



Maya with children from Residential Home for Children with Mental Disorders in Verhniiosyniovydnens'k, Ukraine

Meet Maya...

Since January of 2009, she has been visiting orphanages around the world and continues to spread kindness and love. Her devotion to children in need has inspired her to establish *Maya's Hope*.

Love comes to those who still hope

HOPE n. (hōp): the belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life.

After the unexpected loss of her mother in 2007, Maya Rowencak decided to reach out to children who may have never experienced the unconditional love that can only come from a parent. "I now understand the pain and loneliness of motherless children," explained Maya.

She began her journey in Christmas of 2008, visiting orphanages in her mother's native land of the Philippines. She had one goal in mind: to create new friendships. The children Maya met touched her heart and inspired her to be more than just a friendly visitor. She was determined to expand her efforts. Maya researched history, culture, travel and most importantly her own background.

Next stop: Ukraine – the motherland of her father. Because of the language barrier, Maya had to find a creative way to communicate and bonded with children over something as simple as her digital camera. By taking funny photos and laughing for hours, she again created those priceless friendships.

Upon Maya's return to New York, fate brought Sister Bernarda Arkatin, who shares the same passion and devotion for the less fortunate, into her life.

"She has the biggest heart in New York City," said Maya fondly.

With continued visits to orphanages in the Philippines and Ukraine and the help of Sister Bernarda, Maya's efforts grew and numerous care packages were shipped.



Babies at Bethlehem with baby powder donated by Medline

One child in particular, 12-year-old Mary Jane, was provided a hearing aid for the first time in her life.

Currently, Maya and her talented team of volunteers send monthly shipments of clothing, books, toys, medical and dental supplies, arts and crafts, and much more to countless children in need.

Maya's Hope is fortunate to partner with companies such as Barnes & Noble, Starkey Hearing Foundation, and Freud Carson.

"I want to do this for as long as I have the means to," said Maya. "These children remind me what life is all about... being happy with what you have and enjoying the blessings of each day." ■

- **Freud Carson** donated **\$28,000** worth of **dental products** and equipment – our largest donation to date!
- **Starkey Hearing Foundation** provided a **hearing aid** for Mary Jane, an orphan at Bethlehem.
- Donations sent to orphanages have a total value exceeding **\$200,000!**



Child at Caritas Kiev receives a card, blanket and coat donated by the Academy of St. Elizabeth

IN THIS ISSUE:

Ukraine's Unforgotten	3
Where in the World is Norzagaray?.....	4
Give Hope to a Child	5
Joy to the World!	6
Our Sponsors.....	7

WHAT IS MAYA'S HOPE

See. Through direct visits to institutions for orphaned and disadvantaged children, Maya's Hope observes conditions of institutions, the standards of care and education, the integrity and behavior of care workers, social workers and staff. We then evaluate the needs of the institutions or individual children.

Build. Maya's Hope builds relationships with administrators and individuals whose concern leads them to be involved in the lives of disadvantaged children.

Give. Maya's Hope raises awareness for disadvantaged children around the world by raising funds and finding corporate and individual sponsors. Maya's Hope ships humanitarian aid including: clothing, books, toys, medical, art, and dental supplies.

Hope. After receiving aid, institutions send letters, photos, and updates about the children and their progress.

Love. Maya's Hope maintains relationships with administrators providing continuous aid and awareness. Maya's Hope not only brings aid and hope to children in need, but also love.



Mary Jane wearing hearing aid donated by Starkey Hearing Foundation

MARY JANE'S Song

Mary Jane has been living in silence for the past 12 years. Thanks to the Starkey Hearing Foundation and generous individuals, Mary Jane is learning to hear and sing her own song. She receives speech therapy and is making progress!



MAYA'S HOPE

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Thank You

FOR HELPING MARY JANE RECEIVE THE GIFT OF HEARING!

