With a lot of hard work and resources from volunteers and supporters like you, we are excited to announce the opening of My Refuge House! In a few short weeks, My Refuge House will open its doors to young girls desperately in need of the love and support from the dedicated and caring house staff. On September 28th, what 10 months ago was only a thought—a distant possibility—will become a reality.

In the few weeks remaining before the opening, a team of volunteers will travel to the House in the Philippines to complete the final stages of renovation and support the staff as they prepare for the challenges ahead. Among these volunteers will be Danny Cortez—Refuge House board member and pastor of New Heart Community Church—who has been an integral part of moving Refuge House from an idea to a real place where young lives can find healing.

An Unexclusive Interview with Pastor Danny Cortez

By Sari Yasui

Why is Pastor Danny’s interview “unexclusive”? Well, according to Dictionary.com, unexclusive means “accessible to all.” This was certainly the personality trait that Pastor Danny exuded when this interviewer sat down with him in the middle of a crowded Starbucks patio, and he wasn’t afraid to sing…

Interviewer Sari: If you could choose a theme song to play for the opening on September 28, what would it be?

Pastor Danny: The first song that comes to mind… (hums softly…) Right off the top of my head?! I don’t know what it’s called, but… (singing with a big grin) “Open wide the heavenly gates, the risen Lord!” That’s a pretty popular line… (starts clapping and snapping his fingers)

S: Ummm…

PD: Let’s see… Dee da la dee da… “Let the music flow, …Let the earth resound with singing…”

S: How about I Google that later?

PD: Sounds good. Good luck with that! I can’t hum in tune and I don’t really remember lyrics.

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HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

Join us for...

A Benefit Concert – “Rock for Justice”
Come join My Refuge House, Maharlika, The Social Justice Ministry and 95.9 FM The Fish as we raise money to restore one life at a time.

Featuring: Local Southern California Musicians
Date: TBA
Venue: Biola University, La Mirada, California
Seating is limited and is on a first come, first served basis.

Semi-annual Banquet
Hosted by Heart of Worship, New Heart’s sister church. A night to raise awareness about the human trafficking industry.

Date: November 23, 2008
Venue: Days Inn in Glendale, California

More info about both events TBA.

To volunteer, contact Jamie at jamie@myrefugehouse.org

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September 2008
It doesn’t take anybody special to do this, I mean, you don’t have to feel helpless just because you don’t have millions of dollars or something.

S: Do you have some concerns about what they will be exposed to?

PD: No, not at all. I want them to see that there’s evil and injustice. Of course I want to protect them from that, too. I want them to know there’s bad, but at the same time, we don’t have to turn away from it, and we can actually confront it. We’ve been having discussions about it, and it’s important to have an open dialogue about it. For them, it makes sense that we’re actually doing something about it … which is great because when we first heard about it, we were like “What can we possibly do?”

S: What are three words that come to mind when I say “The Grand Opening of the Refuge House”?

PD: Thankfulness. FINALLY. Excitement.

S: In these last few weeks before you leave, what has been the most encouraging?

PD: I’ve been encouraged by how well the staff is coming together in the Philippines, I’m really encouraged by our Director, Dr. Buenaflor. She’s really shown leadership, initiative and responsibility. She has a really high standard, high level of accountability—exceptional in fact. She’s such a perfect person for the Refuge House. It’s great we were able to find someone we can really trust. Just seeing how many people have volunteered, plus the church is coming together, and it’s great how much everyone has asked to get involved. I feel like God is moving peoples’ hearts and we’re just jumping on the train that God has started, and bringing on board all these different and talented people.

S: Tell me about your primary concerns.

PD: I’m most concerned about the unknown, about how the children will respond to being rescued. We can do everything we can to plan, make the place look nice, have unbelievable staff, get the funding … all that can be in place, but we don’t know about the heart, the condition of the children. That’s sort of the big mystery, how broken each child might be. My prayer is that they would respond well and really understand what it means to be loved unconditionally by God and people; that they could begin to trust people again, that they could be celebrated just for being them. My prayer for the children is that openness.

S: Do you have any advice for the other team members going to the Philippines for the first time?

