



Fotokids

*Fundación de Niños Artistas
de Guatemala*

July 2006

LETTER FROM THE EXEC. DIRECTOR

Heavy rains, dark clouds, and the mountain hillsides are once again becoming saturated. The kids that live in the highlands are nervous every time it rains. Berta from Panabaj, (remember the village outside Santiago Atitlán where 1400 disappeared in mud slides last year during Hurricane Stan?) called one stormy night to say that the mayor had ordered everyone to evacuate. However, because her family's home, though buried up to the windows with mud, had *structurally survived* the landslide, they are ineligible to move into a shelter. The shelters are only for people who have *lost* their houses. Over one hundred recently constructed emergency houses built on church donated property last week had to be abandoned.

Add to this the fact that the engineers redirected the riverbed away from the temporary housing right on the path of the houses that survived, including Bertas'. So where do they go? Land prices for a simple plot have increased from 5,000 quetzales to upwards of 30 to 50,000 quetzales. It promises to be a long rainy season.

This month we start a six-month series of workshops contracted again by Plan International, but this time on the Pacific coast of Guatemala. The seaside was another area hard hit by flooding last year and still has not recovered. The focus of the workshops will be the environmental issues that threaten the coast, as well as the reconstruction efforts. The coast is a

habitat for the sea turtles that lay their eggs on the beaches, and the endangered mangrove swamps, with the hundreds of birds that nest there. Our older students will be employed to do the teaching and the ecological curriculum for the workshops.

One of the best things is that this program dovetails nicely with our environmental project in Las Mangas Honduras, *GUARUMA*. And on that front there is good news; Honduras has been partially funded through Global Child Aid, The Grand Cayman Sunrise Rotary Club, and Fundación de Niños Artistas (that's us).



Tree by Wendy

We have new personnel there that promise to be exceptional. You wouldn't

believe the number of highly qualified people who applied for the job. It was a really difficult decision but we chose Jimmy Andino for the Director, a talented, enthusiastic, and very experienced Honduran environmentalist. As Assistant Director we are looking forward to working with Mac Stone who has done some beautiful nature photography (www.picturetrail.com/mac.stone) and will nicely complement Jimmy's skills.

What is very sad for us though is to lose Anna Richter, who, extending her Peace Corps stay an extra year, did a tremendous solo job. She not only kept the program going, with no funding and very little help, but through her positive attitude and tenacity Anna worked with the kids and the community to make *GUARUMA* an exceptionally respected entity. We will all miss her, but hope she comes back - even if only for a visit.

Last month we began the program with the kids ten to fifteen years old that have just recently been told they are HIV+. Can you believe that? Just entering adolescence, when you begin to have crushes and dream of what it would be like to have your own family (because you are an orphan, your parents have died of AIDS or because your father molested you) and you find out the reason you have been going to the clinic since you can remember, is not because you had a specific health problem, but rather because you have been receiving anti-virals.

Most of the children came in with great Aunts, or from an orphanage, a couple with parent survivors, all of whom had been too aggrieved to say anything to the kids, hoping against hope, a cure would materialize before they would have to tell them. One of the girls comes from 5 hours away by bus, another boy 3 hours, but most are from the Capital.



Vivi teaches Waleska & Peter during HIV+ class

But on the up side, their excitement to have a camera of their own and take pictures is contagious. It is a really motivated class and a lot of fun. We have the classes in the Post Office Art Center, dedicated to young people. This means the kids can mingle without any stigma and that they can take other art classes if they want. It is the first time they have been together as a group, so when they eventually begin to write about their photos and bring up their dreams and fears, the real work will begin.

Exciting news - As many of you know, we are buying the house we are in to provide a more stable foundation for the school. It's a great sunny place and we are getting it for about half of what it's worth. This is an exhilarating time for Fotokids. (See *how you can help*)

We are busy planning for our 15th Anniversary that we will celebrate in conjunction with September's Foto30, the month of photography here in Guatemala. We will do a small Gallery exhibit in the above mentioned historic old post office building. Leading into the Gallery we will have a wall with 15 very large posters describing the history of Fotokids.

In our own school/Center, we are putting in strip lighting and converting the library classroom into a temporary gallery to

show off the young people's new work. For the exhibit opening we plan to invite all the people who have supported us in one way or another in Guatemala. Throughout the month, Manuel has planned a series of photo workshops with kids.

Center of the Image, our *public* photography school, charges on with Manuel and the older students planning the exhibits and professionalizing our student's work. We have been donated digital point and shoots for workshops and have bought a Nikon D70 to bring up the *digital curve*.

To celebrate the International Day of the Child October 1st, the CI is enlisting the Spanish Hispanic Institute's support for a project featuring large vinyls of the student's photographs. The photo would include a sentence by them of how they envision *their* Guatemala. It could include themes as diverse as traditions to be conserved and/or insistence on what they see as child oriented specific rights. A repetitive series of 10 large images would then be hung on pivotal points around the City. (Where there are traffic jams preferably).

So what else is in the offing? Lots of traveling this fall. In October, Bridges, is returning to work with a new group; the younger Santiago students. Bridges worked with us last year at the Lake teaching the kids how to write and use their photographs to produce two excellent premiere movies, that explored the tragic consequences of the mudslide in their pueblo.

