Walking a Mile in Your Shoes

I work as part of a team that picks up donations for the homeless from various donation points. These donations come from thrift store, churches or individuals. We deliver these goods to homeless people. One of the service areas is the river bed in Pajaro.

This is where we see our most severely impoverished families. These people quickly took a place in my heart. They wait, watching for us to arrive each week like we are bringing them something precious. The children jump, clap and wave hoping we have toys.

Many times we have seen children so hungry for food that they bite into bananas with the skin intact. It isn't uncommon for men to drop their belongings, eagerly open a can of cold tuna and start digging into it without utensils.

You never get used to seeing this. Every week I come away wondering why I think I need so much when I witness those who have so much less. Occasionally you get a jolt though, that will not leave your memory or your heart untouched.

When we went to a church in Monterey and looked inside the wicker basket where church members leave donations, I found a very nice pair of size 7.5 shoes. Black, clog style, barely worn and dressy enough for job interviews or as a walking shoe. Right away I called the domestic violence shelters to see if any lady there needed shoes for their job search. No one needed size 7.5. I tucked the shoes into an obscure place so I could make sure they got to someone who could really use them and be properly fitted.

As we approached the river bed and parked, I noticed a petite, middle aged lady walking with great difficulty on the railroad tracks. At first I thought she must be lame. My heart sank when I realized she was not wearing shoes. As she got closer to the van, I motioned for her to sit on the seat of the van with her feet extended. She hesitantly climbed into the van unsure of what I was going to do. She spoke only Spanish and I speak a little but gestures go a long way. Her small feet were covered with abrasions, calluses and grease from the railroad tracks and several weeks of walking without shoes. The other fifty or so people stood watching to see what I was going to do. Normally they would be scurrying around to see what we brought. But I think that even the poorest of the poor were caught up in the plight of this woman.

First, I gave her several hand sanitizing cloths to remove some of the grime from her feet. Then I held out a pair of white, clean socks which she slipped on in a heartbeat. She thanked me and put them on and then started to get down thinking that was all I could offer her. I motioned for her to stay there and I inquired, "What size shoe do you wear?" I knew that any size would be better than none; I didn't want her to see the black clogs though as her actual size might be in with the other donations and fit properly. I was hoping, of course, for the pair of shoes that was in the best condition.

She said, "Siete y medio" (7.5). I smiled as I reached into the van, showed them to her and then slipped them on her feet. Tears streamed down her face as she climbed out of the van thanking me profusely. I said, "No es nada. Dios es bueno." (It is nothing. God is good!) This story involves a wicker basket, washing feet and miracles on a river bed. I guess after all these years, He is still putting people in places at just the right time. So, if you donate to the poor in your community, thank you for helping miracles like this happen. **You never know when someone will be walking a mile in your shoes.**