

NEWS FROM THE ROOFTOP



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Fall 2011

FLOODS, FLOWERS, AND HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

by Charlene Meyer

We have been in Nicaragua for only three days. The weather has been extremely hot and unusually wet. Today we will be traveling to the northern section of Nicaragua to visit the rugged, mountainous region of Madriz, 155 miles from the capital city of Managua. Madriz is one of the poorest areas in Nicaragua, with nearly half the population living in extreme poverty. All stories in this newsletter are focused on families living in the Madriz area of Nicaragua.

After seeing waters more than 18 inches deep rushing down the main streets in both Managua and Masaya, I pray we will be able to reach our destination. We are leery, but determined.

Fortunately, the rains have held off for the day and we arrive at our first destination, Nueva Esperanza Escuela (New Hope School), in the municipality of Las Sabanas. We are struck by the beauty in this mountainous village. Banana trees, flowers, and small vegetable plants surround the school. Nueva Esperanza has 69 children attending primary school. The classrooms, decorated with students' bright, colorful artwork, are lined with books and supervised by a loving teacher. Mothers are busy preparing lunch.

We learn about the 'Book Club' that was formed by community primary school teachers and the staff of Fabretto, a Tin Roof partner here. In addition to reading, the students sing, creatively perform poems, and read imaginative books that allow them to expand their vocabulary and reading fluency.

We also hear about the School Gardens, another program that is teaching practical skills that students can use in their everyday lives and at home, as well as to beautify the school environ-

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BRING HOPE TO KIDS!
ATTEND NICA NOCHE'
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5.
SEE BACK PAGE

