



Dear Friends,

August 2015

I frequently tell people that the Lingap project is a miracle and it truly is. Children are alive today thanks only to this project and kids who previously had no hope whatsoever are being educated, graduating from high school and college and are going on to lead productive and happy lives. They are beginning to give back to those less fortunate, just as they were themselves not so long ago. It is only our donors, supporters and sponsors who have made this possible....all of you. For this, I must say thank you.



The Lingap Center has been home to more than 350 wards since 2006.

Today however, rather than speaking about the children, I would like to look at the Lingap project from a completely different perspective. This letter is about our supporters - especially those who find particular meaning in their own lives as a direct result of the project. There is one in particular I would like for you to know. I first met Mr. Ambet Yangco back in 2007. He is the Sector Manager, Children, Youth and Family for the U.S. Peace Corps – Philippines, headquartered in Manila. He had contacted me to ask if we would be willing to consider applying for a Peace Corps volunteer at the Center. It was highly unusual that they would contact us since the demand for volunteers is so great and the number of volunteers is so limited, but I was simply not interested. I did not particularly want the government getting involved in the project, so I declined to apply. Ambet was persistent, so ultimately we did apply even though there was an incredible shortage of volunteers in the country and the odds of getting one were not good. Soon however, they assigned Mr. Andrew Wells from Maine to us for a two year assignment. He was a great addition to the team and the kids loved him.

When Andrew's assignment ended, Ambet quickly contacted me again asking if I would apply for another volunteer!! Two volunteers in a row was unheard of, so I asked Ambet if we could meet in person. I needed to understand why they were focusing on us so heavily. During this first meeting, I asked Ambet why he was so adamant about sending volunteers to the Lingap Center. What he told me was like a shot to my heart.

He told me that he grew up as a street child, selling anything he could including plastic bags, newspaper, vegetables etc. in Olongopo City, Luzon during the early 1980's. Olongopo is where the huge U.S. naval base at Subic Bay, Philippines was located. Olongopo was well known as one of the dirtiest, most crime ridden and evil cities in the world, known by many as the "Sin Capital of the Philippines" and Ambet grew up on its streets! This led to him becoming a 'child in conflict with the law' (CICL), busily shop lifting and pick pocketing which introduced him into gangs and drugs among other things. He told me, *"I grew up hating Americans because of what I witnessed as a child. My friends and I would peek into the different prostitution bars and see what was happening with the Filipinas. When we saw the sailors and soldiers on the streets, we would run up to them acting happy and jumping up and down, hoping for a small handout or to carry their baggage. As they would sometimes playfully toss me into the air, I would pick*

their pockets and then run off with my treasure. They would throw coins in the filthy polluted river and make children dive for just a few pesos – which they eagerly did because we had no food to eat. We did anything we could just to survive! (Fortunately, I could not swim!!)

My life on the streets changed when a small NGO, similar to the Lingap Center, offered me temporary shelter on a drop-in basis where I could sleep, eat and take a bath. However, I continued to support my family of 13 siblings by working on the streets. Three of my siblings died very young because we had no money to take them to the clinic. The shelter where I lived made the Lingap Center seem like heaven by comparison. But it was filled with the love of people who genuinely cared. What a gift they were. This is where I learned how to make candles and also ceramics made from Mt. Pinatubo ash. With their help and my newly found skills, I was able to become a working student, taking care of my family and putting myself through high school and college.”

Ambet graduated from Concordia College, Manila, Philippines (a Catholic college administered by the Sisters of the Daughters of Charity) and is now a Registered Social Worker. He is truly a self-made man who succeeded in spite of the many unbelievable challenges that life threw in his path.

But I was confused, so I asked, *“If you hated Americans, then why are you in the U.S. Peace Corps and so supportive of the Lingap project which is run by an American?”* He said, *“I believe the Peace Corps is where you get to meet some of the best representatives of America. The volunteers I’ve met have shown me the better side of America. They gave me a more balanced perspective. Volunteers are typically young, fresh college graduates. They want to change the world and really help people to make a difference in their lives. Also, the Peace Corps spends a lot of money and effort to recruit and send us volunteers so we need to ensure that volunteer assignments are successful. Otherwise, they become disillusioned and it’s a huge loss to us if they consider their assignments to be a failure and return home prematurely.”* He then said, *“We consider the Lingap Center to be one of the best facilities of its kind in the entire Philippines!! You really are changing lives for the better and not many organizations can claim that success.”* He then looked me squarely in the eye – right into the depths of my soul and said, *“I consider helping you as a way that I can repay all of the good things I received from many people who helped me survive a very challenging childhood. It is my way of giving back.”* He then added with tears running down his cheeks, *“Thank you for helping my Filipino brothers and sisters!”*

I was speechless. In my entire life, I had never had a conversation as deep and emotionally stirring as this was. Soon thereafter, we welcomed our second volunteer, Lonnie Cooper from Indiana and after he left, Allison Bay from Ohio joined us. She just completed her two year assignment and has returned to the U.S. They are all missed by the staff and the children.

It was pretty clear that Ambet’s story could have been written by any of the Lingap children who have similar histories. Given a chance, they too can do great things and can give back in so many ways. You are all helping to give them those chances!!

In the meantime, our own street education program has been in place since 2008. We have seen the need to redesign and update it in its entirety to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the children. Therefore, we have temporarily suspended it. Leading the new design effort on a volunteer basis is none other than Ambet Yangco while he continues to do his work with the Peace Corps. He is utilizing his unbelievable real-life experience of obtaining his own early education on the streets, to help us develop what I hope will ultimately become a world class street program. Following his outline, we hope to implement it early next year.

The point I am trying to make however, is that there are many, many sides to the Lingap project that most people never see or even think about. As I have said so many times, the kids are far better off thanks to the project, but the true winners are Judy and me. We have met wonderful people from all over the United States and around the world who share a common interest in helping the less fortunate. I continue to be amazed and humbled by the comments we receive from supporters telling how in some way, large or small, that their lives were touched or their lives changed by the project. Several people have shared that they found life-changing meaning in their own lives through the Lingap project. It is something they can believe in and that by helping the children, they are really helping themselves. They too are the winners. Clearly, the project is about much so much more than merely helping a few kids in need.

All of you are tremendous people and collectively you have restored our confidence that the world, in spite of all its problems, is filled with remarkable people. What a gift those friendships mean to us. Ambet is just one of the stories. He and I are now the closest of friends and we always will be. It is a friendship that I truly cherish. But, there are others. Many others. But none of the continuing Lingap miracle would have been possible if not for a few orphan kids in need and those of you who have joined the Lingap family to do something about it. Again, there is simply no way that I can thank all of you for helping to make it possible. When I think of all of these friendships and relationships, I am reminded of a quote I heard long ago:



Ambet and John at the Lingap Center 2015

“Many people will walk in and out of your life, but only true friends will leave footprints in your heart forever.”

(Author unknown)

Always keep in mind that the Lingap Children’s Foundation is a 501(c)(3) organization so all donations are fully tax-deductible. But better yet, because we believe in it so much, the Board of Directors and I pay all administrative expenses, so 100% of all donations we receive go directly to the benefit of the children.

Sincerely,

John Drake



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