



December 2009

The Family Link

A guest house serving families visiting loved ones with life-threatening illnesses

Home-style Hospitality from the Heart

by Sister Ruth
Family Link Program Director

It was a dark and stormy night ... and I heard a tapping at my window. It wasn't very loud at first, but loud enough to wake me and get my dogs ready to bark. I shushed the beasties and listened, and there it was again, but this time a little louder and more persistent. I quickly threw on some warm clothes and went to investigate; the dogs stayed safe—and quiet—on their beds!

The noise was being made by a guest who had somehow gotten himself locked out of his room. He couldn't tell me the problem, because he is a Hmong man and speaks absolutely no English. When I pulled out my key his face changed and he knew that help was at hand.

I went back to bed and lay there thinking about the plight of families who come to us from overseas, or who live in the U.S. without English skills, though most of the latter know quite a few basic words and we get by.

Illness strikes every nationality, race, age and financial status. Our guests at The Family Link face the problems encountered by families with sick relatives the world over. But they come to us with what is often a new problem in the life of their family. Perhaps it's the breadwinner who has met with a terrible accident; a grandchild prone to acts of violence; a planned fun trip to San Francisco for a couple expecting their first child when preeclampsia strikes.

Most guests leave anxious loved ones at home. Often this means leaving young children with other family members. We see many guests when a progressive illness has worn the family down over a number of years: perhaps the last resort is the hope of a transplant, or deep brain surgery for someone with Parkinson's disease, or an elderly blind lady whose husband has a rare cancer. These things can happen to anyone.

The Family Link helps many people who cannot afford to stay in a hotel in San Francisco, or even a suburban motel. However, we never ask people about their finances, because a comfortably well-off guest may need the support that even the best tourist hotels can't give because those establishments are not attuned to the path of fear and sadness that our guests are walking.

It's hard to have a loved one in the hospital no matter what one's circumstances. One of our guests this year was a man whose son met with a

dreadful accident and spent a long time in intensive care. Eventually the young man recovered enough to be moved to a rehab unit. When the son advanced to rehabilitation the father got a look at the bill for the critical care hospital: it was over \$11 million!

Very few people can go through the rest of their life unaffected by massive debt. Even 20 percent of \$11 million is a lot of money. We have written previously about families who have lost their homes when illness has turned folks' finances upside-down. This fall we received a note and a check from a wife who stayed with us for six weeks in 2008 after her husband had a stroke while they were visiting San Francisco: "As we may have to sell our home," she wrote, "we had a tag sale and wanted to extend some of the profits for your work."

In the course of a month we get all sorts of calls from social workers telling us of families in dire need of a place to stay after some trauma has hit a family member. When we already have a full house the best we can do is put names on our waiting list. This month we have been able to accommodate only one person from that list. The house has been so full and the patients so sick that the same families have remained with us.

Your financial help is what makes it possible for us to provide a safe, clean place for these

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*"I thank God for the love, care, and support that you have provided for me and so many more ... this home, The Family Link, is a great blessing to many."
...Sincere thanks, Gary*



The Gift of Song

When a baby named Jonathan was born with severe heart problems this year, his grandparents came to The Family Link. Grandpa Dave played his guitar and sang to Jonathan; Grandma Nancy adapted little tops to fit around Jonathan's tubes. Jonathan's whole life was spent in the hospital and he lived for eight months surrounded by the love of his family, friends and devoted hospital staff.



The Khans—A Success Story

The Khan family arrived on our doorstep in 2001 with a tiny, sick baby and high hopes. Since then they have spent, on several visits, about five years at The Family Link, so many of you have known them. We have watched baby Taban grow into a happy, healthy 10-year-old.

During a 2008 visit to see Taban's transplant doctors, their home province in Pakistan descended into chaos. Shabnam, Taban's mother, had taken a leave from her job as principal of a school for Pakistan's poorest children, educating both boys and girls. The school's philosophy of giving a good education to both sexes with the goal of keeping them from being pawns of terrorists made Shabnam a marked woman.

Taban's two younger sisters, Javaria and Hajira, were born in the U.S. in hopes that their cord blood could be used to cure Taban. The family's return to a combat zone would have endangered their lives, too.

With help and financial support from some Family Link friends we were able to assist their successful application for asylum. In July 2009 the family moved into an apartment in Richmond, about a 30-minute drive from San Francisco. Tahir (or Muhammad, to many guests) has a job in a shoe store. It's minimum wage but most newcomers have had to start with very limited resources. Like immigrants throughout our country's history, they have much to offer and will work to give more than they receive.

On November 29 we had Taban's 10th birthday party.

