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**Juan Manuel Pineda's Story:  
A Dedication of Music to Those Who Transformed His Life**

Juan Manuel, 21, was born in Usulután, in the municipality of Santiago de María, El Salvador with a cleft palate and severe dental deformities. At age 2, a fire in Juan's home caused third degree burns on his legs and the subsequent amputation of both legs at the hip. Juan spent the first nine years of his life without the benefit of prosthetic legs.

When Juan was 9, his mother died of an ulcer. After a turbulent foster situation, Juan was brought to Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos (NPH, Spanish for "Our Little Brothers and Sisters") El Salvador, where he began a new life. As one of the homes NPH runs in nine Latin American and Caribbean countries, NPH El Salvador transformed Juan's life by providing him with all of his daily needs, including healthcare, education and unconditional love. As he grew older, Juan learned what it meant to live with a loving, extended family and his experience at NPH El Salvador has allowed him to become a productive, independent adult who recognizes the value of giving back.

Several years ago while at NPH, Juan's love of and talent for music was recognized, and he was encouraged to further develop this musical passion. He became part of the music program at the home and was chosen to help represent all the children of NPH in the musical tour group. Working with Otoneil Alvarez, the music director for NPH El Salvador, Juan began writing music and playing guitar, and his skills quickly blossomed.

In 2007, the El Salvador home was chosen to perform throughout the Midwest region of the U.S. in a series of "fiestas" to raise funds for NPH. The fiesta tour included both musicians and dancers from the home and gave these children an opportunity to stay in the homes of volunteers, inspiring ongoing relationships with many families.

While in Chicago, Juan sang and played the guitar for an audience that included several physicians from the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Touched by his music and amazed by his story, they committed themselves to find a way to correct some of his medical problems at no cost. Juan was accepted into a program at Shriner's Hospital for Children—Chicago to correct his cleft palate and granted the funds for new

prosthetics for his growing body. Upon hearing the story, the Mulliganeers from Chicago agreed to cover all transportation costs for the surgeries.

In late 2007, Juan began a journey, which continues today, to repair the cleft palate and surrounding cranial facial issues that he has had since birth. Shriner's Hospital for Children—Chicago and the UIC doctors are managing Juan's case and are seeing him through the rounds of surgery necessary to correct the palate, and the plastic and dental surgery to repair his face.

Today, Juan is a dedicated acoustic guitarist and vocalist. During his regular visits to Chicago for medical treatment, Juan continues his music studies at The Old Town School of Folk Music. He has entertained audiences at churches and special events throughout the area. At each event, he plays and sings a special ballad – the theme song for NPH – that was written as a song of gratitude.

Throughout his journey to receive medical attention, Juan Manuel and a companion from NPH El Salvador live with the Byrne and Howard families in the Edgebrook community of Chicago, who provide him with love and daily support. In addition to assisting Juan with medical appointment and daily activity scheduling, host mother Marlene Byrne took it a step further. Knowing of Juan's love of music, Byrne used her connections as the owner of Celtic Marketing, Inc. to introduce Juan to musicians and music producers who saw the potential of this young man. Working with Juan, they provided guidance and resources for Juan to turn his musical dreams into reality.

At the start of 2009, Juan began recording a variety of songs he had written for a CD. While working on his music, Juan decided to title the CD "El Sonido de Graditud" or "The Sound of Gratitude," to demonstrate his appreciation to those who have helped guide his journey.

### **Juan's Project: "El Sonido de Graditud"**

With the backup and guidance of a talented group of musicians and producers, Juan has written and recorded 10 songs – both ballad and folk style – that he is very excited to share with the world. During his CD release concert on Thursday, Oct. 15 at Chicago's Green Dolphin Street, listeners will be able to hear how the emotion of Juan's journey has culminated in these special songs. "My songs are ones of gratitude," said Juan Manuel. "I write them to be thankful for NPH and all the people who make my life good."

In addition, because of the poignant nature of Juan's story, a documentary film crew has begun filming and compiling footage that will eventually be produced into a film about Juan and his inspiring journey.

Juan Manuel's perseverance in the face of enormous challenges, the fostering of his talents by NPH, and the outpouring of generosity by so many Chicagoans makes this a story that is perfectly communicated through his music, and told more in depth in film.

Please visit [www.thesoundofgratitude.com](http://www.thesoundofgratitude.com) for more information.

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