

## Amerasians in the Philippines By: Carlos Bongioanni

Many needy Amerasian children are legacies of U.S. presence in Philippines Stars And Stripes By: Carlos Bongioanni

ANGELES CITY, Philippines — Caroline Ladrillo was born and abandoned in a grassy field just outside the main entrance of the former Clark Air Base ten years ago. She is the product of an American servicemember and a Filipina sex worker from an off-base go-go bar. Thousands of Amerasian children like Caroline — some with no parents, others with one — languish in the communities surrounding Clark and other installations as one of the legacies of the U.S. military's presence in the Philippines. Caroline lives in a darkened one-room hovel, huddled on a bed encapsulated by mosquito netting. Severely crippled with what looks like cerebral palsy, she moves through life by rolling on her back. It's not much of a life. Caroline survives by the mercy of Angeles Ladrillo, 73, who makes \$3 a day as a street sweeper and who helped deliver Caroline. She's cared for the girl for the past ten years. Many other Amerasians in the Philippines survive by the mercy of others. Established in 1964, the organization strives to build better lives for Amerasian children offering support for health, education and livelihood. Their support comes from grants from international aid agencies and from private donations, mostly from the United States. Buck officials estimate that 52,000 Amerasians are scattered throughout the Philippines — 5,000 in the Clark area and another 3,000 around the former Subic Bay Naval Base. Last year, Buck directly supported 2,400 Amerasian children and their families in the Philippines. "The majority of the children have been abandoned by their American fathers," said Jocelyn Bonilla, the manager of the Pearl S. Buck center in Angeles City. Most of these children, she said, live with their mothers or with relatives, but some, like Caroline, have no one. Caroline's surrogate mother, Ladrillo, lives in a squatter's house built of cinder blocks around two trees that offer shade. The tree trunks poke through holes in the corrugated tin roof. A jury-rigged electric line that is spliced into the electrical circuitry of a neighboring building provides enough electricity to power a single low-watt bulb hanging from the roof. Ladrillo can't afford to keep the light on, so usually it is dark in the room where Caroline lives, and where it smells faintly of urine. Although she is now 10, Caroline weighs no more than 45 pounds and she still wears cloth diapers. Ladrillo cannot afford to purchase them. "People donate the diapers," she said. That foundation is now defunct, but the Loving Care Street Kids Foundation took over the building in February. It, too, survives by donations. Ladrillo spends much of her time at the center where the street kids of Angeles City, many of whom are Amerasians, can get a free meal. "Street kids are street kids, no matter where you go. They're basic concern is their stomach," said Purificacion Sibug, the manager of the Loving Care center. The center offers three free meals a day to hungry children so they will not be caught begging on the street. It is against the law to beg for money in the Philippines. But when U.S. troops are in town for military exercises, many impoverished children flock Fields Avenue, the "red light" district of Angeles City. Looking for spare change, they usually sell bubble gum, tissue paper or whatever they can scrounge. When they're hungry, they'll beg. "Fields Avenue is the place where most Americans are coming for a good time," said Sibug. "The kids are asking, 'Joe, hey Joe, give me money.' When they're very hungry, their approach is very forceful to foreigners &hellip; They haven't eaten for a whole day and night, maybe longer. That's why their approach seems so demanding." The children who come for free meals maintain a vegetable garden the center started recently after the Philippines Department of Agriculture donated seedlings. The center also offers programs and events for social interaction, and helps children with their educational costs for tuition and school supplies. Some children who frequent the center have stories as distressing as Caroline's, said Sibug. One Amerasian child's mother abandoned him in a garbage can after his birth. Matthew and Michael Canoy have lived with their grandmother Francisca Polgo, 56, since their mother skipped town seven years ago. Matthew, 12 and Michael, 13, have never met their American father, reportedly a U.S. Marine. The two brothers and their grandmother used to sleep on cardboard boxes in the back of a three-wheeled cart, called a trike, which served as their home. Now they use the trike as a "sari-sari" store from which they sell fruit and other miscellaneous convenience store items to earn their livelihood. Their dwelling is a box about 6 feet long, 4 feet wide and 7 feet high. It is constructed of scrap metal, wire mesh and other scavenged materials. It has one bed inside upon which all three sleep. The rest of the space is jam-packed with their belongings. Latia Stanley, 15, lives with her mother in a thatched-roof house near a banana plantation and rice field in a small village outside Angeles City. Latia has never met her father, Gary Stanley, but he did furnish paperwork that helped Latia become a U.S. citizen in 1995. A child born overseas who has at least one parent with U.S. citizenship is entitled to become a U.S. citizen. When asked if she wanted to go to the States to live with her father, Latia shook her head in affirmation and cast a questioning glance at her adoptive father, Tony Dizon. Latia was very quiet and answered monosyllabically, barely cracking her lips to reveal the braces that covered her teeth. "Her mother wants to wait until she's older," Dizon answered for the girl. "She doesn't want her to take the trip there until she's grown up." Until recently, Latia's father has supported his daughter by periodically sending money, anywhere from \$60 to \$100 a month. But since the money stopped coming last October, it has been a financial burden, Dizon said. Dizon married Latia's mother two years ago. He's now "temporarily unemployed," and they recently had a baby of their own. "The mother doesn't want to take legal action against him," said Dizon. "But, since he stopped supporting her, it's been a problem. She used to study in a private school, now we can't afford it &hellip; She's a young lady now and has a lot of personal needs. It's not cheap."

Latia considers herself fortunate that she is a U.S. citizen and someday will be able to go to the United States to see her father. It's a different story for those like Caroline, who have little chance of ever knowing either parent. For children like Matthew and Michael, it's not so hopeless. Organizations try to unite abandoned children with their American parents. One Internet site called "Amerasians — The Forsaken Ones," helps Amerasian children track down their American fathers. It also helps American fathers track down their children. The home page of the site lists 143 reunion cases. It has successfully resolved 37 cases. Forty-six others are in progress; 60 others are pending. American Robert

Ballenger runs the site. He lives in Olongapo, a city outside the former Subic Bay Naval Base, and volunteers his time for tracking. Efforts to reach Ballenger by telephone and e-mail were unsuccessful. According to the Web site, his voluntary services are so in demand that he now charges a small fee for administrative costs, which have ballooned over the past two years. A Filipina woman writing from Denmark said she was born in Olongapo in 1979 and would like to find her American father who was a member of the U.S. Navy and who had a relationship with Chona Cadag. "I am hoping I would one day find them both, so that I can see where I come from." From tips like these the site tries to track down the parties and reunite the families. It also has a wealth of information on legal issues to help Amerasians seeking to become U.S. citizens. It also is a good site to check out for links to other organizations that provide assistance to Amerasians. Official Website: <http://www.stripes.com/01/jun01/ed061901a.html>