Why Scholarships Matter
Dear Friends,

Just before Christmas this past year, I was sitting in a small room with walls made from eucalyptus trees and sheets of corrugated tin. This single room serves as the community center for our scholars and their families who live just outside the garbage dump in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Many of the families who live near the dump have family members with leprosy or HIV/AIDS, so they are treated as outcasts by the larger community. I was stunned and inspired to hear the personal testimonies of the parents of what the scholarships meant for their children. For these parents, scholarships felt like what a VIP Pass to Disney World would feel like to me, except that scholarships cost less and have a generation-changing impact.

One father was a leper and a street beggar. He told me about his daughter who was about to graduate from college. “I can’t go to the graduation,” he said, due to the stigma associated with his disease, “but we will celebrate at home.” He choked up for a moment and then, after a long pause, he added, “For the first time in my life, I feel like an Ethiopian.” Almost two dozen parents shared similar stories and sentiments with me that day.

As I was getting ready to leave the community center, a group of young men walked into the room and asked for some time to talk. They said that they were happy to see what we were doing for the younger people, but wanted to know if we could help them pay for special drivers’ licenses to get jobs in high demand for better pay. They were tired of working in the dumps. We did, and now, after just a few months, they are all working as drivers. Their success got me to thinking: Just as we needed to modify the types of scholarships we are giving to meet the specific needs of each community, we also need to modify the levels of scholarships to meet the specific interests of people who want to help.

In this issue, we are introducing different levels and types of scholarships to help people give in ways that work best for them. As you read stories about the people currently thriving because of their scholarships, please consider helping more people to become like them. You will be changing their family tree forever.

In gratitude,

Mike Tenbusch
President of International Samaritan, pictured left in December with the young men looking for a way out of working in the dumps.

Hear more from the drivers on the next page...
A Letter from Mooloo: Life Changed by Licensing

Dear Friends,

My name is Mengesha, but my friends call me Mooloo. I live with my father and four nieces, who are all younger than seven. My father is a leper, so after the eighth grade I stopped going to school because I had to work in order to support my family. For the past 14 years, I have been working in the garbage dump, Kore. I will not forget the day a man came to me and asked me in a disgusted tone why I didn’t find a real job. I was very upset. That was my job. As terrible as it might be, Kore was still my family’s sole source of income. What made it worse was that I didn’t want to work in Kore. I wanted to have a different job. Working in the dump has always been difficult and dangerous. The 2017 Kore Landslide killed many of my friends and relatives, including my best friend. I wanted to leave but I couldn’t. I felt working in Kore was my only option.

That changed when I met the International Samaritan team. When I met them, I asked for an opportunity to get my driver’s license so I could find a job as a driver. International Samaritan paid for the expenses for my training and certification from a driving center. I drive well and got my license in less than a month. Now I am working as a driver. When the drivers stop for lunch break or during weekends, I get to drive their taxis, and I am getting income and more importantly practical skills and connection with other drivers. I feel like I am a professional going in the right direction. I am forever grateful for your support.

In gratitude,

Mooloo

Mooloo is pictured third from right along with his friends after getting their licenses. Photo by Engidawork Lemma, front left, our program coordinator in Ethiopia.
Noemi’s Journey: From La Chureca to Spain

Noemi was born 18 years ago in Managua, Nicaragua. She and her family lived in the La Chureca dumpsite, on the banks of Managua Lake where her father often fished to supplement the work he did at the dumps. One day, when Noemi was only three months old, his feet became entangled in the net he threw into the water, and it pulled him in with it. He could not swim, so the weight of the net took him under the water where he drowned.

Forced to raise Noemi by herself, her mother Ruth followed in her late husband’s footsteps and took up recycling and repurposing materials from the dumpsite. She often had to bring Noemi with her. “All the time, I was dirty,” Noemi recalls. “I went with my mom to pick up plastic, but sometimes we didn’t find anything. No plastic. No tires. Nothing. So we couldn’t eat unless we found some food in the dump. I was scared when I was there because a lot of times kids die in the dump.”

The two lived in a house made from materials they found in the dump, and they were both frequently sick because of spoiled food and the pollution from the dumpsite. After their home was destroyed by a flood in 2010, they were moved by the government to a community on higher ground called Villa Guadalupe, along with 3,700 other people who were left homeless by the flood.

At the age of nine, Noemi could no longer go to school. Even though public school is free in Nicaragua, the cost of books, notebooks and a uniform was too much for her mother to cover. That’s when award-winning photographer, Timothy Bouldry, first met Noemi, and helped her get back into school with financial support from a group called the International Solid Waste Association. Tim went on to
join our team at International Samaritan a few years later, just as Noemi was finishing elementary school, and she earned a scholarship to a private high school through the International Samaritan scholarship program that Tim led in Nicaragua.

