

First Impressions
by Catherine Norton

My first real impressions of Baraderes were the children, being a mother of two small children; I quickly made a bond with some of the little ones. There were a group of kids who lived behind the rectory, there was one little girl who I called the ring leader who became my friend instantly. She must have been about 4 years old, she was bare footed wearing a worn out red velvet party dress; she just lost her two front teeth and was all smiles. She was fascinated with me sitting out in front of the rectory. Every couple of minutes she would gather more of her friends to see me. I pulled out my camera and the kids began to pose. Being that it was a digital camera, I was able to show them their photos right away. This excited the kids especially my little friend in red to no end.

At the end of our week in Baraderes, we were able to print the pictures. I gathered my stack of photos and went searching for the little girl's house. She wasn't home but her parents were and I presented them the photos. It was then I realized that these were the first photos of their children that have ever received. It was mind blowing to me that a parent would not have a photo of their children but I guess when you are in a place where people don't have enough to eat, that is a given.

There were two little boys who also made a big impression on me, John and Johnny. They were twin brothers whose mother died during childbirth. Believe it or not these two little 5 year olds were the lucky ones; the nuns were raising them and they were healthy and happy. One of my daily joys was to get my hugs and kisses from John and Johnny. We found out mid-way through the trip they were being adopted by a family in California. Indeed these two were truly lucky ones, since now they would have a chance at a life that most of their friends will never have.

As the week went on it struck me that no matter how poor or hungry the children were, they were often smiling and laughing. The kids in the primary and secondary school that we met were eager to learn even though they had little to work with. Anything that you could give them whether it was a dictionary to use, a lollipop or a smile was so greatly appreciated.

Coming home I realized how we take little things like photos of our children for granted. How insignificant the goings on of Britney Spears and Paris Hilton are. How just 200 miles from the land of plenty there are people that literally do not know where their next meal is coming from. As a mother it is heartbreaking to have met little children that go to bed hungry at night. This trip made me want to hold on to my kids a little tighter before they go to bed.