

## CONTINUED...



Dr. Javier Lupercio Medina is the psychologist who created and runs Eugénesis. "I am a very rich man," Lupercio said. "I just don't have a lot of money."

## Mexico

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government study had found in the downtown area at least 1,600 children under the age of 14 whose only home is the streets.

My letter to Mary Kay told about a local orphanage that was trying to make a difference. Eugénesis, whose name means "A new beginning for that which we have created," is a nonprofit agency that believes we are individually and together responsible for the poverty and social problems our societies have created.

Thus, Eugénesis' mission is to rescue young girls from the streets (with their babies and/or younger siblings) in order to feed, clothe, shelter, educate and nurture them. Many of the street children are girls, often as young as 8, who are forced to survive by becoming prostitutes. By the time they are 21, some girls have as many as six or eight children of their own.

I had met Eugénesis' director, Dr. Javier Lupercio Medina, during one of my many excursions to explore the "real Guadalajara." Dr. Lupercio is a psychologist who, as a young graduate student working with street children, became so involved with his project that he never left. He is now the energy behind Eugénesis.

The idea for Eugénesis was conceived in 1986 and, in 1990, Eugénesis opened its first home with only six girls. Since then, the agency has served more than 180 children and wishes it had the resources to do more. It tries to be more than an institution, providing the home and family these children have never known.

Dr. Lupercio explained that Eugénesis has chosen to help girls out of the belief that girls — women — are the foundation of the family. They give life to others, then educate and provide the basic values that bond the family. The family, in turn, provides the basis for all of society. Eugénesis' motto, he explained, is "If we save one girl, we will save an entire generation."

Dr. Lupercio's enthusiasm was so contagious that I shared it in my letter. I asked Mary Kay whether St. Ambrose might want to help. In October, she replied that the parish had decided to dedicate its annual Advent project, Lights of Love, to benefit Eugénesis.

In the Lights of Love project, people donate \$5 in the name of a deceased loved

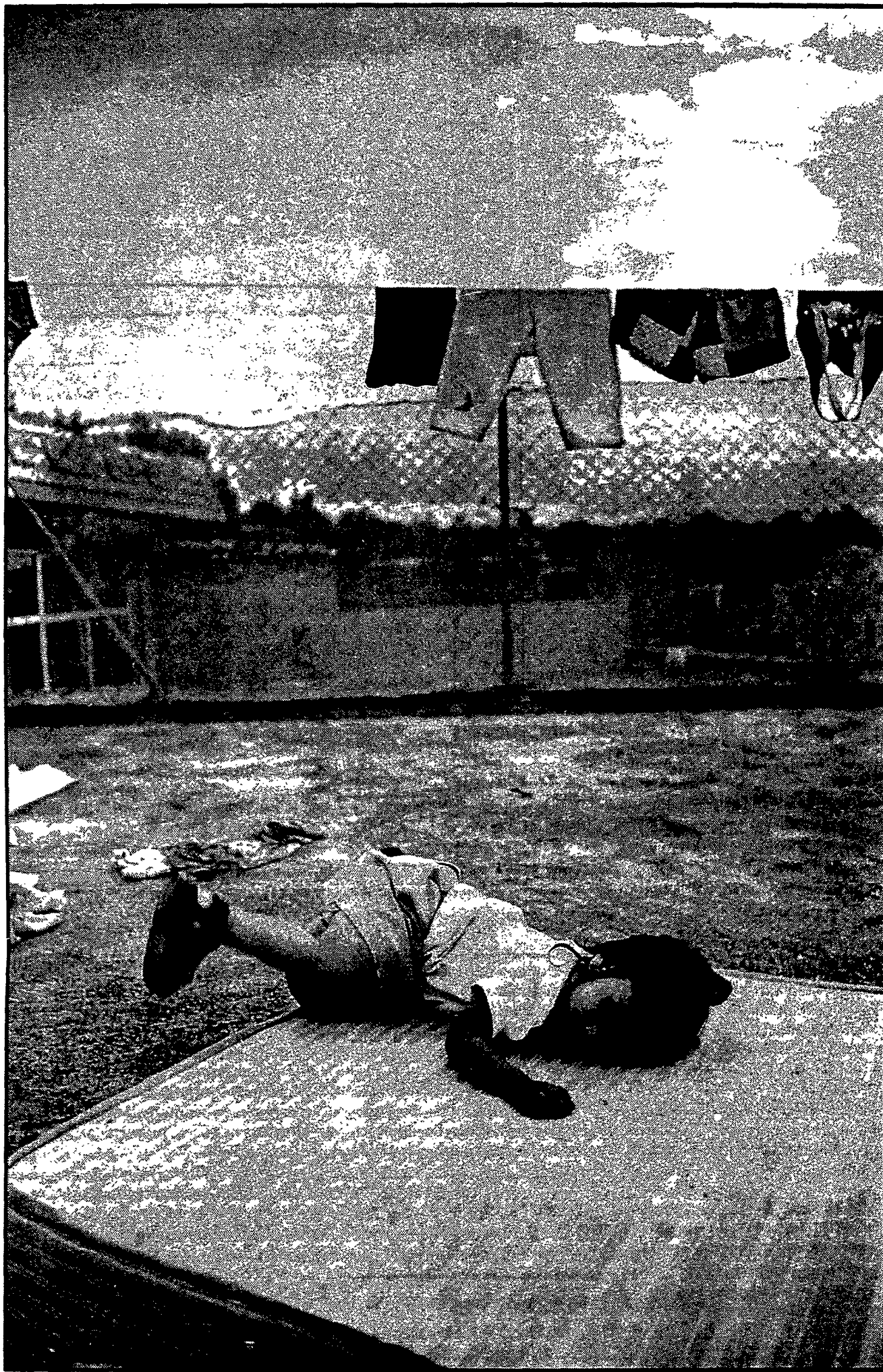
one. The parish adds a light to its Advent giving-tree and the deceased person's name is written on an Advent chain. The proceeds are sent to charitable causes.