Juliet Barbieri, Matthew Barry, Mary Blihar, Tahnee Bodansky, Cecile Casal, Dr. Marina Chernin, Ethan Cohen, Yale Cohen, Edward Dever, Kat Dudina, Elizabeth Eames, Lisa Forsee, Jessie France, Irene Gomez, Mary Jacobs, Barbara Kaminsky, Maria Lancheros, Manuela Latino, Marie Leznecki, Kate Liberatore, Andrea Lubrano, Rosita Mang, Mark Marozza, Michael Meltzer, Ryan Miller, Aviann Mohammed, Karen Morao, Greg Myers, Nakajima Family, Alexandre Pariente, Zaldy Patron, Brian Peterson, Paige Quillin, Maribeth Remulla-Mejia, Michelle Rodriguez, Maya Rowencak, Mathilde Sanson, Tony Sedia, Lyn Velayo, Verunka Vklava, Donna Wandry

UKRAINE'S *Unforgotten*

By Maya Rowencak

Sr. Bernarda Arkatin has been visiting the less fortunate of Ukraine for the past 20 years and sends aid to orphanages, institutions for mentally and physically handicapped, and health clinics. Her profound concern for the lost and forgotten children of Ukraine drives her to grow her mission.

Last September, I witnessed this inspiring one-woman mission in action. Sr. Bernarda introduced me to our first orphanage, Children's Internaut of Bila Zerkva, a boys' institution for the mentally handicapped. The children's energy was invigorating. Despite their handicaps, the children proudly proceeded to show me the vegetable garden they had grown, the livestock they care for, and their many talents. The staff's devotion was evident in every corner of the orphanage.

While Children's Internaut of Bila Zerkva is a state-run facility, the atmosphere is loving. Like most institutions of its kind in Ukraine, the orphanage receives limited funds from the government.

Due to Ukraine's weak economy, administrators have a greater responsibility keeping orphanages functioning.

Other orphanages were not so pleasant. Most were remnants of the Soviet past. We came across an abandoned, dilapidated building, and to our surprise, it was a functioning orphanage filled with children. Three orphanages we visited did not have heat. Children often wear coats and hats to keep warm at school in winter.

Many institutions in Ukraine rely on donations. Even so, it is known that corruption is rampant. My duty is to observe and determine which orphanages are in great need and to develop working relationships with trustworthy individuals. I need to be certain that the children will receive the aid we work so hard to send. Each child deserves our help.

One of the highlights from my trip to Ukraine was visiting a home for six children started by the Sisters of St. Basil. Without speaking a word in Ukrainian, I played and laughed so

much with the children (ages 7 - 13). We communicated through positive energy and a sense of community and belonging. Those children without parents were loved as much as any children in the world.

“Children often wear coats and hats to keep warm at school in winter.”

Every time I return home to the States, I treasure the memories of the faces, the laughter, the smiles of all the children. These children we help are the sweet reminders of life's beauty and the inspiration of Maya's Hope. ■

My own Ukrainian father was once a forgotten and displaced child after World War II and was given the opportunity of a new life in the United States. Like those same Americans who helped my family, I will not forget these children and will continue to find ways to provide hope for them.



Maya and Sr. Bernarda at children's home in Ivano-Frankivsk, Ukraine



Sr. Bernarda and child at orphanage in Bila Zerkva, Ukraine

Where in the world is... NORZAGARAY?

BY MAYA ROWENCAK

SHARING GIFTS

"Norzagaray... NorZacariah, Norzacary, huh?"

Norzagaray, I learned, was one of the rural and impoverished regions where many of the children of Bethlehem House of Bread were born. The birthplace of my "angels."

THE JOURNEY TO NORZAGARAY

One afternoon I went to Norzagaray to visit the mountains' children and families. Among the lush green mountains of this region, was a concrete monument – a somber grey factory. This foreign investment quarry was the bleak symbol of the livelihood of the people I would soon meet.

We parked along the road and climbed another 30 minutes until we reached the gate to the community of people in Norzagaray. Passing through the village, we saw people curiously peering from the window squares of their shacks. I came bearing gifts of baby shoes and fitted any baby cradled in its mother's arms.

