



# Labor of Love on Labor Day

While most people were spending the Labor Day weekend enjoying time with families, picnicking and barbecuing, playing golf, vacationing out of town or just taking a break in the comfort of their homes as we all normally do, a number of volunteers from the Philippine-American Chamber of Commerce (Dallas chapter) spent a lot of time with three homeless Filipinos at several Dallas homeless shelters. In the process of helping them with immediate needs for clothes and spending money, the volunteers got to know them well. These are good people who just had bad luck and ran into hard times, after being exploited by unscrupulous recruiters and lawyers. Two of the three did not know any Filipinos in the area, even after being here for a number of years. Before they met us, the former teacher from Negros with a two-year-old son and the former seaman from Pangasinan preferred to stay in seclusion, never going out and mingling with outsiders, aware of their expired visas and that it was hard to trust people, especially after being exploited and treated badly in the U.S. by fellow Filipinos. The third one had Filipino friends in Dallas who are now taking care of her.



*PACC Texas volunteers Tessie Villoria, Myrna Carreon and Honorary Consul Ethel Mercado with homeless Filipinos in Dallas shelters. Picture on the right also shows Mr. Ceferino Absin with representatives of the Philippine Consulate in L.A. who are also trying to help.*

The 50-year-old former teacher from Davao (name withheld on request) started a family and a teaching career in Negros then came to the U.S. in 2009. She speaks and writes perfect English. She had to borrow tens of thousands of dollars to pay a recruiter and a Filipino immigration lawyer in Houston to get an H1B visa, which turned out to be fraudulent. The company in the petition did not exist, and the teacher had to fend for herself to look for a new sponsor and a job. She was unsuccessful. She was wooed by another Filipino in Chicago who impregnated her, promising marriage and a good life. The Filipino, who reportedly was from a prominent family in the Philippines, had shady dealings in the U.S. and was imprisoned for felony and fraud, while also implicating her. She is now in hiding from the man who used her but is still promising to help them.

They were discovered by Tessie Villoria in one of her church's outreach weekends at homeless shelters. The Macedonia Baptist Church in Mesquite takes care of the mother and son on Sundays, treating them like family and providing for their needs.

Mr. Ceferino "Jun" Absin, the 63-year-old former seaman who was born in Mindanao and raised a family in Sto. Tomas, Pangasinan, jump-shipped in Oregon after what he reported as 20 years of hard labor and low pay. When he landed in Oregon in 2008, he was making less than \$700 and was sending most of it to his family every month. He worked in California plantations for several months before he was brought to Dallas by a Filipino businessman to work in a home care company. When the home care facility was shut down by the government, Mr. Absin was abandoned and became homeless. For six years, he would be at the mercy of black families who would give him odd jobs in exchange for shelter. Last month, he collapsed from exhaustion and hunger on a Dallas street and was rushed to Parkland. A kindly African doctor at Parkland Dr. Urgis and his assistant took good care of him and later endorsed him to the Salvation Army homeless shelter. Dr. Urgis gave him a prepaid phone so he can contact the hospital and the shelter when needed, and called Honorary Consul Ethel Mercado to report his case. Consul Mercado and her officers took it from there. Mr. Absin reportedly had a stroke which partly impaired his memory. All his money and ID papers were stolen when he fainted on the street.

We met with Mr. Steve Grimes, the very kind administrator of the 600-bed Parkland homeless shelter on Harry Hines Boulevard in Dallas. He says his Salvation Army facility in Dallas is the biggest and best-run shelter in the world. The shelter rules would only allow the homeless to stay for 30 days, but Mr. Grimes made an exception for Mr. Absin, after we told him that we would raise money to send him home.

We are raising funds to send the mother and her son, as well as Ceferino Absin back to their homes in the Philippines to be reunited with their families who have lost contact with them and most likely fearing the worst. It would be a really nice Christmas present to them and to their families. Our target date for sending them home is October 15, 2016. We want to give them pocket money so they can go home with some dignity, and hopefully forget their misfortunes in America, and start a new life with their families.



**Left Photo: "Doing the Most Good". Mr. Steve Grimes, Director of the 600-bed Salvation Army facility in Dallas, being interviewed by author, Gus Mercado.**

Voluntary donations of any amount may be sent to our Chamber Director for Humanitarian Programs ([tessievilloria@msn.com](mailto:tessievilloria@msn.com)). Checks may be sent to **PACC TEXAS Humanitarian Fund**, c/o 8315 Navisota Drive, Lantana TX 76226. On request, donations will be receipted for tax deduction purposes. A complete report of donations will be published to all donors. Any questions, please email [pactctx@verizon.net](mailto:pactctx@verizon.net)