American by Birth, Honduran by Heart
By Jesús Almendárez and Garrett Kenyon

Mary has always felt a special kinship with the people of Latin America. She often tells people she is “American by birth, Latin American by heart.” She’s maintained her passion for the region by visiting countries in Central and South America and working as a high school Spanish teacher. And, since 2003, she’s kept a living link to Latin America through sponsorship.

That year, Mary began sponsoring a Honduran boy named Edgar. When he left the program six years later, she began sponsoring 5-year-old Walter. In 2012, she decided to visit the little boy, as well as find and meet Edgar. To make the visit even more impactful, she brought along seven of her brightest students and two chaperones.

Shortly after arriving in San Pedro Sula, the group drove to a CI community center in Las Minas. Waiting for them were Walter, his mother, Edgar and Edgar’s aunt. As the group disembarked, Walter’s mother greeted each guest with a hug and words of thanks. Tongue-tied – despite much preparation – little Walter resorted to a hug, as well. By the time Edgar met Mary, tears were in abundance.

The group then traveled to Walter’s school, where a celebration was taking place to mark Student Day. The Americans were ushered to the playground where they received a warm greeting from the principal and students entertained them with poetry, singing and dancing. Afterward, Mary’s group repaid their hosts’ kindness by singing “The Star-Spangled Banner.”

Next, the group toured the school, giving away school supplies, posing for pictures and answering lots of questions.

Lunch at a pizza restaurant followed. Edgar explained to the American youth how important sponsorship had been in his life, while Mary focused on talking to Walter. After lunch, the group went to a mall so Mary could buy presents for Edgar and Walter.

When it came time to say goodbye, hearts grew heavy. Hugging Mary one last time, Edgar said words couldn’t express his gratitude for her generous support through the years. The scene was no less emotional as the group said goodbye to Walter.
As rewarding as the trip was for Mary, it became even more so when the trip’s chaperones announced that they now wanted to become sponsors. Even Mary’s students decided to start a group sponsorship of a Honduran child. They all hoped someday to be able to return with Mary and meet their own sponsored child.

Mary was grateful to the CI staff who helped arrange their visit. “I am so happy, because I wanted to meet Walter – but I also wanted to meet Edgar,” she said. “Thank you so very much for finding him. I’m so glad to see how impressed my students were by this visit. They are taking home beautiful memories of Honduras.”