups I've ever gotten the opportunity to work with and I am privileged that I got to serve alongside them. There is now a young mother named Laura that has a place to call her own and has witnessed God's love in her life first hand through the sacrifice and commitment of this team.



## Vista Grande



This was the first time I've worked with this church from CO but I hope it was not the last. This large group had 2 other churches join them and built a total of 3 houses. I had the opportunity to build alongside two of our other staff members, Mikell and David. This team brought down more toys and candy for the kids for Vacation Bible School than I have ever seen. It was amazing to see how much they were able to bless the local community above and beyond the home.

There is a scene from the dedication ceremony with this team that continues to replay in my mind as one of the most touching things I have ever seen. We had the opportunity to build a home for Jose and Rosa and after we presented the keys and Bible to them, Jose grabbed his wife with tear filled eyes and stood in the middle of the room and hugged her as tears poured down their faces. It reminded me exactly why we give up weeks of our lives to work in sandstorms and scorching heat. Especially at a time when so few homes are being built, we all stood there speechless knowing that this moment said more than enough. It was a great week and I look forward to the opportunity to build with this team again.



# What Else is Happening?

**What do you do when you have been called to a ministry to build houses, but very few houses are being built?** Instead of building over 400 houses this year like we did in 2007, we are hoping to complete 150 homes in two locations. This is a house-building ministry, but because of the drug war in Juarez, people are afraid to come and build. So what do you do when the one thing that you moved to this town to do is not happening? As a staff we can either sit and wait for the situation to fix itself, or we can ask God what to do in the midst of what seems like chaos. God isn't surprised by the state of affairs in Juarez right now, nor is He limited by it. In this time of questions and uncertainty we at Casas por Cristo have had to change gears and perspectives. God has called us here to serve the people of Juarez and these people need our help now more than ever. We can't build the houses without teams, but our hearts are breaking along with these families' and we can't just sit around and wait. Yet God has been faithful to answer our prayers and show each of us ways to better our ministry and continue serving him during this time.



In only a 6-month time period we have expanded Casas por Cristo and begun building in Acuña, MX. We had plans to launch a new border town in 2014 but God's timing was completely different. We would have never had the time to do this if our ministry was in full swing like it normally is this time of year. Personally, I have been able to devote time to raising money and researching heating options for the homes we are building. Amy has created a hygiene program to give each family information and supplies for a healthy lifestyle. Amy, Janette and Jason and myself were all able to give bags full of food and gifts to families at Christmas. We all come to this ministry with one heart, to help the people of Mexico, but with different passions. During this time when we would normally be building homes, God has been faithful to show us how we can put these other gifts to use to continue to share God's love with the families in Juarez.



Burdened with the heartache of families losing hope and in an effort to show the families of Juarez that Casas has not abandoned them despite the long waiting list for homes, Janette and Jason Roth have created a program to try and continue to share Christ's love in a different way. They are raising money to take bags full of food to these families on our waiting list, and more importantly letting them know that we are coming, we have not forgotten them, and neither has God. With 586 families on the waiting list and less than 100 houses registered until the end of the year the need is great. These families need to know they have not been forgotten. So in the form of beans and rice and tortillas, Janette and Jason are on their way to continue to show Christ's love.



Personally, I am honored to work with individuals that strive daily to figure out how they can do more for Casas, for this world, for the families in Mexico, and for God. I love to walk into our office and see hygiene supplies being boxed, blankets and heaters stacked to the ceiling, and beans, rice and tortillas filling an office.

We have been called to serve these people, and we can't sit idly by as they cry out for help. There is work to be done, and God has been faithful to show us each how we can continue to help across the border despite the circumstances that have changed everything. We can only do so much and this is just a way to meet their physical needs; praying that in the midst of everything they realize the real meaning behind every home, bag of food, hygiene kit or blanket is that there is a God that loves them and wants to be their savior.

If you are interested in helping the families in Mexico but can't come and build, consider giving to further one of these projects. Each of these projects is funded solely by donations and cannot continue without your help. For more information please e-mail me at [bgirle@casasporcristo.org](mailto:bgirle@casasporcristo.org) or donate at [www.casasporcristo.org](http://www.casasporcristo.org) specifically into one of these funds.

*If you made it this far, thanks for reading and being a part of my work. Please continue to pray for our staff and the families in Juarez as we continue to serve a God that transcends borders.  
Much Love, Brittany*