In November I will be taking kids to an exhibit and event in St. Petersburg Florida at Studio 621 for 2 weeks, then on from there to London for an exhibit by Linda Morales of her Uganda photographs, sponsored by World

Emergency Relief. After London we may return to Uganda to give classes to teachers in the hopes they might be able to use it as a technique to reach and help to reintegrate into society the child soldiers returning daily from the Lords Resistance Army.

In December I have been asked by Harvard University and the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies to speak at a conference on *Visible Rights: Photography for and by Children*. The conference is in Sao Paolo Brazil!

And in January once again we may be bringing four younger students up to California to stay with families of the Orinda Lafayette Presbyterian Church.

Then I write a couple of hundred grant proposals and reports and its time for my sabbatical!!! Lucy Innes our present capable Admin. Director has agreed to take over for the months I will be away. I want to write, mostly to put into some perspective the transition from my experiences with Reuters covering the war, to the children's project and hopefully what I've learned along the way. I think sometimes we are so busy that we, well at least speaking for myself, I don't have time to process what's going on. That was one of the reasons I left daily news. So, I'm calling it a book, but don't know that I will publish it.

WHAT'S NEW WITH THE KIDS!

The Chapulines (Grasshoppers), the middle school group and the advanced students are studying web design under Bree Hankinson, our incredible Australian volunteer. Bree signed on with us for 6 months to inspire the kids creativity and give the more adept ones another skill that will make them employable. Keep

posted for changes down the line on the www.fotokids.org web site.

Do you remember the young man, no longer in the project, which I mentioned in the last newsletter, as having left the drug cartels to find a new life?

This is an excerpt from my journal:

“Last night at 11 the phone rang and it was X, he was nearly sobbing and said in a tremulous voice, “They are looking for me, the police” They had come to his house twice yesterday and again today, one of his cousins told him. Since he has worked as a babysitter for a member of the cartel, he is very scared. Add to that the police have killed, in what is termed social cleansing, 4 of his neighborhood friends who were involved with the same group.”

He arrived the next morning at the project, after having spent a sleepless night on the roof of a neighbor’s house. I gave him bus fare to Nicaragua where he will maybe get another chance to start that new life. He will be under the tutelage of a carpenter he apprenticed under and who I know as well. The carpenter, an older guy, is also a church pastor, so I’m hoping that should help.

Vivi’s nightmare drama induced by her brother who is the leader of one of Guatemala’s most vicious gangs continues.

This again from my journal:

“Vivi’s brother Rudy, the leader of the 18 Calle gang is in the hospital after a riot Friday in the Pavoncito prison were guards have accused him of tossing a grenade at a rival Mara Salvatrucha member. In the altercation that left 11 dead, Rudy was shot by the guards with a bullet that

entered his upper thigh, traversed his intestines and took out part of his stomach.

On Monday, the boys in his gang called prison authorities to have him moved back to the hospital, as his condition was grave. Nearly dead, Rudy is in a room with a police guard on his door. The guard is there to keep Rudy from fleeing, which he won’t be doing anytime soon with a mashed intestine and a colostomy bag. The danger for Rudy is a rival Mara (gang member) entering the hospital to finish him off.

Vivi went to the hospital straight away after her sister alerted her to the TV newscast Friday. Allowed to enter the room, she hoped this traumatic event would persuade him to turn his life around. The family and her mother have suffered so much on his account. Doesn’t seem like he took it in much however, as his main reaction was anger, anger that he was shot. He claims he didn’t throw the grenade.

Three MS members came up to the floor Rudy was at and he said, “Vivi that’s them!” They then went down the stairs. We figure they are just casing the hospital to finish him off later.

To avoid that, Vivi is staying in the room with him, which seems to me like it would do no good at all, except get her killed as well. The mother and younger brother are staying by the hospital entrance to watch for them.

Rudy gets returned to the prison today. Vivi wonders where they will get the money for colostomy bags.”

So I include these excerpts to give you an idea of what Guatemala is like these days. Not to depress you, but to show

you the sometimes-overwhelming odds these kids have to face and they do it.

Linda Morales had an entire month (or two!) of fame as her Uganda photos were published in various newspapers, shown at her solo exhibit at Alliance Française. The exhibit was filmed by Rojo Vivo, a Hispanic news station, and she was interviewed on Guatelevision here in Guatemala. She is definitely on a roll and has been teaching the HIV+ kids along with the program director Vivi. Linda will be going to London for her aforementioned exhibit in November.

Atiliano and **Berlin** just finished shooting and editing their first 20 minute solo video for a non-governmental organization in Guatemala. They had to wade through mud and walk through rivers, but did an excellent job.



'Double', by Nancy Morales

Marta continues to work as the Director of the Computer Center in El Tejar and

teach the little kids photography at our school. She was recognized by her university Del Valle, for her excellent academic performance again this year.

HOW YOU CAN HELP!

We still need some educational sponsors and some photography sponsors for the kids.

If you are coming down to Guatemala and can carry some supplies for us, let us know, Additionally if you go to the States from Guatemala and bring up some mail let us know that as well.

Thank all of you who have contributed to the house purchase-Still time to be counted in!

It's in a good neighborhood, fairly recent construction, corner lot with room to expand, and the owners are willing to sell it for \$165,000, which is a deal for that area of the City.

Any donations are U.S.Tax deductible if made out to San Carlos fdn/Fotokids

Or use our **PayPal-Link** at the bottom of the home page.www.fotokids.org

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