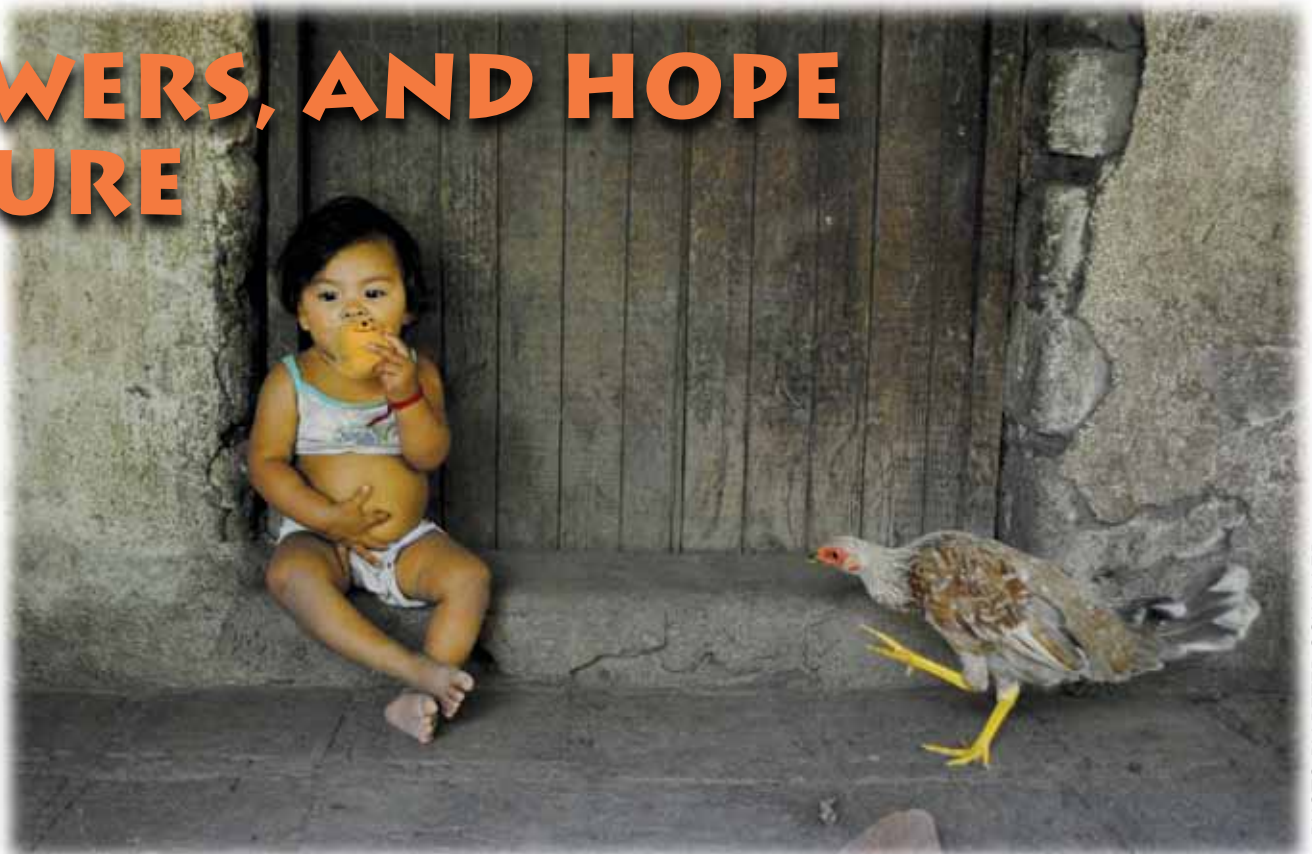


PHOTO BY PETER SCHALLER

Meyna Torrez and her husband struggle for a decent life for their baby girl and family, which focuses on a loving family, having food, and the faith that education will give their children a better future.

ment and produce nutritious fruits and vegetables to compliment the daily lunches. Volunteer parents helped to clear out the school garden area making it possible to produce a wide variety of crops.

POOR HEALTH A HANDICAP FOR KIDS

I begin to think about what we have learned about this area before making today's journey.

The facts: this district is situated near the Honduran border in a mountainous area with an average altitude of 4,000 feet above sea level. Agricultural capacity is severely limited. It has a total population of 4,700. More than 75% of families live in rural communities. Many are remote and difficult to access, particularly in the rainy season. There are 58% of children suffering from chronic malnutrition (40% higher than the national average). Chronic malnutrition contributes to a higher incidence of disease, as children are more susceptible, due to a weakened defense system. Health and nutrition problems also affect educational indicators, as many children do

not enroll in school or are not able to remain in school as a result of these health issues.

Shortly after we arrive, the community leaders begin arriving one by one, climbing the steep, rocky path to the school. Chairs were brought from the classrooms and together we make a circle with the six dedicated community leaders and mothers. The mothers begin to share their stories. There are 30 families living in this community and all but two have one thing in common.... they lost their homes and all their possessions in Chinendega, 246 miles from Nueva Esperanza, to Hurricane Mitch in 1998. They are refugees. But as I look around this small community, I don't see despair. I don't see hopelessness. What I see is pride. What we witness in hearing one family's story after the other is courage and determination in spite of unimaginable obstacles.

MEYNA'S STORY

Meyna Torrez is 47 years old. She is very thin and looks much older than her age. Her

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FLOODS...

Continued from front page

youngest child is a toddler, happily sitting on her mother's lap. Meyna and her family were Nueva Esperanza's first residents. Meyna's oldest sons and her husband have left the community to find work. One son works in Honduras, two sons work in El Salvador, and one son and her husband work in other regions of Nicaragua. They make the rugged journey home only every two months. Most men in the community work in El Salvador because jobs in this community are seasonal-agricultural, working eight hours a day for an income of \$1.75 a day. We now realize why most men leave their homes in search of work.

Meyna invites us to her home. It is a very short distance from the school. However, the path is steep and rocky. Meyna, even though she is carrying her baby girl, quickly maneuvers the challenging terrain. Al and I, however, must make sure of our footing...a little embarrassing. We call out, "Wait for us!" I'm sure she wonders why we are so slow.

GETTING BY ON BASICS

Before long we see a small adobe house located at the bottom of the long hill. Once again we see flowers, a vegetable garden, and banana trees planted around Meyna's simple home. The back yard drops off into a stream. Meyna tells us that when the hard rains come, the water rushes down the hill directly into the front of her home, just like a funnel. The rains also cause the stream to become a raging river overflowing into the back yard and creeping up to the house from the opposite direction. I can only imagine how the torrential rains of the last few days turned this hillside into a muddy waterfall. In spite of the challenges, we see a strong, caring mother who is

PHOTO BY PETER SCHALLER



PHOTO BY AL MEYER



determined to educate her children and provide for them to the best of her ability.