LIFE IN NORZAGARAY

I found a little girl who looked like a doll in a red dress. She was playing outside of her bamboo shack. Her mother, a coalmaker, greeted me. Her hands were wrinkled and black. She had problems breathing and looked 20 years older than her 35 years. Her oldest daughter was pregnant at 17.

Her husband, also a coalmaker, passed by me wearing broken sandals and carrying two 5-gallon buckets for fetching water down by a stream – the only available water source.

LIVELIHOOD

Coal-making and quarrying are the main jobs available. Coal-making, a seasonal labor, is common work for women.



Men work at the factory or explode rock to gather minerals. Some fathers have lost limbs from explosions or have died. Their children are admitted into the orphanage if the children show malnourishment. Although a means of steady income, the factory also provides deplorable conditions, and workers cannot rise above the poverty level. Faced with these options, many families simply cannot afford to care for their children. Children here are not sent to orphanages because they are unwanted; parents are unable to earn enough to feed them.

*"Orphanages are not a choice.
They are a means of survival."*

LIFESTYLE FOR CHILDREN

The fortunate children who can afford to go to school have to climb hills and cross rivers, often without shoes; the other children help their families earn a living.

This isolated region doesn't allow for an escape from poverty. With limited options for work, many families eat packets of soy sauce for dinner.

That is when I decided to help them.

HEALING SOLES

I returned to Norzagaray with boxes of donations and 100 pairs of slippers. After having seen children barefoot in markets around Bethlehem House of Bread orphanage, I was determined to fit every child with a pair of slippers in Norzagaray.

In the village center, we discovered a hoard of children awaiting their new footwear. The excited children selected their own pair of slippers, while the social workers and I distributed clothing, toys, and fabric. A pair of slippers for a child is a relief to a parent here.

After speaking with the social workers about the conditions and limited educational opportunities for the children, I decided to launch a sponsorship program to help each child have a more hopeful future and more comfortable childhood.



Child from the village of Norzagaray receiving a shirt donated by Garan.



SPONSOR A CHILD WITH MAYA'S HOPE



For \$30 a month, your generous sponsorship will:

- help ensure a child receives adequate medical care and nutrition
- help educate a child and build community
- offer a personal relationship between you and your child through letters, photos, and periodic updates
- provide hope for a better future

Email maya@mayashope.org to become a sponsor today!

SPONSOR A CHILD IN NORZAGARAY

Maya's Hope launched a sponsorship program with the children in the village of Norzagaray to provide hope and opportunity. In each case file, every child has the same humble wish – to go to school and to help his/her family.

Life's hardships cloud their dreams. In collaboration with Bethlehem House of Bread Orphanage and the social workers in Norzagaray, Maya's Hope is helping to provide hope for a brighter future.

Your sponsorship directly benefits a child. The only administrative costs are stamps!



Joy TO THE WORLD!

BY MAYA ROWENCAK

BABIES ARE THE JOY OF THE WORLD, especially at Bethlehem House of Bread Orphanage. Visitors, young and old, eagerly wait to be escorted into the ward to cuddle, cradle, and kiss the little angels. Upon entering the infants ward, you discover the cries and smiles of babies. They themselves do not realize the worrisome future they have, while some have already forgotten the smell of their own mother.

During my stays at Bethlehem, I organize my time among babies, toddlers, "big girls," and staff. I do my best to engage each child. My mornings begin with the pitter patter of little feet from girls running up and down the hallway, then the taps at my door as the girls coo, "Ate (Big Sister) Maya!" Then it is off to prayer, breakfast, and playtime with the babies, while the rest of the children are in school.

The babies who have been at Bethlehem for more than a month are usually well fed and incredibly active. As I make my rounds, hugging and holding each baby, I meet a silent baby girl. Her mother abandoned her that very morning.

She stared at me blankly as if to say, "Where am I?" She had scraggly, thinning hair, and weak limbs. Her arms and legs seemed weightless.

"What's her name?" I asked. Nurse Elvie sang, "Joy! Joy to the World!"

No smile, no laugh. Nothing. Joy's spirit was shriveled. When I picked her up she just sat in my arms. I asked the staff to take a picture of this "abandonata" and me. But still... no joy.

