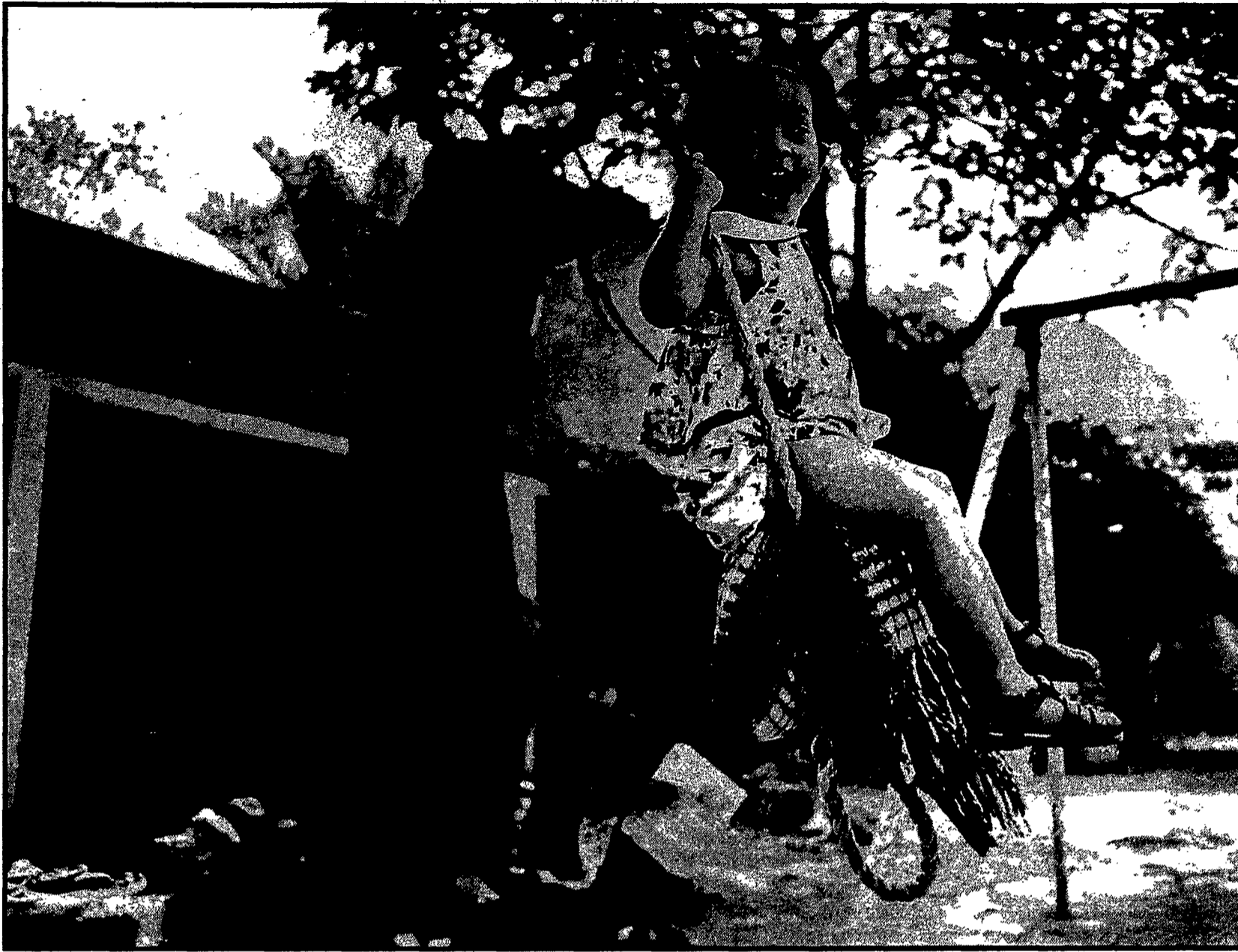


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A young girl flies through the air on a rope swing in the back yard of Eugénesis. The girls were out of school for a week for Easter vacation, and were able to play together more than usual. Most of the girls come from broken homes, but are very close — they fight and they play and they depend on one another just like sisters.



