



BY **KEN NIGRO**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **KATHRYN QUIRK**



---

LINDOS SUEÑOS 2011:

# WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO NAME

When you picture the Dominican Republic, you quickly see magnificent beaches, clear blue waters and grand luxury hotels.

But, now try to picture this place in your mind. It is a rundown, small, dilapidated village in the Dominican Republic, 10 miles east of Santo Domingo and only a short walk from the Red Sox Baseball Academy. To the casual American observer, the streets don't look like streets at all, but rather a series of mangled, muddy paths, with no street signs nor lights to guide the way.

This is a village in the truest sense of the word. The community has only 2,000 residents and 70 percent of them are unemployed. Of the other 30 percent, a large number are employed in low paying jobs at an Air Force base in nearby San Isidro. The illiteracy rate is alarmingly high.

Most people from this village simply wander around, waiting for something good to happen. Most live in incredibly cramped, small two-room houses and many walk around without shoes.

"They keep waiting for their time to come," said Jay Alou, the former Major Leaguer and Director of the Red Sox Dominican Academy. "But it never does."

The village is El Mamon, and it is where 20 teens spent a portion of their summer vacation as part of the Red Sox Lindos Sueños program—presented by JetBlue. Lindos Sueños ("Beautiful Dreams") was started back in 2004, thanks to a large donation from a baseball-loving mom and philanthropist. David Ortiz and others have also contributed to the program's funding.

Each year, the Red Sox select 10 American and 10 Dominican youths (ages 15-18) to participate in the program. The American youths are flown down to Santo Domingo and they fly for free, thanks to the generosity of program sponsor, JetBlue Airlines. Upon arrival in the Dominican, the 10 American teens meet their 10 Dominican teammates. The 20 youths spend the next 10 days playing baseball together, and conducting community service in an impoverished Dominican community.

In past years, the American and Dominican participants have worked at an orphanage in San Pedro de Macoris, a school in Guerra, and at baseball fields in Haina and El Mamon.

But, this summer was different and probably the most satisfying of all the Lindos Sueños programs. The participants were once again in El Mamon, but not to refurbish a baseball field. Instead, they spent their time fixing up rundown houses. And, it was one amazing sight. First, you watched the American and Dominican youths pry the nails off these very old houses. Then, you watched as they sawed off new pieces of wood and calmly nailed the wood back on each house.

Presto, they rebuilt not one, nor two, nor three houses. Make it four in just seven mornings. And for much of the time this summer, the teens had to deal with heavy rains in El Mamon. Every participant no doubt had to buy a pair of sneakers upon returning home.

One has to actually see a house up close in El Mamon to comprehend the scene. Many of the houses consist of only two small rooms, with no bathrooms, no refrigerators and no television sets. And, even when these luxuries did exist in some of the houses, there was a catch...neither the bathroom, nor the refrigerator nor the TV actually worked.



Above: Widowed, unable to pay for her children's medicine and fearful that her house would crumble on top of her family, Sonaída prayed for a miracle. After three days of work, the teen participants had restored her home and her spirits.

The biggest house the youths worked on was 15' by 25'. And, the reason it was that big was because it was used as both a schoolhouse and a home.

Another house was owned by a widow who lived there with her four children. Three of the children are mentally challenged and a fifth child died at an early age.

"That was it for me," said Connor Roth, one of the American youths from Washington DC. "When we were done, the widow came out and sung a hymn. It was so moving. Before we worked on her house, she would have to stay up all night, praying that it would not fall down. That we changed everything around for her was something else."

The more the Lindos Sueños youths worked on the houses, the more they wanted to continue working. Suddenly, playing baseball was not that important. Fixing the houses became No. 1, and baseball could be played some other time.

"We were supposed to play ball at the Academy every afternoon," said Connor. "We wound up playing only three games, but that was okay. It didn't put a damper on my trip at all."

Seamus Vahey, a 16-year-old from Concord, MA, had similar thoughts.

"Community service became so rewarding for us," Vahey said. "We wanted to get the job done in El

Mamon. We were all dedicated to the project."

Both Connor and Seamus, along with their 18 teammates, soon began to realize something about the people who lived in El Mamon. Everyone was very content and seemed perfectly at home in this land of extreme poverty. The little children who watched the work on the houses never begged for water, nor food, nor gifts. And, in the end, these little ones were doing somersaults all over the dirt roads as they received T-shirts, sports bags and other gifts from Connor and Seamus and the other American and Dominican workers.

Rebuilding the houses also brought the Lindos Sueños team together. Both the American and Dominican youths saw enormous good in what they were doing and they

bonded. The American kids even started speaking more Spanish. Yes, it was muy despacio (very slowly) and it was muy pocito (very little). But, it was still Spanish.

Yes, El Mamon is a tiny, impoverished village. But, it is truly a sight to behold.

And, there is little doubt that the 10 American and 10 Dominican youths who participated in the Lindos Sueños program this summer are sharing the same feelings over and over and over again.

"I had the trip of a lifetime," Connor said. "It was awesome. When are we going back?" ■

To learn more about Lindos Sueños and watch a video from this year's trip, please visit [www.redsox.com/lindossuenos](http://www.redsox.com/lindossuenos)

