

One night
it all began
one night i never
thought you would
leave left but then
again i really never
thought about it
love ~~was~~ you part
of many resources
i thought i could
get one with life
but i can't it hard
so many time
help but i really
don't now why
~~think~~ always
~~about~~ about
i could not get
her uper my
ne of my life,
de is hard to
e with i gess
seller's stand
to life
b. Dola medkano
thurt. 10, 1994

HOPE IN THE UNSEEN

"Faithfulness, not Success" 1990-1997

16-year-old David Carrasco lay in a pool of his own blood in the parking lot of the Circle K. His life hung by a thread. He had been stabbed in almost every vital organ except his heart. Ian Danley's heart raced as he crouched by the body awaiting the emergency medical technicians drawn by a 911 call. His mother Kit arrived a few minutes after the cops. Her eyes saw the yellow police tape and her ears heard the officers talking in code into their walkie-talkies. But her heart railed against the scene: *No, not again.*

It was 1994 and virtual full-scale war had been waging between rival gangs for the past two years. Ministry leaders still recall these days with sadness. John-John Lopez was shot down at 14. Andre Lewis was executed in front of Buster's Market. Jesse Soto made the fatal mistake one afternoon of throwing eggs at cars owned by rival gang members; they returned in the evening, tires squealing and guns blazing, to blow his head off. Jose Perales died on a Saturday night with three other boys in a car wreck, the conclusion to a high-speed chase with police after they'd gotten drunk and stolen the vehicle. Death was such



Luis Medrano Jr., 21, of Phoenix, a warehouse laborer, died June 13, 1998. He was born in Washington. Survivors include his parents, Dorothy and Luis Emmrick; foster parents, No-

elia and Tony Tallabas; sisters, Dora, Estaphana, Mary Jane, Gomacinda, Janet, Angelica, Nichol and Lydia; brothers, Frutoso, Louie, Sonatane, Tony, Thomas, Jason and Beto. Services are private. Greenwood Memory Lawn Mortuary.

SHOOTING VICTIM

John Lopez III



Funeral services were held for John J. Lopez III on Friday, August 13, 1993. John was shot by another 14 year old on August 8th in Phoenix, where his family is residing. Interment was in Pioneer Cemetery.

John III was preceded in death by his father, John J Lopez, Jr in 1992. Survivors include his mother, Corine (Victor) Lopez; sisters, Rechanda and Maureen; brother, Victor; who all live in Phoenix. Paternal Grandmother, Regina Lopez of Gila Bend; Maternal Grandmother, Nellie Victor of Phoenix; and Great-Grandmother Isabelle Luna of Gila Bend. John III was the nephew of Eddie, Everett and Darlene Lopez, long time residents of San Lucy.

the norm that ministry staff listened to pre-teen boys planning their funerals with the attentiveness to detail usually reserved for giggling girls imagining their wedding days. Wayne Danley explains, "It is the only day where they know everyone will say good things about them, a day when only the good things will be remembered. And if their death is gang related, they will be thought of as heroes."

Before rushing off to the hospital, Kit placed a call to Tony Mata, the urban Young Life staff worker seconded to Neighborhood to assist with teen ministry. "I asked him to meet me outside St. Joseph's," Kit remembers. "I told him: 'We're gonna pray that if David is dead, God will raise him back to life.'"

David's heart did stop beating on the operating table. But the St. Joseph's ER team—with Divine aid—was able to resuscitate him. He pulled through surgery, and lasted through that first, seemingly interminable, week in the intensive care unit. Kit

was a daily visitor. Slowly, the danger passed: David was going to live. God had performed a miracle.

"We always felt beat up in those days," Kit remembers. Neighborhood Ministries had entered a season of suffering that made the words of II Corinthians 4 relentlessly relevant: "We are hard-pressed on every side...perplexed...persecuted... struck down..."

The children NM had faithfully loved on, tutored, and sang with for so long seemed so lost. With both his father and older brother now dead, Victor Lopez gave himself over fully to the streets. Teen girls long beloved by the ministry were homeless, unable to cope anymore with the ceaseless violence characterizing their families. One night Kit found one such girl in the bushes outside her ramshackle house. She was hiding from her mother, who was demanding that her 13-year-old daughter come inside to provide sexual favors for her heroine supplier. Gang members ran over Benny Ruiz with a car; he lived, but suffered permanent brain damage. Luis Medrano, NM's first-ever baptized convert at age 12, died just after turning 21. His younger sister Dora, who practically grew up in Neighborhood Ministries, was pregnant—at age 13. Her boyfriend, 26-year-old Noe, was battling depression. A few months after she gave birth, Dora brought the baby back to their cramped apartment only to find Noe swinging from the ceiling. He'd hung himself with an electrical cord.

"John's shooting; Dora, our first kid, getting pregnant at 13—these were word pictures of what it was like incessantly," Kit explains. "And there are other incidents and examples

"In the first 19 years, we lost 19 lives. You couldn't help thinking, 'are we going to lose them all?'"

—Wayne Danley

as well. For that season of time, it felt like we had to keep believing that God was invading these dark places and spaces with His love and His Spirit and His life-saving ability—even though we really couldn't see any of it."

