



The Man of the House

By Laura Liz Gil Echenique

Junior is 49 years old. He comes to get clean water every day in a handcart made up of a plastic box, four wheels and a handle. He has been coming for 12 months now. He is a little shy, but he smiles happily every time he comes; he knows what his task is and he feels responsible.

I was sure he had a beautiful story to tell, so I decided to ask him. Someone approached me and told me that probably he could not answer me. I was convinced that if he came with

his clean bottles to get water every day, notwithstanding the heat or the distance, he would have no problem to talk to me about his experiences or answer any of my questions. Fortunately I was right.

Junior is short, wears thick glasses, smiles all the time and concentrates on what he does. He has Down's syndrome. He lives with his mother and his grandmother, whom he calls 'Ayah'. He told me, a little bit ashamed and flattering at the same time, that he comes to get the water every day because in the instructions it reads that water should be consumed within 24 hours. Every morning he takes his handcart and carefully avoiding the sunny sidewalk, he climbs the streets that lead to the Evangelical Seminary of Theology. There he goes to the taps where he gets the purified water; he does it with pleasure and he takes pride in what he does, because it is his duty.

We are standing under the sun, and he puts his cart on the shade so that the sun does not go directly into his purified water. He tells me that he has to leave quickly because he has many things to do, and back at the house they had already ran out of yesterday's batch of water bottles. I ask him to let me take a photo. I ask him again if he does not get tired of coming everyday up here to get the water. I insist on asking him because I know that he can talk to me about so many things, but the lady near us insists on telling me that he cannot answer my questions. Sometimes she even answers for him when I ask him a question. I pay no attention to this lady and persist in my queries; whether his mother comes to get the water too, or whether he has felt he lacks the strength to get here. He takes his time to answer me. He thinks carefully about my words, smiles again, looks up at the sun and looks down to his bottles. Then, as if he were sharing a secret with me, he confesses he is not bothered by any of it, and with a mischievous joy he says, "I am the man of my house."