



Tom Nazario and Renée Byer following a presentation in the Silicon Valley office. (Photo by Paul Kitagaki Jr.)

Telling the Stories of the World's Poor

By Allison Morgan
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Tom Nazario, a University of San Francisco law professor and human rights advocate, along with Renée Byer, a Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist, visited Bingham's West Coast offices recently to talk about a new book they're working on. *Living on a Dollar a Day: The Lives Behind the Faces of the World's Poor* tells the stories of people around the world who have so little and often suffer so much.

Here, Tom talks about his motivation for the book, what he hopes the project will help accomplish and how he became connected with Bingham.

How did the idea for this project come about?

Twenty years ago, I wrote the book *In Defense of Children: Understanding the Rights, Needs and Interests of the Child*, which covers all areas of children's rights. This led to appearances on numerous television shows, including "Oprah," and much of my international work for the United Nations. It was through my travels for the U.N. and other organizations that I became astonished at the severity of poverty and the impact it has on the lives, health and dreams of families and children.

My two main reasons for this project are 1) my belief that poverty is probably the biggest problem facing the world today and 2) that it's an issue that's not getting enough attention worldwide. People are being left to die.

Three-and-a-half years ago you started a foundation, The Forgotten International, which combats extreme poverty across the globe. Talk about the connection between the foundation and this project.

Living on a Dollar a Day is an outgrowth of the work of the foundation. There are a billion people living in extreme poverty in the world, and the purpose of the book is to bring the lives of these people to the forefront. The book is a unique step in that direction in that it profiles the day-to-

day life struggles of these families and children. In order to do this, we've recently completed visits to 10 countries: India, Bangladesh, Thailand, Cambodia, Ghana, Liberia, Romania, Moldova, Peru and Bolivia. What we've covered is quite compelling.

Why profile children and families in foreign countries and not the U.S.? It seems like poverty is a serious problem here, too.

I get asked this often. We believe poverty in the U.S. is different from other places in the world. In the U.S., a lot of poverty relates to mental illness, unemployment, various addictions, undocumented individuals, and other issues that, at least to some extent, have programs and resources available to address them. In the countries we're profiling, there are few, if any, resources to help the poor. As a result, the extreme poor often live on the edge of life and death.



A photo that will be featured in Tom and Renée's book and is being proposed for the cover. (Photo by Renée C. Byer)

You've been involved in social justice for more than three decades. How has that impacted your investment in this project?

I've always wanted to do this work and teach at the same time, and I've been blessed to be able to do so. In one of my travels for the U.N., I was asked to write a report on the treatment of Tibetan children, which led to my spending a substantial amount of time with the Dalai Lama, who then wrote the foreword for the book. He and I became good friends, and we spoke often about the suffering of the impoverished. That was one of the things that encouraged me to start this project and my foundation. I wanted to do something that was more international in scope and also begin to chip away at issues related to economic justice.

What reactions have you received from friends and colleagues about this project?

It's been very well-received. We're in the process of lining up meetings with publishers, and we are also working on a documentary, which we hope will lead to even bigger things. David Griffin, who was previously with *National Geographic* and is now working with the *Washington Post*, is helping us with the design of the book. In the process, we've made a lot of friends, and my foundation has raised more than \$700,000 to help support grassroots organizations in seven countries. Hopefully, this book will help us raise much more money to help the poor.

Did this project always incorporate a book and a documentary, or did that materialize during the process?

Originally, this project started out as just a book, but we then decided to record our visits to each country. We ended up having so much video content that we decided to try to make a film. We're planning to work with experts on commentary and hope that the combination of the book and documentary will diversify our audience. Actor Pierce Brosnan, who has contributed to this effort, will be narrating the film. Our goal is to release the book and documentary around this time next year.

You've made presentations about this project in a number of Bingham offices. What's the Bingham connection?

One of my first students, partner Debbie Fischer, is a good friend and is on the board of directors for The Forgotten International. After I told her about my work a few years ago, she set up presentations in five Bingham offices and, in the process, I've gotten to know more about Bingham. Also, Bingham donates about \$25,000 each year to our foundation, often through a summer associate-related lunch program and special events. I'd like to sincerely thank Bingham for their help and support, and specifically, Catherine Curtin, director of partner special events and community affairs.

Where can people learn more about your foundation and this new project?

I'd encourage them to check out the website for [The Forgotten International](#). We'll also be planning a few book signings for those interested and will let everyone at Bingham know before those take place.

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