Noemi graduated with honors from high school. Now Noemi is a pre-med student finishing her first year of university through the support of donors to our program.

“I want to be doctor so I can help the children from Villa Guadalupe because they are sick all the time,” Noemi says.

In October, the International Solid Waste Association, the same group that helped Noemi with school supplies and uniforms when she was nine-years-old, will be flying her to Spain for their annual conference so that others can hear her story, a story made possible by our donors—people who have stopped, and have given, and have changed her life.
Now, Jenny Wants to Repay her Mom

By the time Jenny was seven, she was already spending her evenings digging through the garbage, searching for scraps of metal that she could sell to recyclers for pennies. This is how she spent every night after school, but even with the whole family working, they barely made enough to survive. Jenny recalls, “To eat, we used to cook chicken and sausage waste we found inside of trash bags that came off garbage trucks.”

Jenny grew up with her mother and four siblings in the dumpsite in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. Her mother worked in the dump for Jenny’s entire childhood, working every day from 4:00 in the morning until sundown to provide for her family. Jenny assumed that when she finished sixth grade, she would go to work in the dump full-time, too.

But Jenny’s mom pushed Jenny to dream bigger – and in 2016, she pushed Jenny to apply for our scholarship program. Three years after receiving her scholarship, Jenny is in ninth grade at the Instituto Linea de Vida and no longer spends her evenings picking through garbage. Instead, she spends her nights studying and planning for her future.

“My biggest wish is that my mother never has to work in the garbage dump again,” she shares, “so I will graduate and become a young professional.”

Jenny is pictured right with her little brother.

Now, Mearege Wants to Grow Up

Five years ago, when we were exploring whether we should expand to Ethiopia, Selam Terefe talked with young people whose families live and work near the dump site in Addis Ababa. Mearege was one of the first children she met. Selam asked Mearege the same question we would ask many others: what dreams do you have for when you grow older?

Mearege’s response stunned her: She did not want to grow up.

“Mearege showed me her house. It was a small, single room that she had to crawl into,” Selam explained, recounting the experience. “She told me that, because she was small, it was easy for her to crawl in and out of her house, but for her parents it was incredibly difficult and painful. Mearege saw her parents suffering and decided that she never wanted to get bigger.” The pain of Mearege’s reality caused Selam to leave her work as a lawyer for the United Nations to work for us. She helped Mearege and 66 other young people like her earn scholarships in Ethiopia last year.

Mearege is 10 now and attends the Don Basco School, one of the best schools in Addis Ababa. She is finally excited about growing up. When we asked her again what her dreams were, she had a very different answer.

“I want to be a doctor so that I can help sick people get well,” she says. “I feel so good when I see people healthy, happy and smiling.”

Mearege is pictured right in her school uniform. Photo by Simon Yemane.
Now, Miguel Wants to Stay in Guatemala

Since October of last year, thousands of people have joined caravans from Central America to make the long walk toward the promise of a better life. What can be done to make that promise a reality in their own home? For one young man from Guatemala, the answer came in the form of a scholarship.

Miguel’s family moved into Zone 3, home of Guatemala City’s teeming garbage dump, when he was 12. This was soon after his father left them, leaving his wife and children behind. Manuel recalls, “It was hard. I couldn’t focus in school or make friends. I didn’t pass fourth grade until I was 14.”

Despite his struggles, Miguel stayed in school, reaching the 9th grade at the age of 20. At that point, he received a scholarship from International Samaritan to attend trade school. Now, at 21, Miguel has a stable job as an auto mechanic, and he’s also become a constant presence at our after-school center, the Ave Maria Learning Center, in Zone 3. He enjoys tutoring and serving as a role model for younger scholarship students.

Last fall, a friend of Miguel’s tried to recruit him to join a caravan. Miguel considered it, but refused to go because he finally felt like he had an opportunity in Guatemala and didn’t want to lose his scholarship.

“Before International Samaritan, I think I would have gone with him, because I had no hope,” he said. “But when he asked, I knew that I wanted to stay. And I’m glad I did - I have a job now, and a community with International Samaritan.”

Hope and a sense of belonging. That’s what a scholarship can do when combined with the mentoring and encouragement that comes from our team on the ground and other scholars facing the same challenges. People are walking thousands of miles to seek opportunities like these, but for our scholars, it’s something that they’ve been able to find at home.

Miguel is pictured right in his work uniform.
In this issue, learn about our new levels of scholarships, tailored to meet the needs of those around the world - including yours.