I held and rocked her for an hour. She was alone with me, this foreigner who kept speaking to her in English. I felt the heaviness of her little heart. When I first fed her, she gobbled every grain of rice. She feared that there would be no more spoonfuls. I fed her as much as she wanted – we bonded. She trusted me.

I examined little Joy. She had scars and scratches on her arms, ankles, and in the folds of her neck. Her knees had rough skin and dirt was under her nails. Her hair produced crawling families of lice. I cleaned her nails, pulled lice from her hair, smothered her with kisses and big squeezes. Still, nothing.

When I gave her back to the nurse, finally... a reaction! She cried and howled. I kept on kissing her and stroking her head, but she panicked and tried to grab for me. I left, but later that night, Joy chose me to be her best friend. For those days, we were inseparable. When the nurse bathed her or changed her diaper, she screamed for mercy. Back in my arms, she magically was quieted. Stubborn, she wouldn't smile, but she was attached.

Every morning, she waited for me to pick her up from her bamboo crib to start our day of fun adventure. At meals, she quietly sat on my lap. The staff teased me that I spoiled her. She deserved every bit of love I could offer.

At the canteen, Joy recognized two boys ...her older brothers. Her eyes seemed to say, "there you are!" It was a sweet reunion.

My last evening, my angel was already asleep in her crib. I picked her up, and she awoke annoyed until recognition dawned in her eyes. She joined me in the playpen for our last slumber party. She fell asleep on top of me. She slept peacefully, finally.

While she rarely showed any joy, she was comforted around me. I too was comforted by her love for me.

Months after, I received a picture of a plump baby in the nurse's arms. "Joy to the world!" I thought.

Joy's mother eventually returned and took her three children back to their village in Norzagaray. I plan to visit her and her family when I return. ■

MORE ABOUT JOY

Joy was about 7 months old, malnourished and living in a small hut. She comes from a family of 10 children; her mother is 30 years old. Her family lives in Norzagaray. While she is reunited with her biological family, we will do our best to monitor her progress and make sure that she no longer faces malnourishment.



Joy's first day at Bethlehem



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Firefly Children's Boutique
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Munchkin
Safari Ltd.



Child at a Tuberculosis clinic in Lviv, Ukraine

Maya's Hope is thankful to partner with **Charlie Holley**, President of **Freud Carson**. They have donated \$28,000 worth of dental products, including hand pieces, an ultrasonic scaler, and domestic shipping costs for it all. They are truly a reason to smile.



Garan Inc. regularly donates clothing, toys and other items to **Maya's Hope**. We are grateful to **David Fligel** and **Jessie France** for their constant concern for children in need.



Baby playing with toy donated by Jack Rabbit Creations

THANK YOU FOR SPONSORING A CHILD!

Jennifer Balagna
Russell Bennett
Assad Clark
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Ethan Cohen
Yale Cohen
Lana Dickinson
Pavlina Fedakova
Irene Gomez
Deanna Hernandez-Arza
Mary Jacobs
Diane Lawley
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Michael Meltzer
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Neica Murray
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Children at Bethlehem House of Bread Orphanage, Bulacan Philippines

Hugs!

Hugs to **Sr. Bernarda** for sharing her mission in Ukraine. Maya's Hope looks forward to building relationships with many more orphanages.

Hugs to **Hailey Myziuk** of **HelloHailey** for designing countless media pages for emails Facebook and marketing campaigns, holiday cards, and the newsletter!

Hugs to **Michael Meltzer** for all his legal and marketing expertise and **Alexandra Gerros** for her savvy business skills.

Hugs to **Leila Fernando-Tolosa** for being a committed partner in the Philippines.

Hugs to **Rene Perez-Bode** of **Starkey Hearing Foundation** for providing a hearing aid for Mary Jane.



MISSION Maya's Hope helps disadvantaged children living in poverty and helps provide hope by instilling value and purpose in each child.



MAYA'S HOPE

follow:  **mayashope** and  **Maya's Hope**

email: maya@mayashope.org visit: www.mayashope.org

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