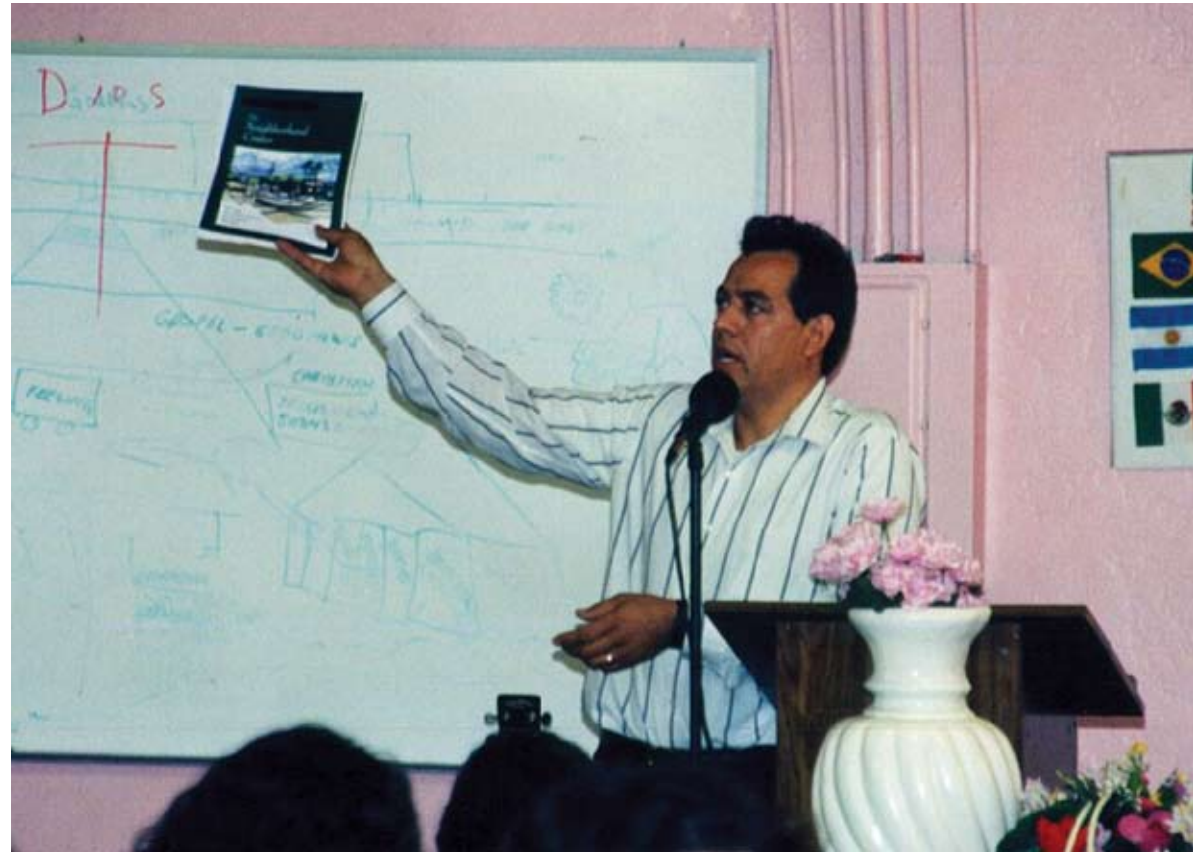
"Victor in these years started getting into all kinds of awful and evil things on the streets," Kit remembers. "I used to go following him around. It occurred to me at some point when I was praying for him that God had named him 'Victor.' Victor—which I was claiming really meant victor. I prayed that he would one day be an overcomer; that he would one day have victory." It would be years before she would see it. "I remember claiming victory for Victor," Kit says, "but it really represented what we were feeling for *all* of these families, even when we were at a funeral: that some day, we would experience and see the victory in these lives and there would be breakthrough."

"I was reading Mother Teresa a lot at the time," Kit remembers. "Her words were such comfort: 'God has not called us to be successful, but to be faithful.' Of course I wanted to be successful," she admits. "But I couldn't endure if success was the point." It just seemed too elusive. "But if the point was faithfulness," she says, "then we could last."

God kept Neighborhood Ministries going with innumerable, "just-in-time" provisions. "It was a season of learning that Jehovah Jireh means, God—Himself—will provide," Kit explains. When vandals smashed every window in the ministry's main bus, the local news media picked up the story. Immediately a local glass company came to the rescue. Another year when engine trouble parked yet another bus, a caravan of suburban women in mini-vans showed up. Faithfully for three days straight the well-coiffed women made pick-up runs all over parts of the city they'd never dreamed of entering. And then there was that time when a stranger showed up with 140 apples for "whatever might be needed." God had known that hours before the volunteers leading the cooking class for the 5th grade girls had asked on their knees for 139 apples needed for the day's project.

"These little miracles created a legacy of confidence within us," Kit emphasizes. "He knew we would need this for what lay ahead."

