

Missy, along with daughter Valentina and husband Dr. Carlos Acosta, travel between Katy and Colombia to fulfill physical, educational, and spiritual needs for some of Bogota's most vulnerable citizens



# Love Without Borders

*How one Katy family cares for the people of Bogota, Colombia*

*Written by Susanna Donald | Photography courtesy of Missy Christie de Acosta*

Eleven-year-old Missy Christie cowered on the floor of her home in Bogota, Colombia, waiting for the intruders to shoot her. In the mid-1960s, Missy's parents, Lindsay and Denise Christie, traveled from New Zealand to Colombia to work as missionaries. While living and working in Bogota, the Christie family encountered many difficult situations, but the violence hit home the night armed men entered their house, bound their hands and feet, and aimed their rifles at them. Missy looked at her parents, who were laying beside her, and then closed her eyes, waiting for the final moment - then the doorbell rang. It was Missy's oldest sister.



## Love One Another

“To this day,” Missy says, “I do not know what those men saw. They tied my sister, threw her on top of us, and left our house immediately - God protected us that day.” Such a close call would have caused most people to leave the country, but it only made Lindsay Christie even more determined to meet the needs and see the hearts of the Colombians change. Ten years later, when the group whose members had attacked the Christies finally surrendered their weapons and became a political party, Missy’s father started a school for the ex-combatants and countless others who were displaced by the ongoing conflict. From there, he established more schools and daycares in the area, all with the goal of being a living example of the second greatest commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

## Carrying On

When Lindsay died in 1994, his schools and programs served thousands of people. Still, he left behind many unfulfilled dreams. “I had never thought of taking leadership in the ministry, but suddenly a spark ignited in me,” says Missy. “But I had felt the fear so many little ones in Colombia experience, and I knew I had to continue what my dad had started.” She was 24 years old when she and her husband, Carlos Acosta, started searching for ways to expand her father’s work among the poor in and around Bogota. They incorporated CDA (Corporacion Dios es Amor, or Corporation God is Love) as a non-profit organization and now work with a staff of 400 to alleviate poverty. CDA’s subsidiary, Conviventia, serves other organizations who desire to learn from CDA’s success and improve their work through strategic partnerships.

CDA structures projects in education, child protection, health, housing, micro-finance, vocational training, and community development, reaching out directly to an average of 10,000 people and indirectly impacting more than 25,000. Carlos, a medical doctor, coordinates CDA’s health program and also supports many of the organization’s different medical outreach efforts while Missy currently serves as president and executive director of CDA-Conviventia and leads CDA’s new branch in the U.S. Carlos and Missy’s daughters, Anna and Valentina, are also involved in the ministry. “This type of work requires the commitment and involvement of the whole family. Without their support and participation, it would have been impossible to make it this far,” explains Missy.

## The Katy Connection

Two years ago, the Acostas decided to move from Colombia to Katy, knowing their love for the Colombian people wasn’t dependent on their proximity. In fact, living in Katy has provided multiple opportunities for the ministry to grow. “As CDA expanded, it was clear that we needed a branch located in a place from which you could easily travel to different countries in Central and South America,” says Missy. “Katy met our criteria - we knew of the opportunities here.” Missy’s in-laws moved from Colombia to Katy in the early 2000s. “Having family here is a definite plus, but the fact that Katy offers the benefits of a ‘small town’ lifestyle right next to a global city like Houston made it the best location for CDA’s US branch,” notes Missy.

Colombia is a beautiful country full of warm and hospitable people, but the ongoing internal strife can make it a difficult place to raise a family. Missy knows firsthand that security is the biggest challenge of living there. “I consider it a privilege to do what I do, but I know it can represent risks for my family,” says Missy. The peace of mind that comes with living in Katy actually provides opportunities to link others to the



Students studying at one of CDA's computer labs



Missy and one of the students at the Las Curces Technical and Vocational School, established by CDA



Walking down the streets of Altos de Cazuca, Soacha



Preschool class at El Pozon in Cartagena



work of CDA. "Having direct flights from Houston to Bogota makes it much easier to put work teams together," she notes. "Here, we find many open doors to carry out our mission."

### Sharing the Love

The Acostas know from experience that sustainable change can only come if the root causes of poverty are addressed as well as the symptoms. As Missy says, "We want to do good in a good way." CDA and Conviventia ultimately work toward changing mindsets and hearts to bring about the kind of individual and community transformations that lift people out of poverty and set them on their own two feet. That is why Missy is always eager to work with others who share her heart and her vision. "When we all work together, it is possible to make a real, lasting difference," she says. "Obeying the mandate to 'love one another' is what led us to CDA and Conviventia," Missy acknowledges. "Never underestimate the power of an obedient and compassionate heart." KM



*SUSANNA DONALD has witnessed the beauty and tragedy of Bogota and is grateful for people like the Acostas who reach out to people who need it most.*



Missy celebrates with students from Barranquilla at the inauguration of their new school building

## How to Help?

Visit [conviventia.org](http://conviventia.org) or email [info@conviventia.org](mailto:info@conviventia.org) for more information about these opportunities.



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