



Celebrating PEOPLE

Helping Others Lifelong Passion for Alvie Bello

*Wherever people are in need – whether in her local neighborhood, her native Philippines or, most recently, Haiti – **Non Clinical Safety (NCS) Compliance Coordinator Alvie Bello** is dedicated to helping in any way she can.*

The man was desperate. His wife had died in Haiti’s devastating Jan. 12, 2010 earthquake and, like many others escaping the ruins of Port-au-Prince, he found his way to the northwest coastal village of Bombardopolis, holding two small hands.

“I need to feed my kids,” he implored, one of hundreds of grieving voices heard by the volunteers at Orphans’ International Helpline (OIH), a non-profit center dedicated to helping children affected by Haiti’s rampant poverty.

Among the volunteers was Alvie Bello, Roche NCS Compliance Coordinator, who has been involved with the humanitarian organization for several years and now sponsors five children from Bombardopolis – an area so remote that “the U.N.



Alvie Bello holds the camera in one hand as she leans in to pose with her young friends during a February 2010 visit to Bombardopolis, Haiti, where she is an active volunteer and sponsors five children through the non-profit organization, Orphans’ International Helpline. The kids, she said, “love getting their pictures taken!”

didn’t even know it existed after the hurricanes of 2008,” she said.

With just one generator, no running water and a two-mile walk over steep, rocky hills to find potable water, OIH resources in Bombardopolis were already stretched thin. But the need has been overwhelming since the earthquake, which also destroyed OIH offices in Port-au-Prince.

“They lost everything. They didn’t have any way to get food for the children in Bombardopolis,” recalled Alvie, who quickly arranged to fly down to assist in any way she could with OIH co-founder and president, Jean Florvilus.

She and fellow OIH workers were finally able to buy sacks of wheat, corn and rice in Gonaive. They packed the goods into a dilapidated rented pickup truck and sent it on its five-hour bumpy journey to Bombardopolis, where the ranks of the hungry have grown dramatically, and children



Wheat, corn, beans and rice are the main food source for the children at OIH. Sponsored or not, no child is turned away when food is served.



During her February visit, Alvie and fellow volunteers were able to purchase sacks of wheat, corn and rice in the town of Gonaive, where they loaded supplies into this rented pickup truck and sent it on its five-hour bumpy journey to Bombardopolis.

wander around shoeless and in tattered clothes.

“People who left Bombardopolis to go to Port-au-Prince returned after the earthquake, and hundreds of others found their way there,” explained Alvie, who, during her most recent visit in early February took nearly 250 photographs of children in the small village in the hopes of finding sponsors for them through an OIH website she is helping develop.

Those photos – including the two starving youngsters who arrived with their widowed father – are now on Alvie’s kitchen table in her North Jersey home, where she works on cataloging them whenever she gets a chance.

“We never saw the father again after that one day, but we have the photo, and my friends at OIH are going to try and find the kids so we can get sponsors for them,” she said.

Heritage of Caring

Her outreach in Haiti is just one of many things Alvie does to help others. A glimpse in her garage reveals bins of disparate items: shoes she picked up at a sale, coats collected at her church, secondhand shirts still in good condition, toys, diapers and household goods.

The containers are labeled “Haiti,” “El Salvador” and “Philippines.” “There’s even one called “Neighborhood.”

“I collect things and go through the bins when people come by in need,” she said simply.

It is a habit – and passion – developed long before Alvie drove cross country from Palo Alto, where she worked for nearly 10 years, with NCS Study Director



Women carry water in buckets on their heads for two miles over steep, rocky hills so there is water to drink and to mix cement for a missionary house under construction on the OIH property in Bombardopolis.

Denise Knapp to their new posts in Nutley following the Genentech integration. (Denise also sponsors a child through OIH.)

Growing up in San Jose, Calif., where her family settled after coming from the Philippines, Alvie watched her parents open their door to anyone who needed food, a place to stay, a ride or gas money.

“One of my parents’ community outreach efforts is called Bread Ministry. Through the church they get food that is about to expire from grocery stores, and my mother makes boxes, often taking things from our refrigerator and pantry if there wasn’t enough. My father would always drop people off or help them out. The family house is like a 24-hour restaurant, day care and shelter,” she said.

Four-legged strays also were welcomed (at one time they had 12 dogs!), which the petite scientist says fueled her love for animals and led her to earn her B.S. in Animal Sciences from the University of California-Davis.

Deep Rewards

At times it is hard for Alvie to reconcile the extreme differences between her comfortable life and the great poverty she has witnessed.

“Sometimes it gets depressing, but it is a priority to me to try and make life better for others. And I find it exciting to be part of something bigger than me,” she said. “When the kids in Haiti lean on you or hold your hand and call you mama, it is very rewarding.”

“I don’t have a lot of connections or money, and I am not a surgeon who can staff a medical clinic down

there, but everyone can make a difference,” she added.

Over the years, Alvie has been involved in missionary trips to El Salvador and Philippines, and plans to return to Haiti in August. Along with helping OIH create a useful website, she has helped with fundraising to purchase an industrial drill.



Alvie poses on the roof of the OIH missionary house with a few of the approximately 300 children being sponsored through the humanitarian organization.

“The [OIH] goal is to drill a lot of wells in the Bombardopolis area and different parts of Haiti so people have access to clean water,” she explained.

Now she is helping the group raise funds to buy a truck or SUV to use for transporting food, driving children to doctors and other needs.

“It costs so much money to rent vehicles and we don’t have many choices in terms of reliability, especially now with what we can rent in Haiti,” she said.

In May, Alvie will travel to Missouri with the OIH president and another board member to promote the organization.

“We have been given an opportunity to be interviewed by a TV station, so we’re very happy that many people will get to hear first hand from those who have been to Haiti and have been working with the kids and community,” she said.

When another earthquake hit northern Haiti the third

week of March, Alvie was relieved to hear that the youngsters at OIH were unharmed, but 50 students from a nearby Baptist high school were seriously injured when the second floor of the building collapsed.

She said the lack of resources to construct earthquake-resistant buildings in Bombardopolis will deter OIH from adding a second floor to its existing missionary house, or plan for two stories in its future school or dormitories.



Smith Pierre is one of many children in need of sponsorship through OIH, which helps provide education and health care for its sponsored children. “He kept following Jean and me as we surveyed the OIH property,” said Alvie.

Despite setbacks and challenges, Alvie said her humanitarian efforts have intensified her gratitude.

“I think it should be a requirement for families to take their kids to places where there is no running water, or where they see orphaned kids taking care of themselves,” she said. “It will make them more grateful for what they have, and not stress that they didn’t get the \$100 sneakers when there are kids running around without any shoes at all.”



Alvie poses with her canine family, Oboe, Madison and Kahana, in California before relocating to New Jersey last year for her NCS post in Nutley.