



Crystal's Ark

By Peggy Reiff Miller, *World Ark* contributor



Crystal Marrufo, with her son, Jose Rosales, and daughter, Amelia Marrufo, displays the Heifer calendar she uses to record how much money she puts into her Heifer Ark every day.



Crystal Marrufo makes snow cones at her church's annual carnival.

PHOTOS BY PEGGY REIFF MILLER

Just as Noah stepped out in faith to build his ark in the Biblical story, the decision that mother Crystal Marrufo made to raise money for a Heifer Gift Ark has been a leap of faith.

Soon after she and her children, Amelia and José, began attending the Goshen City (Indiana) Church of the Brethren in 2011, they fell in love with Heifer International and its mission during the church's annual Living Gift Market. "Ever since," Crystal said, "I've wished we could do something for Heifer."

This past December, Crystal picked up more information at the annual event and was told an Ark is \$5,000. She laughed at this seeming impossibility for a mother who struggles to pay her bills on a cook's wages and prorates her annual tax refund over the course of the year to cover her expenses. She sat around a table that Friday night joking with friends about buying an Ark. The next day she realized, "If I quit smoking, I could save \$2,000 in a year's time! If I can raise that much by myself, so can everyone else. Together we can buy an Ark!"

She and Amelia went to the grocery store that night and bought nicotine patches. To strengthen her resolve, Crystal asked for the rite of anointing the next morning at church and hasn't had a cigarette since.

Amelia, 15, and José, 14, are proud of their mother. Having started smoking at age 9, Crystal was a pack-a-day smoker, able to quit only the two years she was pregnant. Ever since Amelia could talk, she has pleaded with her mother to stop. "She's tried everything to quit before," Amelia said, "even hypnosis. But she couldn't." This time around, with Heifer in mind, success has come.

"In the beginning," Crystal said, "instead of going to the gas station every day and buying a pack of cigarettes, I would go to the church and donate the \$6 I'd have spent." With her habit under control, she started putting the money for the Ark in the church offering every two weeks, when she got paid. Her commitment inspired others in the congregation to join her efforts. By June 30, \$2,055.78 had been raised.

Unexpected benefits resulted for Crystal. "I used to get out of breath just walking up the ten steps to the church



office," she said. But less than three months into her project, she was running. "I mean, I had not run in forever! Quitting smoking lets me know that I can do anything."

With her newfound confidence, Crystal applied for a Habitat for Humanity house and was accepted into the program at the end of April. But Habitat's financial requirements slowed down her progress on the Ark. "I have to make monthly payments to Habitat until I have \$700," she said, "and payments totaling \$1,600 to another account that matches me 5-to-1. But I'm still going to raise the Ark. It will just take longer."

Crystal also had to pay off a lot of debt to qualify for Habitat. "I had to use my tax refund that I count on for my bills," she said. This created a dilemma. Her cigarette money was now going to her Habitat accounts, and her bill-paying fund was gone. Could she still continue giving to the Ark?

"I decided to take a leap of faith," she said, "and continue putting money aside, not knowing where it would come from. The same week I spent my tax

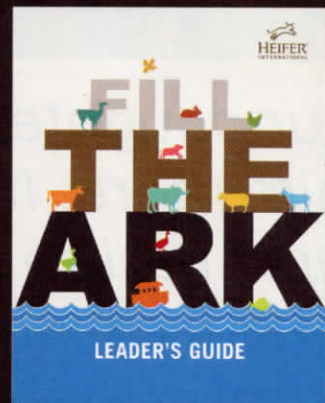
refund, without my having asked for it, my church offered to start paying me \$35 a week to cover expenses for volunteer cooking I'd been doing for their Wednesday night program. So there was my Heifer contribution!" At the end of June, Crystal received notice that she had qualified for rent assistance from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "It will pay to the dollar what I'm short for my bills," she says.

Crystal is confident that she'll make her goal for a Habitat house and an Ark for Heifer. "Seeing how others are helping with the Ark motivates me to keep on. I'm excited!" she said, face aglow. "I can't wait to celebrate when we have our Ark." ■

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Peggy Reiff Miller is a historian and writer who is working on a book about Heifer's seagoing cowboys, the young people who took to the seas to deliver the first shipments of Heifer animals. Learn more about Reiff Miller and her work at peggyreiffmiller.com.

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