

**"The best gift one can bestow on a friend
is a happy memory."**

New York Times, Dec. 1894

Memory is such a gift of God. It brings such joy and satisfaction to recall past experiences and to reflect on their importance in one's life. Our past experiences both positive and negative pave the road to understanding and bettering our lives. Connecting with an old friend revives the spirit and makes us appreciate the ties once shared.

With this in mind, I was delighted when a dynamic person from my past called me to inquire about me and the Residence for the Elderly Poor here in Panama. Memories rushed in as I remembered Glenna Orr and her kindergarten and fifth grade students from the Howard Air Force Base. From the Fall of 1993 to the Spring of 1994 Glenna and her young companions enhanced the quality of our lives. It is difficult to decide who enjoyed the weekly visits more, the impressionable children or the grateful elderly men and women. LOVE was in practice through the children's generous gesture to visit us in an ongoing fashion. Simplicity and innocence were shared.

Our oceanfront setting with an open park provided the afternoon atmosphere of visiting and touching through hugs and handshakes. The children attended the green area by weeding the garden and raking our leaves. Watching children motivated by love touches the heart. The group had a great idea to visit the rooms of each resident. One child observed that the residents lacked plant life in their rooms. Shortly after, all residents were given a plant for their room. Dear Edelmira, a tiny, fragile 89 year old woman was delighted. She understood the instructions for the afternoon sun to mean for her to daily take the plant outdoors for two hours. She faithfully sat beside the plant, watching it grow. She fascinated the children, and although she could barely communicate due to a stroke, she communicated volumes to the children by her preciousness. She loved her plant.

Then there was Gwendolyn, an 87 years old blind, bilingual, Afro-American woman. She had no family to come and visit her so the children were her family visits. They sat with her on her bed. Her laughter and interest in them were gifts to be received. The children learned about her love of her music, and she played the tambourine at the daily liturgies. For Christmas the children surprised Gwendolyn with a gift of a new tambourine for her personal use. This instrument became her pride and joy.

Both Edelmira and Gwendolyn died in 1997 well accompanied and loved. They left us with happy memories. To know them was to love them. This was the mutual experience that volunteers receive when they give of themselves. The inter-generational bonds serve each generation not to fear the natural aging process, but to realize that love is for all ages.