As I begin my climb back up that steep path, I think about how Meyna and other mothers in the village struggle to make a decent life for their children. No, they don't buy them designer clothes, send them to summer camp, or worry about whether each child has his or her own space. They get by on the basics: a loving home, fresh flowers and vegetables by the doorstep, and a faith that educating their children will lead them to a better future.

I wonder what I can do—what we can do



PHOTO BY AL MEYER



PHOTO BY AL MEYER

Top left clockwise: Meyna Torrez, with her two young daughters, looks older than her 47 years; outdoor clothes washing area; the gate to the family's home; the steep, rocky hillside as you leave the Torrez home.

together—to ease their burden? We can support humanitarian efforts in this poverty-stricken area. We can send them our love and support in the form of our donations to The Tin Roof Foundation. Won't you send yours today?

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Jadon Tapp's Birthday
Malia Tapp's Birthday
Quan Truong
Eastside Christian Church
Dudley Farrell's 80th Birthday

IVANIA'S STORY

Story and Photos by Peter Schaller
Fabretto Director of Operations

In rural Nicaragua, cases of what most of us would consider “hardship” are all too common. Most rural families live in conditions of poverty, and each day is a struggle to survive, to keep enough food on the table, to keep the rain from pouring through the holes in the roof, to make sure the kids have shoes (or at least rubber sandals) to go to school.

Unfortunately, those scenarios are so normal, that anything better is an exception. In these conditions, many families become resigned to poverty. They do not know how to hope, or dream, or imagine a life unburdened.

A MOM'S UNTIRING LOVE

Ivania Rivas lives every day in those conditions, but she is not resigned to poverty. Ivania is a 33-year-old, single mother of four children. In addition to the enormous responsibility of raising four children on her own, Ivania is faced with another considerable challenge—two of her children have disabilities.

Ivania's oldest son Wendell is 12 and in the sixth grade. He has a natural ability for writing and music, and has become well known in Las Sabanas, where he has sung and recited his poetry in public. Esterling is 10 and is in the third grade, about two years behind where she should be, though she does well in school. Jason is 6, and although he has been going to preschool, he has developmental

deficiencies that will affect him for his entire life.

Jason can only say a few words, and his motor coordination is very limited. It's quite possible that his developmental problems stem from chronic malnutrition, particularly during the pre-natal stage. The teachers in Nueva Esperanza have great patience, and work with him closely, though they do not have formal training in special education.

Ivania's youngest daughter is Mayerling, who

is 3 years old. Mayerling cannot crawl, walk, talk, or demonstrate most of the skills that a 3-year-old would normally have mastered. Ivania has to carry her around with her wherever she goes, which is obviously tiring, and makes it very difficult for Ivania to work to support her children.

ENTREPRENEUR'S GREEN THUMB

Nonetheless, Ivania is not only a dedicated mother, but she is also a creative entrepreneur.

She has no formal education, but she has prioritized her children's education, because she knows it's the only way they will be able to strive for a better future. In order to support her children, Ivania has planted different types of fruits and vegetables in every available space in her yard. She has tomatoes, peppers, corn, carrots, squash, mangos, bananas, oranges...a cornucopia of produce that she can use to feed her children, and also to generate a small income. Ivania spends her days caring for her plants, even though she has only empirical experience in agriculture.

Ivania and her family will have to struggle to break the cycles of chronic poverty that have affected their family and their community for many generations. They will have to continue to prioritize education, continue to work as hard as they can, every day, just to keep that dream alive. We are confident that Ivania will do everything

in her power to keep her children safe, healthy and in school, but she needs our help.

With your support, we can continue helping families like Ivania and her children. Please send your donation to The Tin Roof Foundation today.



PHOTO BY AL MEYER



PHOTOS BY PETER SCHALLER

Ivania is shown holding 3-year-old Mayerling who cannot walk, crawl, or talk. Wendell, age 12, is gifted with writing poetry and singing. Esterling, age 10, is two years behind and in the third grade. Jason, age 6, has severe developmental problems and can only say a few words.

THE TIN ROOF FOUNDATION WHO ARE WE?

