

Volunteering in Mexico

Amigos de los Ninos

by Steve Perry

Editor's note: This story was originally published in *Rocking Chair Rebels*, a book of stories by RVers that benefits Escapees CARE, Inc. CARE is a facility where RVers with short or long term health problems may go for assistance while continuing to live in their RV. The story is reprinted here with permission from the author, *Steve Perry*.

Linda and I were excited about RVing in Mexico. And we were especially inspired by all of the school supplies one group collected to help support the school in Alamos. So, when we went to Puerto Penasco, we collected 16 large plastic bags of children's clothing and stuffed our camper shell full.

We stopped at a little school on the edge of town. The principal was delighted to receive the clothing and sent a gaggle of bright-eyed, excited, enthusiastic boys and girls out to our truck to haul in the loot. I felt like a happy Santa Claus.

As we were about to drive away, a student told us to wait and then brought us a diploma made out in our name, inscribed in Spanish, "Thank you for your gift of clothing to our children." We were touched by their expressions of appreciation.

The next year, we returned to Puerto Penasco and, again, we brought clothing to the same school. We were accorded the same glorious reception. This time I got a little bolder and asked the principal if I could volunteer to assist in some way in the classroom. She thought it over and said, "Si."

Each day I went to a different class in grades three through six and presented photos of Yosemite, fall colors, and other scenes from our RV travels. I speak some Spanish, and I kept a list of vocabulary words in Spanish to enhance my descriptions.

Then I would ask what words they wanted to learn in English, and they would write them on the blackboard in Spanish. With a dictionary at my side, I would write the English word and get the class to repeat it after me. I felt like Robin Williams teaching the ESL class in *Good Morning, Viet Nam*. I had so much fun, my cheeks ached from smiling.

The third-graders stole my heart, and I spent most of my time with them. I would go around the classroom from time to time and give each child a pat on the back, a smile, or a hearty "bueno!" for a good job in spelling or a correct answer in their notebook. They loved the attention and the recognition, and I loved giving it.

I noticed that one student, Catalina, age 10, had vision problems. I arranged to get her glasses, which I paid for rather than wait to try to find a Lions Club.

I met her parents and five siblings, aged one to nine, and saw the rather primitive condition of their home. I have some handyman skills, and I helped the father do some repairs on the house.

I also greatly look forward to continuing to teach at the school. I feel I have gotten a lot more out of these experiences than I have given, and it's a great feeling.

We hear about the earthquake, flood, or hurricane, and think, gee, I'd like to help, but how would I go about doing it? Maybe just go there and show up at the Red Cross.

More information?

Puerto Penasco is located about 65 miles south of the border crossing south of Ajo, AZ. You need Mexican insurance to drive your RV into Mexico. Check also with your own insurance carrier to see what coverage you have in Mexico and if there are any limitations.

There are RV parks in Puerto Penasco. One web site that lists them is Puerto-Penasco.com.