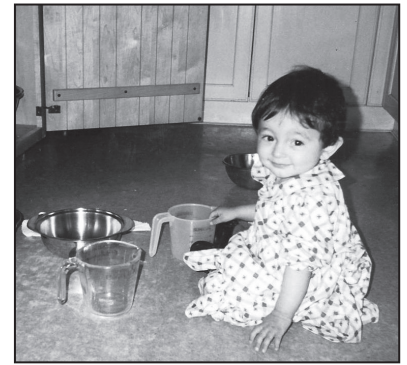
Shabnam summed up the Khan family's gratitude:

"If my family had not been able to stay at The Family Link during Taban's treatment for Thalassemia, she probably would not have lived to celebrate her 10th birthday. We owe her life to The Family Link, and we hope people will continue to support The Family Link and keep it going. We are so thankful for everything. It means so much to me that I have my daughter today due to this wonderful place.

"We came to the United States as visitors, with nothing but hope, and we found a home away from our home. We were welcomed at The Family Link with open arms and open hearts. After we came back last winter to check in with Taban's doctors, our home country became more and more unstable. Now we have our own home in the Bay area; my husband has a job and our daughters are thriving. Everything became possible because of the welcome we received at The Family Link.

"I am grateful to everyone at The Family Link—the staff, volunteers, board members and fellow guests who stayed during the times my family was here—for their kindness, love and support. Even when times were terrible for us, all those people made these hard times more comfortable for our family.

"Most of all, we are thankful for everyone whose generosity helps The Family Link maintain its home for visitors like us who have nowhere else to go."



Taban, at home in the kitchen in 2001.

The Family Link

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Meet Our Newest Board Members

Meghan Carlson is human resources manager for a 180-person San Francisco law firm, responsible for all aspects of employee relations. In addition to professional experience and affiliations, she is a member of the Steering Committee of the United Way of the Bay Area's Emerging Leaders' Society. Meghan is our board vice president.

Larry Curtice, J.D., is a "mostly retired" attorney with over 40 years' experience. Before opening his own practice in 1979 he spent four years with the San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation, represent-

ing indigent clients. Larry serves as a superior court pro-tem judge and finds time to volunteer with Little Brothers-Friends of the Elderly, St. Anthony's Dining Room, the One Brick Foundation and S.F. Animal Care & Control.

William Fellows, C.P.A., is a senior manager with a major national accounting firm. Will earned an MBA from MIT's Sloan School of Management, and is a chartered financial analyst, a certified public accountant, and a financial risk manager. The board elected Will treasurer this year, a critical position as we work to keep our financial head above water in the current recession.

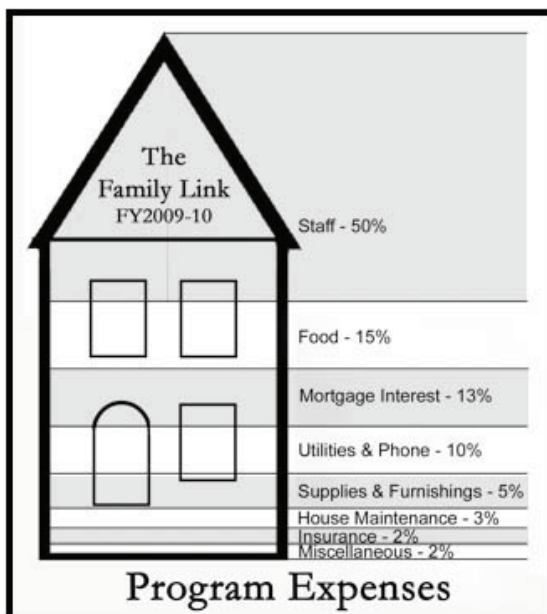
Balancing Income With Costs Creates a Bare-bones Budget

Snip here, trim there, defer a major expenditure, find a new grant, recruit more volunteers to help raise funds.

The current FY2009-2010 annual budget reflects serious belt-tightening, coupled with redoubled efforts to increase income amid recession. The total of \$195,000—lowest in several years—covers basic needs. Less than 10 percent goes to “overhead” expenses, which include mortgage principal, office and administrative costs, fundraising and public relations outreach.

The vast majority of expenditures are “program” expenses, essential to keep operating. Key program costs include the salaries of our program director—our only full-time employee—our housecleaner and a portion of our administrative assistant’s salary.

Three sources account for nearly 90 percent of the income we’ve budgeted this fiscal year. Over half—\$100,000—comes from individual donors; we hope to find \$50,000 in grants; and \$24,000 is our optimistic projection for guest donations, although an increasing number can’t afford to pay anything. The balance, we hope, will come from fundraising events and other miscellaneous sources. We’ve been notified



that a benefactor who died this year named us in his will, but that’s all we know—so \$8,400 is budgeted for bequests, a figure that lets us balance anticipated income (often speculative in today’s economy) with expected expenses (fairly well defined).

Treasurer Will Fellows is advising the board as we near the mid-point in this budget year. With seriously depleted savings, we are exploring creative ways to keep the lights on.

Repairs, Maintenance, Painting are Planned for Summer 2010

Our longtime volunteer Janis Berwitt learned about a Junior League program of emergency grants. With two showers in need of repair or replacement, the Junior League of San Francisco gave us a \$3,800 emergency grant to cover the costs. We are very grateful to be able to fix the leaks before they cause damage to the structure of our 105-year-old house.