The Tin Roof Foundation is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to “Bringing Hope to Kids” by providing educational opportunities, meal programs, health-care to facilitate learning, and economic development assistance for their families, thereby enabling children to escape the spiral of poverty. There are no salaries. All administrative costs are funded by Tin Roof Foundation founders Al and Charlene Meyer and special designated gifts. The Tin Roof Foundation, Inc. is incorporated in the State of Ohio. It is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible.

TWO-MULE BOOKMOBILE BRINGS JOY OF READING TO KIDS

Story and Photos by Peter Schaller

It's no secret—reading is important. However, our team in Cusmapa has taken reading seriously; so seriously, in fact that they are willing to move mountains (or cross them anyway) to promote reading. Because many of the rural schools in Cusmapa are located in remote and inaccessible communities, providing books and reading materials to the schools is a particular challenge.

Mountains, rivers and ravines are small obstacles for our education team in Cusmapa though, especially when there are kids that need books. The public schools often don't even have text books, not to mention reading



material. Most families in rural Nicaragua never own any books other than a Bible, especially in areas where illiteracy rates are still alarmingly high.

LIBRARY ON EIGHT LEGS

At the beginning of the 2011 school year, we bought two mules in Cusmapa who were affectionately named Alfa and Beto (*alfabeto* is Spanish for alphabet), and the two were assigned the difficult task of making sure that every school in Cusmapa has access to reading materials! That's no simple feat, and they do have some help from other staff members. Our education team in Cusmapa saw footage of a project in Africa where mules were used to create a "mobile library," and they quickly came up with a plan



to replicate that experience in Cusmapa.

Special saddle bags were made out of thick leather for Alfa and Beto. The saddle bags are large enough to carry at least 100 books, and there is usually enough room left over for some

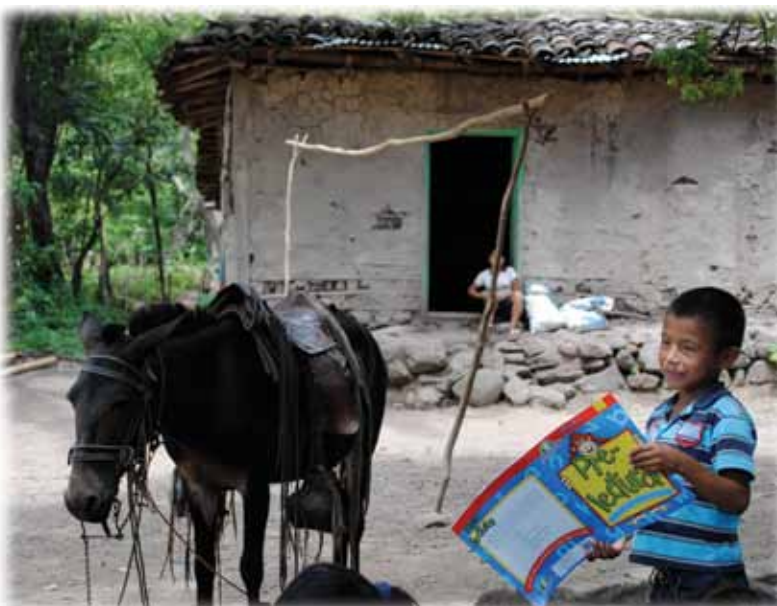
miscellaneous educational materials. Our staff members in Cusmapa, René Baquedano and Milena Baez, work with Alfa and Beto to take the joy of learning to the most remote schools in Cusmapa. They load the saddle bags full of books, school supplies, and piñatas (made by students in the town of Cusmapa) and begin the long hike through the mountains to get to the schools that only Fabretto is reaching.

NO MOUNTAIN TOO HIGH

On one particular day last week, Alfa, Beto, René, and Milena scheduled a visit to the community El Terrero, located some 10 kilometers from the town of Cusmapa. The path leading to the school winds down through the mountains, with some of the most spectacular views in the whole country.

On the way down the mountain, the volcanoes of the Pacific Coast are visible to the west, and to the north, the mountains of Honduras. The trip from Cusmapa to El Terrero takes more than two hours and would be described as treacherous by almost any but the most expert hikers. Alfa and Beto don't seem to mind though; they were glad to come across a small stream, just about half a kilometer before arriving at the school.