God's greatest provision, though, came with the launch, at long last, of a Spanish-speaking church. Jorge Macias and his wife accepted Christ after they'd been attending a Bible study led by Denny Gradin and Karen DeSmet. With Jorge's conversion, God had supplied the first adult male convert. Open Door volunteers and newly converted Hispanic women continued to besiege God with petitions to bring more Hispanic men to Himself. For a long season, they were very specific: they asked God for five men, believing this could be a solid core for a new Spanish-speaking church. "We wanted to see whole families come to Christ and we



Jorge preaching in a worship service at Nueva Esperanza, the Spanish church plant.

NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTRIES
CORE VALUE:
Racial Reconciliation
We rejoice in the multi-ethnic diversity of our community and seek through forgiveness, repentance, reconciliation, and justice to fashion cross-cultural relationships the way God intended them.

Long-term Relationships
We invest in relationships long-term, remaining involved in people's lives for as long as they permit us, tenaciously tracking our kids to enable their continued involvement with us.

NEIGHBORHOOD MINISTRIES
CORE VALUE:



prayed for 5 male heads of households to follow Christ, and start a church plant,” one ministry volunteer recalls. God answered: in 1990, a fledgling Spanish flock began meeting for worship services on Sunday evenings in the Fellowship Hall at Open Door.

Spanish-speaking missionaries Karen DeSmet and her adult children played a major leadership role at the new fellowship called Nueva Esperanza (New Hope). Jorge Macias was the key indigenous leader. Looking back, he recalls this time as rather “churchy”—a traditional service with worship music, preaching, and an offering. In 1991, Kit met with veteran church planter George Patterson, who emphasized how critical it was to move Jorge and other Hispanic men into even more visible leadership roles. She began encouraging the team at Nueva Esperanza to promote Jorge to a provisional leadership role, and to integrate other Hispanic men into visible positions as facilitators of

corporate prayer and music leaders. Hispanic men also began taking over the making of announcements and planning of fellowship times, and served as ushers. Meanwhile, as these leadership changes evolved, the fellowship was growing and a desire was surfacing for a Sunday morning service. To accommodate that, Nueva Esperanza and Open Door volunteers worked hard to renovate property owned by ODF across the street from the church. It was not work for the faint-hearted. The building had held tiny apartments called “casitas,” and many walls had to be knocked down and rooms gutted. One casita had housed a senile woman who’d kept seven dogs inside with her. The smell was unbelievable.

Jorge was increasingly stepping into his God-given call to shepherd the flock at Nueva Esperanza. Sunday mornings became a time of very interactive worship—with Jorge reading scripture, reflecting on it, and inviting congregants to share their thoughts and questions. The service was “growing up” and becoming more authentically indigenous. “Jorge was the foretaste of an entire army of indigenous leaders that God was preparing in this season—though most of these leaders were not yet visible,” Kit recalls.

But challenges still remained: Nueva was not reaching the younger generation. “Even with the joy we experienced at having a Spanish language church,” Kit explains, “an unfulfilled longing remained—for a truly multiethnic church.” Despite the “days of death” (or perhaps because of them), Neighborhood Ministries was seeing ever more growth in its student ministries. This increased “spiritual fruit harvest” needed a church. Spanish-only Nueva Esperanza didn’t fit since most of the kids spoke English. And remaining at Open Door Fellowship became increasingly challenging, as parents of white youth worried about bad influences from neighborhood kids who looked and acted much rougher. ODF was also experiencing its own growing pains—outgrowing the building on McDowell. ODF’s elders felt it was time for them to purchase a larger campus where greater numbers could be reached. It was a painful time for Billy Thrall, ODF’s Adult/Missions pastor at the time. “What I remember very plainly was that I wanted ODF to be the home for the fruit of Neighborhood Ministries,



Leaving Open Door Fellowship

but that was obviously not what God wanted. Today, looking back, we can all see it wouldn't have worked for either NM or for ODF. ODF still remains one of our strongest supporters and we continue to thank God for each other."

Everyone at NM and ODF had mixed feelings. Tensions had grown over the attempted integration of neighborhood kids into the regular youth programs at church, and some Neighborhood leaders were ready for "their own space." At the same time, Neighborhood Ministries had been incubated within ODF—memories and relationships ran deep. Once again, ministry leaders were experiencing that strange mixture of pain and hope. Neighborhood Ministries board was in agreement. "We knew we couldn't move out of the barrios. Incarnational ministry was our heart and soul and that meant we had to find a new home," Kit remembers. She sensed a word from her heavenly Father upon the sale of the church property: "This is a push from the nest. It is time for you to fly." The future was unseen. But one thing was sure: God would be in it. "Ironically," Kit recalls, "If this had just been our idea, or some grandiose vision for 'growth,' I don't think we could have trusted God for it. As it was it just felt like obedience." ●

Life

Life is sweet
like candy, it
beautiful like rain,
life is how you
live it, it just the
way life is once
you will never come
again once life
is gone you will
never now you will
beautiful life
would of been
god made this
world to be
beautiful he is
beautiful like
you and me.

Dora
Medrano

A poem by 13-year-old Dora Medrano