

Serendipity: How a Two-Week Trip Inspired the Creation of Michael's House

We have all heard the word *serendipity*. It seems like a new age word, but it first appeared in 1754 and basically refers to the faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident. It is like going out to find something we think we know we need and being led by chance to something that would avail us better.

In 2003 I decided to go to Ethiopia for two weeks to see if I could help destitute and sick children. I had definite ideas that I wanted to help this population because their plight was omnipresent in the media. I was limited financially and time wise. But I was anticipating retirement and knew that my situation would be more fluid later. So in my not unusual stubbornness and tunnel vision, I had to identify, and or connect with some reliable charity dealing with children, present my enthusiasm to help, and take on a role that would fit into my then available parameters. All in two weeks!

I spent every day visiting children's aid agencies, international charities, hostels, and clinics. I was overwhelmed by the innumerable charities caring for children's needs. Coupled with that were literally hundreds of mainly Europeans and Americans arriving daily to adopt babies and young children. It was staggering and quite impressive to see so many people willing to help these children.

Towards the end of my visit, I was a little despondent that I had not connected with any of the busy children's agencies. I was walking alone and almost aimlessly when I witnessed a massive crowd of people standing on both sides of a busy road. I thought it might be some kind of parade starting or a demonstration. But the mystery unraveled when a large truck stopped on the road and began to unload sacks of grain. Mayhem ensued. Hired men with sticks were trying to ensure that each person only got one sack. But it was futile. The chaos was too much for them. Those, especially the young able bodied, could grab two sacks while the weaker struggled with one. I even saw some young men quickly returning, bullying, and beating their way to grab a third sack. It was bedlam and the survival of the fittest. The whole distribution was over in about twenty minutes. Then all was silent. The sun was almost set.



Michael Craig, Founder, Michael's House

I was just about to leave that place when out of the corner of my eye, I saw movement on the far side of the road. ***Then I saw that it was old people in deplorable conditions. Some were crippled, some were blind, some were scooting on their buttocks. Emaciated and with so many limitations, they were timidly making their way to forage the residue of grain that had fallen to the ground. They were using every ounce of energy they had. They scooped up handfuls which they carefully secreted in the folds of their clothes and rags. Some of them just put fistfuls directly into their hungry mouths. These were the elderly street people for whom nobody was responsible.*** Sadly, I realized that, as in all species, there is a hierarchy of scavenging. Here it was at work. They were all alone. At this point, it came to me that I was stubbornly searching for the two weeks thinking I should be helping children. But right here was a problem crying out for help. This was serendipitous.

On reflection, I was reminded of the Biblical story of the man who sat near the Sheep Gate at the pool of Bethesda. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed lay around the pool. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When the Healer saw him and knew how long he had been ill, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

"I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get there, someone else always gets in ahead of me." This was a type of intervention he never dreamed about. The Healer said "get up and walk." And he did!

Surely, this is what we at Michaels House are all about: Being cognizant and sensitive to the many destitute aged in the developing world who wait, often in vain, for a hand up, for relief from their pain. We reach out to those who are so near and yet so far away from help!

A serendipitous moment twelve years ago is now unwavering commitment by our donors and volunteers. Many crying out have received our hand—but more wait. Together, we can reach them with food, relief, and hope, so they may live out their remaining years with dignity.

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