While René stayed behind to make sure that Alfa and Beto had a good drink, Milena went ahead to the school, so the children would be prepared to greet the mobile library when it arrived at school. The children were ecstatic and gathered in front of the school to wait. When Alfa, Beto and René arrived, they applauded and sang a welcoming song. Mules are not uncommon in El Terrero, though it was the first time they had ever seen mules carrying books! After a brief introduction, René passed out books to the students, who gathered underneath a large tree to



read, some individually and some in groups. The preschool children gathered on colorful mats and listened to René read them stories. They studied the pictures intently, and listened attentively to the stories. In conclusion, a carrot-shaped piñata

was hung from the tree, and the children took turns whacking at the piñata with a crooked stick until it finally burst in a colorful explosion of sweets.

A PREMIER EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION

The books in the mobile library will be loaned to the school in El Terrero for a month, and will then be swapped with the books in a neighboring school. In this way, with a small collection of books, we are able to rotate them and continually introduce new titles to each school. The teachers in El Terrero and other schools have been trained in techniques for teaching reading comprehension as well as the proper use of reading materials in classroom activities. They are committed to providing quality education to the children who know nothing but poverty and hardship. That's why our team has come to be recognized as a leading educational organization in Nicaragua, one of the few organizations willing to move mountains (or cross them anyway) to provide quality education.

The Tin Roof Foundation continues to be a major partner with the Fabretto Children's Foundation in serving the poor of rural Nicaragua.



CARPENTRY SHOP GETS NEW LIFE AS VOCATIONAL-EDUCATION CENTER

Story and Photos by Peter Schaller

The carpentry shop in Cusmapa, founded in 1999, ran into trouble when a moratorium on logging in the area cut off the supply of usable wood. For several years, the shop had produced and marketed puzzles and other products but now the income level was not sufficient to cover operating expenses. In 2010, we began to plan a reorganization of the shop, with the idea of converting it into a working, vocational education center.

With The Tin Roof Foundation generously supporting the plan, in early 2011 we were able to hire an experienced carpentry instructor who helped us design a vocational curriculum that would meet the needs of students in the area. Since there are so few opportunities for employment in Cusmapa, carpentry could be a viable and significant source of employment in the future, especially since new provisions in the moratorium allow for thinning and forest maintenance. This will help provide the school with a small but consistent source of wood.



EXPERIENCED INSTRUCTOR LEADS THE WAY

Our new instructor, Alberto Carazo, has been working in a vocational education program in Somoto for the past several years, teaching carpentry to adolescents. His background was a perfect match for the new design that we are promoting with the shop. Not only does Alberto have experience in woodworking, but he is also a skilled teacher with vast experience working with high school students. He has made a great addition to our team and is already well respected by his students.

Alberto currently has more than 30 students, divided into three groups, taking classes this semester. They are starting with very basic information about woodworking, such as identification of different types of wood; selection of wood; safety in the shop; proper use of hand tools; and different measurement systems. Our goal is to continue developing the curriculum to have a two-year course that can be certified by the Nicaraguan National Institute of Technology. During the course, students will learn practical, hands-on woodworking skills and will also participate in production processes in the shop.



OPENING A DOOR TO THE FUTURE

In addition to the vocational classes, the shop will continue to produce marketable items for both internal and external markets. With the support of board member Tom Gleason and volunteer Mike Andersen, we are in the process of defining our line of products which currently includes: Nativity puzzles, Noah's Ark puzzles, wooden bowls, as well as some simple furniture (chairs, coffee tables, stools, and night stands) for local markets. Some of these products are already being sold by our partner organization, Feed My Starving Children, based in Minnesota. We hope to explore other local and international markets, in order to generate some revenue that can help cover the operating costs of the shop and the vocational education program.

Our hope is that students will gain practical experience in the shop, and that they will also learn valuable skills in production, quality control, and business management. The students and staff in Cusmapa are excited about the new classes and especially about the new opportunities that will be available in the future.

WHY GIVE TO THE TIN ROOF FOUNDATION?

- 100% of your gift goes directly to the project
- No salaries (all volunteers, all the time)
- No administrative costs paid from your donation

Note: We will never share your name or information with any other organization.

