An avid traveler, Anastasia Yecke (Miami) makes friends far and wide – including children she’s sponsored and visited for more than 10 years.

Ana has also made important connections as a founding member of Aura’s House, an online crowdsourcing project her friend, Kristen Palana, (Rome, Italy) created to fund housing, health, income generation and education projects through Children International.

Recently, Ana traveled to Guatemala to help provide medical care to impoverished children. She arrived a few days early to drop in on Aura, the former sponsored child who inspired Aura’s House. Now 20, the young woman is a full-time elementary school teacher who attends college on the weekends thanks to educational support provided by Ana, Kristen and others.

Reconnecting with Aura wasn’t the only surprise of her trip, though. During a bus ride to the colonial town of Antigua, Ana met a congenial young man and his nephew. It turns out she had something very special in common with her fellow travelers. Ana shares the details …

I was taking a bus back to Antigua when I met a very nice young man, Jonathan, traveling with his 6-year-old nephew, Daniel. We began talking, and I learned that Daniel was sponsored by “Children.” “Children International?” I asked with excitement. “Sí!” they both replied.

It turns out that not only Daniel but also Jonathan’s younger brother (age 16) were sponsored!

It was fascinating to talk with Jonathan about his family’s experience with CI. Through the years, I have had the privilege of meeting a total of four sponsored children in the Dominican Republic, Honduras and Guatemala. Each time, I have been very impressed by the community centers and, of course, the children themselves. But each time, I was always accompanied by a CI rep … so I was very curious to hear what Jonathan’s “unfiltered” experience with them was. I was not disappointed.
“Cheel-dren has been a huge benefit to our family,” he said. “Just 15 days ago, Daniel received a new pair of shoes. They have provided him with school uniforms, clothing, vitamins and medicine when he is sick. It is a big relief knowing he can get treatment when he needs it.” Of his 16-year-old brother, who is also sponsored, Jonathan said: “He is currently in training [at the CI community center] to be a machinist. This would not have been possible without Cheel-dren.” Jonathan also told me that Daniel’s sponsor is a lady in Spain with whom they communicate frequently. “We always look forward to her letters,” he added.

As if this experience wasn’t amazing enough, Jonathan and Daniel were kind enough to accompany me from the bus stop (on the outskirts of the city and not in the best part of town) almost to my hotel, to make sure I didn’t get lost - even though it was not on their way home. I was very grateful for their help, especially because it was nighttime when we arrived.

As we parted, they both hugged me and said it was so nice to meet another sponsor. But the pleasure truly was all mine!