In addition to not having enough funding, it is difficult for Eugénesis to find responsible women who want to live with and take care of 30 girls, and who also are good role models. Only one "mamá," Rosie, was living at Eugénesis main house, so the older girls often pick up the slack of mothering. Here, an older girl comforts a 2-year-old who could not get to sleep late one night.



Two young teenagers watch their favorite television show at Eugénesis. Much like in the United States, teenage girls in Mexico are very involved in pop culture. Even these girls, who have next to nothing, have many of the same interests as American teenagers.

child. There she was fed, sheltered and provided with clothes, shoes and health care. She was also given chores and taught responsibility. Her birthdays and achievements were celebrated, and her mistakes lovingly corrected. She found "sisters" with whom to gossip and adults to protect and care for her.

about \$45 per day.

"It is not a job to become rich," Dr. Lupercio acknowledged. "It is a job of love."

The first time I visited Eugénesis, the children showed me a treasured photo album documenting christenings, first Communions, birthdays and graduations. We came across a picture of a little boy, the son or sibling of one of the street girls that Eugénesis rescues.

About 2-years-old, this child, Luis, had deep brown eyes you could fall into. His smile was so big and bright, the picture practically glowed. A beautiful child — the kind of kid you automatically scoop up into your arms and hug.

"Yes, he has done very well with us," Dr. Lupercio said in his serious, soft-spoken voice. "He is now fat and happy. But he spent six months in the hospital before coming here."

As a tiny, abandoned infant, Luis had been uncovered in a pile of garbage by a

pack of street dogs. Why they did not kill and eat him is a mystery.

While Eugénesis is recognized and appreciated by state and local governments, it receives no financial support from them. Thus it depends on donations of money, goods and services from individuals and private businesses for the \$100 per month it needs to care for each child.

"Sometimes I worry," Dr. Lupercio said, "that I will not have enough money to properly feed my children."

When St. Ambrose Parish decided to work on behalf of Eugénesis, it began to make miracles. Its Lights of Love program raised more than 11,000 pesos (\$1,195) for Eugénesis. Nearly 200 people from the parish participated in the program.

One parishioner told me later, "Your letters made everything so much more personal. It showed us that people are not so different in other places. What you experienced in Mexico was not so different from some of our experiences here. It made the world a little smaller."

That was exactly what I saw as my mission: to show the people of St. Ambrose that we are citizens of the world, not of just our own neighborhoods. And that we are responsible for offering care and justice throughout the world. I tried to do that

by showing how like our own families the Eugénesis children are.

Like in the story of the loaves and the fishes, St. Ambrose's outreach multiplied into many gifts, helping to increase Eugénesis' support from within Mexico itself.

A group of expatriate American women, learning about the project, decided to help, too. They and their children collected food and presents to ensure that each Eugénesis child had his or her own special gift on Christmas morning.

Others decided to volunteer their time and talents. A retired psychiatrist offered to assist children with mental-health issues. A middle-school teacher at the local American School worked to pair her classes with children at Eugénesis, first as pen pals, then as mentors and tutors.

Our family returned to the Rochester area during the summer of 1999. That Christmas, the people of St. Ambrose again chose to support Eugénesis, raising \$1,195 through the Lights of Love program. A parish soup supper also benefited the children. The supper provided a chance for our family to share our stories and experiences with parishioners.

We had helped to bind people together across thousands of miles. We had helped overcome differences in languages and cultures. We had helped to make a small miracle.

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EDITORS' NOTE: Staff photographer Andrea Dixon made a side trip during her April vacation in Mexico to take pictures for this story.

Freelance writer Donna Marbach is a former staff writer for the Easter Seal Society, American Lung Association and Volunteers of America. She and her husband, Joseph Brennan, have five children, ages 8 to 16. She has taught children's liturgy, first Communion and first penance classes; and has served as a board member of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches as well as chairman of the Rochester Interfaith Jail Ministry. She currently does marketing for Scholar's Choice, a small business in Rochester.