ALBERTO AND THE BEAN HARVEST

Story by Al Meyer, Photos by Peter Schaller

I am on the dirt road in front of the Nueva Esperanza Escuela (New Hope School), catching my breath from my trek up the mountain when I make eye contact with a man in front of the house next door. He is dipping a plastic bucket into a sack of red beans. He waves and gives me the typical greeting, *Buenos dias. Como esta?* I return his greeting in my very limited Spanish, and then begin what becomes a very interesting conversation.

ALBERTO MEETS ALBERTO

His name is Alberto, same as mine. He and his wife have three children who attend the Nuevo Esperanza School, taking advantage of the lunch program and educational opportunities provided by our partner organization, Fabretto. His wife helps prepare the school lunches as part of the community service.

Alberto has just harvested 1-1/2 *manzana*, or approximately one acre, of red beans. This was a good year with adequate rainfall that yielded approximately 3,000 pounds. Unfortunately, the price is currently low, about \$30 per 100 pounds. In spite of the low price, Alberto is satisfied.

As we talk he continues to dip the one-gallon plastic bucket into the 100-pound sack of dried beans. He holds the bucket above his head, slowly pouring the beans into another larger plastic container on the ground.

When harvesting beans, the entire plant is pulled up by the roots and thrashed on the ground breaking up the pods and releasing the beans, hence the dirt and debris mixed with the beans. As he pours, dirt and debris blow away in the breeze. This action is repeated until he has removed all the debris leaving a basket of beautiful clean red beans. Imagine using this high-tech system for 1-1/2 tons of beans!



DOING HIS BEST FOR HIS FAMILY

Alberto is especially happy that he has been able to work in the community and be home with his family. The reality, Alberto knows soon he will be forced to travel to El Salvador to find work to supplement what he has earned from this

year's bean production. He will be away for at least two months at a time, a real hardship for the entire family. Immigration affects tens of thousands of families throughout Nicaragua.

As I walk away I am impressed with this young man. He is a hard working man doing his best to provide for his family.



UPDATE ON WILDER

We continue to celebrate Wilder Torrez's successful kidney transplant which took place Friday, February 4. Wilder has returned to Nicaragua to his job, his wife, Elba, and new baby, Andrew.

Wilder is so thankful for all the support and love he received throughout the transplant procedure. "I still can't believe someone giving me their kidney and the many people who cared for me. God sent me many angels."

If you would like to help with Wilder's lifetime of anti-rejection drugs, please contact Kathy Lisner, (513) 325-6103 or e-mail us at hope@tinroof.org.

DON'T MISS NICA NOCHE' 2011

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5TH

6:30 P.M.

SHARONVILLE CONVENTION CENTER

Make your reservations now.

Bring your friends!

Contact Russ Monjar at

(513) 340-4269 or by

e-mail at rmonjar@cinci.rr.com

Per Person: \$75 Table of 8: \$600



These six original paintings by young people at the special needs center, Familias Especiales, in Matagalpa, will be auctioned off at this year's Nica Noche'.

Don't miss Nica Noche' 2011, now one of Cincinnati's premier fundraising galas.

It's a festive evening dedicated to bringing hope to the children of Nicaragua.

- **Michael Zelek**, volunteer to Nicaragua for several years, is our featured speaker.
- **Sally Baucke**, a comedian who has performed throughout the U.S., is our emcee.
- **Live auction** with lots of valuable items including a vacation at an Italian villa.
- **Silent auction** featuring scores of items just in time for holiday gift-giving.
- A **delicious buffet** with Latin American fare, cheeses, fresh tropical fruits and veggies, and an assortment of yummy desserts.
- **Live entertainment** to tap your foot to or turn loose and dance.
- **Up-to-the-minute news** about The Tin Roof Foundation projects and the children we are helping.

Educating, Healing, and Feeding a Generation

FEED THEM. EDUCATE THEM. LOVE THEM.

You can give these children the gift of hope.



PHOTO BY PETER SCHALLER

In the remote mountainous region of Nicaragua where we are now working, 58% of the children suffer from malnutrition. By establishing combination school/meal centers, we help heal their diseases caused by malnutrition as well as prepare them for economic self-sufficiency by educating them. You can help the children escape the cycle of poverty. Donate to The Tin Roof Foundation today.

PLEASE MAIL YOUR CONTRIBUTION TODAY

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