We are looking for other grant opportunities to pay for additional needed maintenance and rehabilitation of the building. Sister Ruth is compiling a list of repairs we hope to accomplish in June 2010, when she will be away. She’s well qualified to organize this work, thanks to a year of hands-on experience when we restored the house after buying it in 1994. And, you may recall, she’s a licensed general contractor.

The partial work list: Repainting each room, recarpeting the guest bedrooms, replacing the kitchen counters and replacing the floor in the upstairs guest laundry area. We also hope to replace our dishwasher and the washer and dryer used by guests. New beds are on the wish list if we can find a donor.

The board agreed to suspend guest visits while rehabilitation is under way to avoid conflicts with guests’ security and serenity. That also presents an opportunity, before the guests return, to open all our rooms for an open house event to thank friends, supporters and businesses who have helped—we’ll alert local residents by e-mail.

Quilts to Warm our Guests

Dorothy Langlois Epstein is a close friend of Diana Hartman, our board president, so she hears a lot of Family Link stories. This summer she responded with a unique gift: quilts for all of our beds.

“When I heard about the compassion and generosity extended by The Family Link to the families and friends of those hospitalized,” said Dorothy, “I was inspired to donate these quilts, to help add comfort for visitors during their stay.

“These quilts are all made by me (some were machine-quilted by Nina Farrell) and are unique—as are the people who use them. I hope that they will get plenty of use over the years and will provide warmth to many.”



Visit us online

Our Website address is
www.thefamilylink.com

*“I’m still in awe ... You were all so wonderful and the house itself so beautiful. Thank you, thank you!”
...With Love, Mary*



Simon Dinglasan shows one of Dorothy’s lovely quilts.



Thanks to Those Who Help



Treasurer Will Fellows and wife Kerr volunteered to help raise money at the Castro Street Fair.

With many grant funders forced to cut back their giving, we are grateful to the following organizations who have helped The Family Link in the past year: Broadway Cares; Frank A. Campini Foundation; Dominican Sisters of Springfield, Illinois; Episcopal Charities; Junior League of San Francisco; Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence; Trust Funds, Inc.; and Wells Fargo Foundation. In addition, we have been approved for a grant from the Castro Lions.

Funds generated by our 38 volunteers at the 2009 Castro Street Fair will be received in December 2009. Our board members and other

volunteers also participated in Macy's Passport in-store benefit, earning direct cash from ticket sales and a yet-to-be-announced share of the event's proceeds.

Some Free Means of Support

Donate A Car works! Our first vehicle was donated this year. We'll hook you up—and the tow truck will hook your auto up. Call us at 415-703-9050 to make arrangements.

eScrip sends us 2%–10% every time someone uses a registered credit, debit or ATM card at hundreds of businesses, from supermarkets to airlines. Card users pay nothing. We receive a few hundred dollars yearly, but could receive thousands if all our friends signed up, free, at www.escrip.com. Enter group name The Family Link; group ID# 3375889; ZIP code 94114.



Community Thrift Store, 625 Valencia St., gives us proceeds when they sell your donated items. Be sure they credit our account, #15. For furniture pick-up, call 415-861-4910.

Cole Hardware, with four community-minded stores, will give us 10% of your pre-tax purchase amount if you ask the cashier to credit the sale to The Family Link.

"Just having the peace of mind of knowing we had somewhere to go relieved a major portion of the stress we were going through. We sincerely appreciated everything you did for us."

*...Thank you,
Daniella, John & Family*

Home-style Hospitality, with Heart

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families in crisis. So far nobody has had to leave the house in the morning hungry, because there has always been food available, and the same is true when they come home in the evening. The washer and dryer are available to them, and

the computer is there for folks to communicate with family back home, or to research an illness. We invite people to make themselves at home. Nothing can change the circumstance of having a loved one so sick, but it is a privilege to be able to respond with some simple home comforts and a warm welcome.

In Memoriam Richard A. Parodi, D.D.S.

We are saddened by the death of Dr. Parodi in July. The Parodis have supported us with a monthly pledge for many years. Guests who were here at Christmastime shared beautiful food baskets Dr. Parodi had received. The Parodi's pledge has supported day-to-day needs in the house. Our sympathy is with Dr. Parodi's wife Betty and their family.

Help Us Keep in Touch During our Anniversary Year

We plan some special events for our 25th anniversary in 2010. We'd like to keep our friends informed of plans for this milestone year via e-mail. We promise not to overwhelm you with messages, and we never share our mailing list. The enclosed envelope has a space for your e-mail address, or just e-mail us, with your name and address, at thefamilylink@mindspring.com.

"A Taste of Pakistan" is one event worth watching for. Family Link benefactors from as far away as Virginia enjoyed a modest 2009 fundraiser that combined current events with Pakistani cuisine prepared by Shabnam Gul

(page 2). We plan a repeat in 2010 so more people can participate in this event.

V.P. Meghan Carlson (l.) and Susan Schneider helped Shabnam Gul serve delicious dishes at A Taste of Pakistan.

