

A Hero With Heart



Leigh Haeger

Peru

When Ana Dodson traveled to Peru two years ago, she went on more than just a vacation. She was visiting her native country.

Ana, 13, was born in Peru, but she was adopted by an American family and grew up in the United States. While in Peru, Ana got a glimpse of what her life could have been like had she not been adopted.

She visited several Peruvian orphanages, including one in the hills of Cuzco, near her birthplace.

"[The orphanage] was really cold and dry," Ana told *Weekly Reader*. "The paint was falling off....The girls...were very **malnourished**¹."

When Ana returned home to Colorado, the memory of the orphanage in Cuzco haunted her. "I really couldn't get the girls out of my mind, and I really wanted to do something...because I could have been one of those girls in that orphanage."

She decided to start a group called Peruvian Hearts to help. In two years, Peruvian Hearts has raised about \$18,000 for the orphanage. The group also bought a chicken coop so the girls can eat fresh eggs.

Ana's efforts have not gone unnoticed. She recently won a Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes. The award is given to kids and teens who make a difference.

Ana says any kid can do what she did. "Really believe in yourself, and follow your heart," she says.

¹**malnourished:** condition when a person's body is not getting enough nutrients.