PD: Flexibility. Flexibility is one of the biggest issues about going on these trips because you plan and hope things go one way, but there’s always a curve ball. I think communication is also really important. You want to attempt to resolve things before they get to a boiling point. One of my strongest hopes and desires for our team is unity, somehow we will all learn to work together. An attitude of servant-hood so that we can go in there as a team and not as an overseeing committee. The whole staff will be there, so hopefully by the time we get there, they’ll see that we’re not there to lord over them; we’re there to learn.

S: The week that the team is there before the actual opening, what are their goals?

PD: The major goal is to get the place ready, most likely the beautification. Maybe paint some murals? Making the place feel homey. Just getting to know the staff and understanding how we can be supportive of them. There’s this “oneness” theme I like—the idea that two different places are coming together. What I like about the grand opening is that it’s going to be a time to celebrate what God is doing, an affirming of our trust of the staff which is empowering for them. God has led us on this journey, and the staff and volunteers are the hands of this operation, and we’re here to empower them to do it. That’s something we want to convey.
Update from the July Trip

By Ben Warner
Photo by Silas Cole

The facility

The day we landed in the Philippines on the July trip we dropped off donated boxes full of clothes and sheets at the facility. The renovations to the facility were taking longer than expected, so our first priority was to supervise the job each day to get things back on schedule. Next we went about finding the correct equipment to outfit the House. Through local connections, God’s divine providence, we met a young man whose parents owned an appliance store. He helped us get some great deals, and we were not only able to purchase bunk beds with a private donation, but mattresses and much more. Significant progress was made in all areas, yet more improvement was needed in decoration, electrical, plumbing and security.

Searching for godly mothers

It was also our quest to find employees with the right qualifications—a living Christian faith and emotional maturity. We were looking for women with a calling to serve, who could be mother figures to the girls. We interviewed 3 to 5 applicants each day and heard their stories which allowed us to be first-hand listeners of these caring women’s lives. These applicants shared their stories with us—sometimes tears too—as they told us of their backgrounds and desire to serve. We interviewed about 30 applicants; from these we narrowed it down to 15. We finally selected eight women to be the House staff. Our staff members immediately began training so that when our director Dr. Buenaflor came the following week, she would already have a prepared staff.

Exploitive underage sex is common

In this city, walking down the streets, through malls, eating in restaurants, checking in and out of hotels was us taking part in a city where western men are able to interact, take out, make a transaction … a purchase of young Filipinas for sex. Seeing pedophiles out in the open, and transactions taking place in our very hotel filled us with a nauseating sadness in our stomachs.

But darkness can turn to light quickly. Hope manifests itself when a life is transformed. We had the opportunity to meet up with five girls who we saw rescued from a brothel last February. Over lunch they told us of their metamorphosis from the brothels to a new life. At McDonalds, one of these girls sang a song filled with hope, thankfulness and dreams. These are the miracles we saw, and if someone told me those girls I saw that first night rescued would transform, I wouldn’t have believed they could. But what’s too hard for God?

Is there anything?
Editor’s note:
Just in case you were wondering about Pastor Danny’s choice for a theme song, here are the lyrics. Enjoy!

**Did You Feel The Mountains Tremble?**

Did you feel the mountains tremble
Did you hear the oceans roar
When the people rose to sing of Jesus Christ the risen one
Did you feel the people tremble
Did you hear the singers roar
When the lost began to sing of Jesus Christ, the saving one
And we can see that, God, You're moving
A mighty river through the nations
When young and old return to Jesus
Fling wide, you heavenly gates
Prepare the way of the risen Lord
Open up the doors and let the music play
Let the streets resound with singing
Songs that bring Your hope
Songs that bring Your joy
Dancers who dance upon injustice
To wash away our brokenness
And here we see that, God, You're moving
A time of jubilee is coming
When young and old return to Jesus
Fling wide, you heavenly gates
Prepare the way of the risen Lord
Open up the doors and let the music play
Let the streets resound with singing
Songs that bring Your hope
Songs that bring Your joy
Dancers who dance upon injustice
And here we see that, God, You're moving
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Dancers who dance upon injustice
Open up the doors and let the music play
Let the streets resound with singing

*Lyrics by Matt Redman*