



Fotokids

Fundación de Niños Artistas de Guatemala

December 2005

LETTER FROM THE EXEC. DIRECTOR

Season Greeting to you all! As this year draws to a close I still feel myself reeling from the constant buffeting that is Guatemala. But I must say that I find myself optimistic (probably because I have been traveling outside of Guatemala!)

Many of you are aware of the devastating mudslides in Santiago Atitlán in October, as a result of Hurricane Stan. Tons of mud slid off the mountainsides and buried what was once a up and coming barrio of Santiago, leaving 3 of the 18 families we work with homeless and all of them mourning the deaths of family or friends.

We have three boys from Santiago living at the school in the Capital who were torn with anxiety as all communication was cut off. They were left agonizing over the fate of their loved ones. Diego took buses, hitchhiked rides, forded angry rivers and walked for 6 hours in the pelting rain to arrive home and find his own house in tact while the neighbors on either side were buried up to their roofs in mud.

Here is an excerpt from Diego's very moving journal:

"I asked my father what had happened in Panabaj and he told me that Tuesday afternoon at about 5 pm

there had been a mudslide by my house that washed away 6 houses. The electricity cut out and then in the early morning hours they heard noises and discovered that the whole neighborhood of Panabaj had been swallowed by mudslides. He told me that about 5 in the morning the people of Panabaj tried to save their own lives by running in all directions. Some people slipped and were swallowed by the mudslide. Others ran naked out of their houses or some just stayed together as a family waiting for death. At dawn the population went to rescue their neighbors with anything they could find, with poles, shovels ropes and anything else they could find at hand. Many who went to rescue fell by the wayside. People that were trapped were pulled out by ropes, but when the rope burnt their hands they let go and died. It was impossible to save them; the mud reached the level of the roofs. My father said that while he was rescuing a man that was still alive he heard the sounds of a baby crying. The child was in the arms of its mother trapped under a large rock. He saved the two month old child but couldn't do anything for the mother. Hearing all these stories saddened me and I couldn't understand why this would happen to my village."

We had planned to do a Photoshop/Premiere workshop with Phil Borges of Bridges and the kids decided "lets go ahead with it," they wanted to talk about it. They did 2 emotive 4-minute movies with their still photos, interviews made with survivors (see link: www.bridgesweb.org)

Marlieke, our former Dutch volunteer collected almost \$4000 in emergency relief aid, which we are distributing as needed.

The homeless are now sheltered in a tent city alongside the church in Tzan Cha, until the government can find adequate land to relocate them in an estimated 14 months.

So, that's a long time and we will continue to monitor needs through Betty, our coordinator there who had been working in one of the displaced centers.

Uganda!- I knew I was seriously burned out when going to Uganda sounded like a break. Remarkably enough it was. Took me outside of myself and any problems we have here. World Emergency Relief (WER), one of our donors, invited advanced student/teacher Linda Morales to visit the projects they support and document photographically some of the almost 2 million internally displaced living in camps in Northern Uganda.

The photos really tell the story here; I barely know where to begin. The trip was amazing and encompassed so many impressions. The quantity of people in the camps who had fled the rebels (called the Lords Resistance

Army, LRA) numbered at times 60,000. The round earthen thatched

thatched roof huts seemed short, but a dug out dirt floor insured the family could lie down to escape the rebel bullets.

After the World Criminal Court's condemnation of rebel leaders, rebel troops, (who you have to remember are child soldiers), killed 5 international aid workers the week before we left. The larger relief agencies pulled out of Northern Uganda.

WER works with grass roots organizations that are there permanently, and they have the ability to move quickly. Mathew Langol kindly took us around everywhere. He is a really remarkable man, and works with Bishop Tom who has 500 or so churches under his wing from Lira District through the S. Sudan.

Here is an excerpt from my diary of a trip we made up to Adweir, where WER had built and supplied a much needed rural hospital. The hospital, taken over by rebels, was only abandoned in July of this year. We wanted to see what had been destroyed. It was our slightly dicey destination.

"The Rhino Boys are the President's crack troops selected from rural communities and engage in most of the skirmishes with the rebels. All with green rubber boots and varied camouflage uniforms they sat looking out on both sides of 2 pick up trucks. They were our escort to Adweir.

We formed a 5-car convoy with Bishop Tom sitting out in the open with the Rhino boys. Though no attacks had been registered lately the idea of heading

farther into Northern Uganda filled me with apprehension. The rebels had supposedly ravaged the hospital after using it as a base for 200-400 of the child soldiers.

We traveled up towards the last camps. It was hot in the land cruiser. Then there was a turn off of 8 kms down an abandoned road. We passed what was once a thriving trade center, and saw only burned out crumbling houses. There was no one around.

Mathew told us that the Rebel Commander Kony had put a price on Bishop Tom's head because he and another Bishop had gone and prayed at Kony's sacred site and had thrown out all the witches (destroyed his black magic). For this, Kony had sworn then he would get B. Tom no matter what it took. This was not particularly reassuring as Bishop Tom, tall and imposing dressed in his Bishop crimson was a great target in the pick-up behind us.

