

SPRING/SUMMER 1994

Beyond the Briefcase

Kevin Marinacci (C'89) says following in the footsteps of a priest who helped children in Nicaragua for more than 40 years is a little like "singing after Sinatra."

The Illinois native was involved in public service efforts as an undergraduate, but found himself wanting to do more than a couple of hours of volunteer work every week. He decided that after graduation, he would devote a year to helping others.

But after the university's Volunteers in Latin America program led him to Nicaragua, he found it nearly impossible to leave.

It was there that Marinacci met the Rev. Rafael Maria Fabretto, a Salesian missionary from Venice who came to the developing republic in the 1950s and established five homes for abandoned, abused and orphaned children.

While the homes were important in the ensuing four decades, they took on a special significance in the 1980s as civil war broke out, and 17,000 children were orphaned before the fighting stopped in 1990. With 30,000 killed in the war, half the population of the country is now under the age of 14. A whole generation of children have thus been denied an education.

Marinacci worked with Fabretto for eight months before the priest died unexpectedly in 1990. After Fabretto's death, the organization was in crisis - Fabretto had literally run the operation out of an old briefcase. Without him, the homes were in danger of closing. Though his year was almost up, Marinacci decided to stay and help the late priest's organization survive and prosper. He ended up staying more than four years.

"Father was one of these - almost

out of central casting - saints," Marinacci says. "You know, the battered-up briefcase, God was his lawyer, money in the glove compartment - the whole nine yards.

"He was able to go into somebody's office and bring his kids and sing the 'Ave Maria,' and any bureaucrat would sign off. We can't do that - we're not saints."



Kevin Marinacci (far right) joins directors of the Fabretto homes for children in Nicaragua.

Saints or not, Marinacci - with the help of his father, Carl, and David Beam (F'82) - moved to formalize the organization by incorporating Familia Padre Fabretto, as it's known in Nicaragua, and establishing a counterpart, non-profit American organization, Fabretto Children's Foundation, in Marinacci's native Illinois.

Other Hoyas supportive of the organization include John Maisto (C'61), the current U.S. ambassador to Nicaragua, and his wife, Maria (SLL'61, G'86); Roberto Mayorga (B'58), current Nicaraguan ambassador to the United States; former Nicaraguan ambassador to the U.S., Arturo Cruz (C'47, G'71); Holly Taylor (C'89) and Gillian Murphy (C'89), who produced the organization's fundraising video; Francis J. Rienzo

(C'89); Ambassador Mayorga's son, Carlos (B'92); and Michael Keeler (F'89).

The Fabretto homes provide food, shelter and education to 120 children, aged about six to 16, and offer educational and other services to another 120 children outside the homes. Staff members trained in accounting, projects writing, health

care and child development monitor each child's educational and emotional progress.

"We bring them up to an academic level where they are eligible for scholarships," Marinacci explains. Such scholarships include the Cooperative Association of States for Scholars (CASS) and the Nicaragua Peace Scholarship Program, both of which are administered by Georgetown for the U.S. Agency for International Development. CASS brings promising but economically poor students from 17 Central American and

Caribbean nations, including Nicaragua, to learn technical skills at community colleges throughout the United States.

Marinacci, who plans to continue raising funds for the organization as he pursues a graduate business degree at Northwestern University this fall, also credits Georgetown with directing his aspirations. "The Jesuit ideals of Georgetown helped me to become sensitive to the needs in the world, and the training at school helped me to find ways to meet those needs," he says. For more information about the foundation, contact: Fabretto Children's Foundation, 2146 Orrington Avenue, Evanston, IL., 60201, or call (708) 328-4934.

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