

## The Heart in Project Moises

By Charlie Hudson Nov 28, 2019 Updated Nov 28, 2019  0

As the child of migrant workers, Vicky Saldivar knew what it was like to frequently move. Even though her parents settling in Homestead two weeks prior to Hurricane Andrew might not have been ideal timing, they, like many others who remained, watched the town rise from destruction and rebuild. It was home. And as time went on, Vicky Saldivar's six children chose to live in the area. Then came the day when she cradled Moises, her first grandchild in her arms; a loving moment captured in photograph as well as in her heart.

More grandchildren followed and in the words every parent and grandparent dreads, Moises was diagnosed with Leukemia when he was in kindergarten. "You have to stay positive," she said.

"I needed to be the strong one for my daughter. I waited until I was alone to cry."

During the months of treatment, Saldivar saw children of all ages in the cancer ward. One evening as she was leaving the hospital with other grandchildren after a visit, there was a young boy who looked to be in his early teens. He was in the hallway, obviously a patient, his hair loss easily visible. He did not lift his head, nor respond to her smiling greeting.

Thoughts of the wrenching sight caused tears to well up in her eyes on the drive home. That night as she prayed, she wondered if there was any way for her to reach out to that boy and others. After all, she wasn't wealthy. How could she make a difference?

"I was substitute teaching third-graders the next day in social studies," she explained. "There was a story about a little girl whose grandmother had cancer and the girl started making bracelets for people who donated to their cause. That's when I had one of those inspirations like you see in cartoons when a light bulb goes off over someone's head."

Crocheted hats. It was always chilly in hospitals and a pretty or whimsical hat would be not only cheerful but practical as well. In taking the idea another step forward, one group of children were enjoying reading the classic, "Charlotte's Web". Why not create a "character hat" to go along with a book? In asking the children what to begin with, they overwhelmingly wanted to see Wilbur the Pig. She purchased yarn and stayed up all night designing and making that first one.



Saldivar was surprised how quickly word spread. Her students asked if they could buy books for her to use and as she thanked them and explained the process to their parents, she knew this was the right choice for what she could do. She also spent time at the Palace Gardens Assisted Living facility and for many of the older women, crocheting was an activity that brought back memories; something they, too, could participate in.

Saldivar would post photographs of the completed hat and book pairings to her own Facebook page, but as the project grew, she established a dedicated page of Project Moises at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1753859501559205>

Books come in from different places and she has now sent packages to hospitals as far away as Kaiser Children's Oncology in Los Angeles. Donations of books and yarn are helpful, but extra hands are welcome, too. "I'll be glad to teach someone to crochet," she said, and she has been a guest speaker at organizations such as the Homestead Kiwanis. Even though she is busy in her new job of the Before and After School Director, Waterstone Charter, for grades K-5, she likes it when she can complete, "thirty hats in thirty days".

"You have to have faith and stay positive," is her advice. At age nine, Moises's treatments have been successful, and he has been cancer-free for two years. She prays for all the children and families going through the same difficult situation.

One grandmother took time to express her appreciation. "Hello Vicky - I wanted to send you a warm Thank You for your thoughtfulness in creating this project. I was very touched to read about what led you to crocheting these wonderful hats for kids with cancer. My granddaughter was diagnosed with Leukemia last year at the age of 4. She is in her 19th month of treatment and doing very well. She