I was worried about Linda as it was of course my responsibility. "I would never forgive myself if something happened."

Well nothing happened *then*, but later in the week in Kampala, while returning to the hotel solo she got caught up in a serious political demonstration, with gunshots, tear gas, the works, and she was swept along with fleeing masses. She eventually found her way back to the hotel though and although distressed, hey, it makes for a good story."

The purpose of the trip was to provide an interchange, a sharing of knowledge between Fotokids and the Ugandans working with WER projects. What looks like might hopefully emerge is the opportunity to return and instruct teachers in the use of photography as a tool (our program).

They in turn would work with the young child soldiers to assist them with verbal/visual self-expression and reinsertion into society.

An estimated 20,000 of these children, kidnapped at ages 10-12 or younger are forced to kill, sold or exchanged for arms, or are obliged to prostitute themselves to the Commanders. Naturally they are scarred for life. Some have been able to escape and Mathew thinks 100 a day are returning back to Lira District.

Linda loved Uganda and wants to return. I believe it will have changed her life.

There is a lot to write on this topic and I have only scratched the surface, but I'm thinking this is a Holiday newsletter so lets end this on an upbeat note.

Handel's Messiah, produced yearly and with much hard work by Betty Whitbeck and her son Harris, designated Fotokids as the beneficiaries this year. The concerts were held both in the City where 1900 people attended and in the Hotel Santa Domingo in Antigua G. The Santa Domingo, a partially restored 16th century convent, was lit with hundreds of votive candles. The orchestra and chorus were amongst the ruins in front of the old cathedral's altar. It was magical really, and it was inspiring to think it was produced with soloists brought in from the U.S. with *us* as the recipients. A wonderful start to the Holiday season.

SAVE YOUR HOLIDAY CARDS
WE CAN USE THEM! SEND TO MCGIRR 1360
JONES #601, SF, CA 94109

[What's new with the Kids](#)

More Travels-Nancy Morales went to San Miguel de Allende Mexico with a scholarship from Santa Fe Photography Workshops to study with Jock Sturges. Nancy has been photographing nudes for the last couple of years.

Abdías Perez, age 14 the Tower

Gerardo Petzey has just returned from Mexico DF where he participated as our representative in a United Nations youth conference on drug and AIDS prevention.

Berta Garcia as a result of getting to know the mayor of Santiago through Bridges/Fotokids is now working with *Fundapaz* a government titling organization working to find land for the mudslide victims

.Alba Tzina is getting married and moving to Solala. She finished her high school and vocational training as a bi-lingual secretary. Hopefully she may be able to find work in the tourism industry.

Wilder Monterroso and Oswaldo

Batres have also moved on to new horizons. Wilder is continuing his studies in computer engineering but is now actively freelancing. **Oswaldo** is teaching fourth grade and this winter will complete his volunteer fireman training.

Daniel Gonzales, Jessica and Samuel Zepeda took the Bridges workshop and are our newest teachers assistants for the year to come. from Lira District through **Atiliano** received his 3 year technical degree from the National School of Bellas Artes. We have a contract with Child Aid and local organizations to teach our program in El Tejar for 2 5-month sessions next year.

Berta, Andres Sapalu, Vivi and Diego will be going to Lafayette California in January to take part in an intercultural exchange with high school students there and exhibit some of the Fotokids work.

An exhibition date yet to be announced will be in London featuring the work of **Linda's** on this latest trip and the newest work from the project.

Both **Linda** and **Vivi** are working hard with **Manuel Morillo** on our series of workshops given to the public under the auspices of our Center of the Image. This year the Center has given 6 workshops and hopes to have even more in 2006.

Nora Elton, who has worked with us in the past, is arriving in January to help out the Center of the Image as well as training teachers for Fotokids. She will be joined for a week workshop with Laura Blacklow from the Museum School in Boston in March.

Also slated for next year are 2 more 6 month workshops with Plan International and we have a contract with Child Aid and local organizations to teach our program in El Tejar for 2 5-month sessions next year.

How you can Help!

Haven't pitched in yet? Hey its not too late – we still need quite a few scholarships.

Educational sponsorships are \$300 per year, and can be paid monthly or annually. All funds go to an individual child's educational expenses, either as a scholarship for secondary school, intensive English studies or to help defray the costs of

our courses here (which are free to our students).

Photography Sponsorships: are \$150 a year and cover the students photo supplies & classes. Log on to www.fotokids.org and click on **Foto-Link** at the bottom of the home page.

U.S. Tax Deductible donations:

Donations should be made out: to "San Carlos Foundation/Fotokids" and sent to:

FotoKids, PO Box 661447; Miami Springs, FL 33266

Those of you that have *the Out of the Dump book*, hold on to it. They are now going for \$79 used on Amazon.com! We have a **CD available** of the book for \$15

Scheduled Exhibits 2006

January – Lafayette, California send an E-mail if you want to donate
mcgirr@intelnett.com

November- St Petersburg, Florida
Let us know if you can help!