Mary Kay and Vicki Iannettone, the parish's religious education administrator, were key coordinators. They promoted the Eugénesis project from the pulpit and in the weekly bulletin. They made a poster of the pictures I sent them of the children and displayed it alongside the church's Advent giving-tree, magnificently adorned with a chain of names of deceased relatives and, of course, the Lights of Love.

My job, in addition to sending photographs, was to tell the story of Eugénesis through a series of letters to the congregation. One letter was published in the church bulletin each week during Advent.

Eugénesis operates three homes, housing approximately 80 children at any time, I explained. The main "casa" shelters 20-30 preadolescent and adolescent girls, their children and younger siblings — usually between the ages of 3 and 8. A second house cares for girls 1 to 8 years old, while a third works with young women between 15 and 18. Ultimately, the agency hopes to open and operate a total of seven such homes.

The need in Mexico is great. Only a block from where we lived, in a rather exclusive, upper middle class neighborhood, a family with six children worked the streets every day. It was not a choice for them. It was how they survived. From



A 2-year-old girl lies on an old mattress on the roof of Eugénesis. The mission statement of Eugénesis reads, "If we save one girl, we will save an entire generation."

dawn's first light, the mom walked between cars, hawking gum, puppets or rubber maps of Mexico. Dad sold fruit or newspapers. Their baby, then about 4 months old, spent the day in a hammock tied between two trees. When traffic slowed or the light changed, one of the family members walked by and rocked the hammock.

Meanwhile, the couple's toddlers played with stones or empty bottles on the median strip near one of the busiest intersections in Guadalajara. Sometimes the boy was tethered to a tree to keep him safe. After school and on weekends, the three older children joined the family. They washed windshields or sold roses well into the night. I imagine there was little time for homework and almost no chance the lives of these children would ever change. Yet they were lucky. They had a family who cared.

The girls of Eugénesis have been abandoned by their families. Some have been beaten for failing to beg enough money for food. Others have been sexually abused or prostituted.

Rescued when she was barely 2 years

old, Gladys had been badly abused by her parents. She arrived at Eugénesis with bruises and marks all over her tiny body, including the clear imprint of a shoe on her chest. In addition, her ears had been repeatedly bitten. But this was not the worst. Gladys, barely out of infancy, had also been sexually violated.

Juanita's case is just as heartbreaking. She arrived at Eugénesis at the age of 13, suffering from serious malnutrition and weighing only 57 pounds. On the streets, she was literally starving to death.

"We needed to develop a special diet for her and she ultimately regained her health," Dr. Lupercio said. "Sadly, however, we could not cure her developmental disabilities that resulted from so many years of malnutrition."

Gladys and Juanita are but two examples of Mexico's street children.

And though many of the children's stories have sad beginnings, the endings are often full of hope and promise. Maru is a beautiful young woman of 17 who, within the year, would be required to leave the protective shelter of Eugénesis. She came to Eugénesis as an abandoned and abused