

# Magicians Without Borders

September 2009

Magicians Without Borders performs magic shows for children in refugee camps, orphanages and hospitals around the world -often in war torn places where love, laughter and magic are desperately needed. Magicians Without Borders began when Tom Verner, a professor of Psychology, was traveling through Eastern Europe in 2001 and did some magic shows in the refugee camps of Kosovo and Macedonia. The shows were so well received, that Tom decided to take a leave from his teaching and perform full time.

Tom and his wife Janet, along with other magicians and theater teachers travel to El Salvador every three months where they perform for children in the countryside and are teaching magic and theater skills to the children in the ASAPROSAR's Barefoot Angels program. Magicians Without Borders sponsors a week long Magic, Theater and Art Camp for these children who live in grinding poverty surrounded by



brutal gang violence. These young magicians have already begun to perform in orphanages, hospitals and disaster areas in El Salvador. One day some of them may travel with Tom and Janet to bring magic and laughter to other poor children in other parts of the world.

In January 2005, Tom and Janet Verner with Rob Kinslow traveled to El Salvador and performed twenty magic shows. The trip was made possible, in part, because of support from ASAPROSAR - The Salvadoran Association for Rural Health. They performed for many of the children ASAPROSAR serves. They did magic shows in ten of the sixteen Nucleos (preschool kindergartens) that ASAPROSAR has set up in the countryside of Santa Ana. The Sprouts of Hope (three to seven year olds) are an important part of ASAPROSAR's vision to change the future of El Salvador so Janet did a workshop with the Nucleos teachers on teaching art and also after many of the magic shows, she did art with the

children. Tom and Rob spent three marvelous days teaching magic to eighteen Barefoot Angels.

Tom, Janet and long time friend and supporter Marie Rice have made many trips to ASAPROSAR since the first in 2005. Each trip has goals they hope to accomplish. During their last trip in May of 2009 Marie Rice and Tom worked with a dozen of the Barefoot Angels teaching magic and theater/performance skills to new and veteran (ones they have been working with for the past five years) magicians. They had three goals for the trip:

1. To maintain the continuity with the magic training program



2. To help develop the "next generation" of magicians. The older ones have already or are graduating from high school and moving on with their lives. A number of them are in post-secondary programs (nursing school, computer training, etc) and a number finishing high school.

3. To help the veteran magicians to further develop their magic skills.

During their trip in May there were nineteen hours of work with the kids during the week-end and two days during which all of them performed a number of times. They had formal and informal meetings with all of the magic students. During these meetings they worked to further accomplish goals #1 and 2.

They had talks with most of the veteran and "new generation" magicians to help them see themselves more and more as leaders in the Barefoot Angels Program through their magic performing. They also discussed that as in the Angels Program they need to teach the younger children who do not attend the magic camp. There was a strong emphasis -from Magicians Without Borders and the ASAPROSAR Staff on the connection between the learning of magic and the development of leadership qualities and skills. The kids really saw the connection between the skills needed to be a good performer and the skills needed to be a strong leader in the Barefoot Angels Program. They will build on this in the future.

Tom is heading back to ASAPROSAR this month for two weeks and will build on his successes in May by continuing to work with some of the new magicians. Tom also plans to travel to

Guatemala with two of the most experienced and talented magicians in the Barefoot Angels program. They will perform at schools in Guatemala and share what they have learned with others.

