

Our mercy mission

By DANIEL McGRORY
Chief Foreign Correspondent

A COUPLE wept unashamedly as they read a Daily Express report about Reina, a tragic Guatemalan teenager.

Haunted by her plight, Duncan and Jenni Dyason came to a momentous decision — to go out and help some of the thousands of neglected youngsters like Reina.

"Looking back it is extraordinary how

Couple moved by plight of tragic Reina fight to help other youngsters

Express EXCLUSIVE

quickly it all happened," Jenni said yesterday.

"One minute we were in a cosy country cottage in Buckinghamshire with cyclamen climbing up the wall.

"The next we were climbing off the bus in Guate-

mala City into heat that hit you in the face like an iron."

The Dyasons had little idea of what to expect in the vice-ridden city.

They had seen the Daily Express picture of Reina cradling a baby she can-

not afford to clothe or feed.

Barely 15½, her life has been spent working as a prostitute.

If she can find three customers a night she can afford powdered milk and medicine for baby Maria.

Like most parents, the Dyasons immediately thought of their own 15-month-old daughter

Katelyn, who is not much older than Maria.

Reina is addicted to sniffing bags of industrial glue. This stifles her hunger.

The Dyasons were working with young drug abusers in Amersham, a town where youngsters complain about boredom — but whose biggest danger is themselves.

"These kids needed help, but what we couldn't forget was Reina's face," said Jenni, 30.

"We sat up nights trying to imagine how adults — soldiers, policemen, even their parents — could abuse children like Reina and then kill them because they're a nuisance."

"We knew we just couldn't turn our back on girls like her."

The Dyasons used their free time to discover more about Latin America's street children and how they could help them.

But they might not have been able to do much more if not for the generosity of Daily Express readers.

The Jubilee Campaign, which helps fund a shelter in Guatemala City, had raised enough from our readers to recruit more volunteers.

The Dyasons did not need any persuading.

Duncan said: "We talked it over with close friends, listening to them spell out the drawbacks of living in a country like that with a baby like Katelyn."

Painful

"But in our hearts we had already decided to go."

"Everyone wished us well, though we could see in their faces they thought we must be mad."

"Jenni's brother virtually accused us of murdering Katelyn."

The first few weeks in Guatemala were awkward and painful.

The searing heat and cramped living conditions sometimes made them yearn to be back in Buckinghamshire.

The worst moment was when Katelyn fell ill with food poisoning.

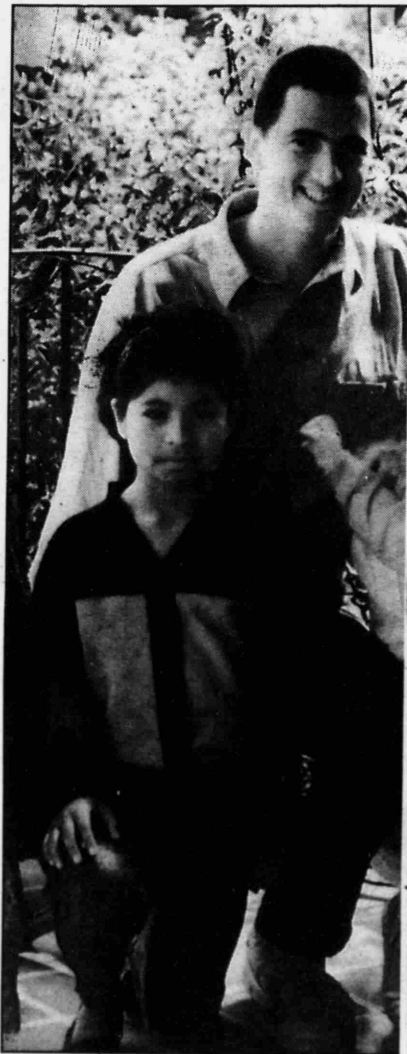
But Jenni said: "Katelyn recovered and every day we came across girls like Reina and knew we'd done the right thing."

Staring at a picture of Reina, in her fetid one-room squat inside a drug den, Duncan, 32, said: "Children should not have to live like this, anywhere."

"The cruelty out here is unimaginable for families back home."

"Truly, the sights you see are heartbreaking. Five-year-olds who have never known what is to be hugged, only kicked and spat at."

On the city's garbage dump there are toddlers with feet like leather who sift through monstrous piles of rubbish, fighting off rabid dogs and crows



NEW FRIENDS: The Dyasons with Katelyn and

for scraps of food. The dirt and cloying stench eats into every pore and cholera is rife.

"No one seems to care about the kids. With a £1 coin here you could do so much," Jenni said.

The Dyasons are investigating a smuggling ring who sell new-born babies to couples in America for up to £75,000 a time.

"The mothers get maybe £1,000," said Jenni.

"They are poor women with maybe six children they cannot feed already and these smugglers get doctors to approach them in maternity wards to sell their babies. It is monstrous."

Even more unspeakable is the trade in human organs, pirated from youngsters who myster-

ously disappear off the streets. The Dyasons are watching one house in Guatemala City where a woman keeps up to two dozen children who are never allowed to leave.

Duncan said: "We were told by a woman these children are butchered for their kidneys or a cornea, and never seen again."

Threats

"The informant was scared and drew her hand across her throat when we asked her for more proof. 'If we do nothing else here we will stop this vile trade.'"

In the short time they have been in Guatemala the Dyasons — who work for the Casa Alianza foundation — have already had death threats. So have

Mexico, non-stop.

(It'll make your grin grow, gringo.)

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