



Fotokids

Fundación de Niños Artistas de Guatemala

June 2010

LETTER FROM THE EXEC. DIRECTOR

A friend wrote, " Nancy, I guess living in a place like that for so long gives you a different outlook on what constitutes a crisis. We're all sitting here spellbound and worried, and you're always "well, we got up, had some coffee, walked the dog, cleaned up ash from the volcano, had some lunch, then we had a hurricane, and then it was time for dinner . . ." ¹

Well I guess that's much better than feeling like every newsletter I write is trying to top the last one on the *Misery Meter*. (Misery Meter high this month: code orange)

I know you are all concerned about the results of the school robbery, the volcano firing up and the Tropical storm Agatha that left more than 192 dead here, but I am seriously worried about compassion fatigue. I can't believe that every time I go to write a newsletter there is so much tragedy to address. So lets start with the more cheerful news first.

You all, superior Fotokids supporters that you are, came through as always and made it possible for us to reach our goal in replacing the stolen computers. Not only did you come through with funds, some of you carried laptops down from the States and others did fundraisers or worked through family foundations. Many of you joined in our campaign of \$100 donation. It was incredibly heartening to see how many people came though in our hour(s) of need.

Another amazing event happened in Antigua Guatemala when local non-profits were galvanized by Barbara director of Safe Passage and joined together to do a fundraiser for us at the sports bar, Mono Loco (Funky Monkey Bar). Billy the owner, made up *I support Fotokids tee shirts* and gave us a good cut of the day's proceeds. Lucky for us there was a soccer championship at lunchtime. Volunteers ran around selling tickets and dinners, lodging and gourmet items from local hotels and restaurants were raffled off. It was truly remarkable to see so many people coming out to give us support.

We did quite a few things to shore up security at the school, including raising walls, reinforcing doors and windows, hiring an armed guard nights and week-end and buying a fat 800 pound safe where the laptops and mini Macs reside at night.

Our insurance company did come through just this week with a check for about half of what we lost. This was an unexpected but joyous occurrence. So were rollin in it! For the moment anyhow. We might even buy a used van. So, if you kept thinking I have to send in a donation to Fotokids and haven't gotten around to it; save it for a rainy day (or a spewing volcano).

The ash from the volcano Pacaya was more like little pebbles and ranged from ash up to corn kernel size in our neighborhoods. The bigger pieces came down sizzling and burned the arms of some people. There were big flaming rocks as well, that landed

¹ Stu Estler Disgn4Kids photography mentor

on houses in villages on the skirts of the volcano and set them on fire. The lava shot up 2 kilometers into the sky. The ash was 2-3 inches deep.

Then the rain started. At first it seemed like a good thing because it kept houses from igniting and kids didn't inhale it into their lungs, Then we realized that the ash +water =cement, and it had to be swiftly swept up so it wouldn't clog all the street drains. It landed on the tin roofs and the weight of it collapsed them. Today as I came into work, hills of black ash as tall as me lined the streets (5'5 1/4"). Evelyn Berlin, Abdias, Werner, Gerardo and Vivi worked all day, sopping wet, to fill 30 garbage bags from our patios and terraces.



Evelyn and Vivi sweep up some of the 30 bags of ash photo by Gerardo Petzey

As the rain came down heavily all that night and the next morning, I started to get nervous because that's hurricane rain. I recognized it from Hurricanes Mitch and Stan, steady, then heavier than too much for our soil to absorb. Three days of rain,

rain, rain. Besides sweeping away homes, it destroyed bridges, and left 107 communities nation wide without sufficient help and many incommunicado.

Panabaj, the barrio right next to our Santiago Atitlan school, where 600 people were buried in a river of thick mud and trees in 2005 was again in danger. Andres, our director of Fotokids there now that Bree has left, called me on the cell phone as he ran up the road to see what was happening with Bertha, one of our kids who lives there. Bertha's house is in the path of the mud and she barely escaped alive in 2005. "Its just like before," he yelled to me out of breath- "houses are flooding". Bertha wasn't sure what to do. The family wanted to leave but didn't have any relatives in town to stay with. They ended up hiring a pick-up to take them and their belongings to the village school where they slept on the floor that night.



Santiago Atitlán begins the long clean up of mud from Agatha photo by Andres Sosof

Marta from Tierra Nueva2 called late Saturday night her backyard had collapsed into a ravine, leaving the tin house perched precariously close to the yawning ravine. Her neighbor who lives directly above her had used sandbags to shore up her foundation. The bags slid off and slammed onto Marta's tin roof. Her mother usually

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calm freaked out and nervously demanded that they had to move out. Marta called reluctantly to ask to borrow money to buy a piece of land in a more secure area. Luckily for Fotokids and thanks to you all we can do that. Anyone though who wants to help out buying cement block to replace the tin walls will be fully appreciated.



Marta's house in bkgrd and her lost yard photo by Marta Lopez

Although natural disasters are horrible I think I was even more depressed by the cyclone of violence we are living in here in Guatemala.

Young kids that we know as young as 14, have their own gangs, they are armed, and have motorcycles. One of the Mom's heard that a boy named Coco was involved, as well as Benito's younger brother and had robbed neighbors in the dump at gunpoint.

"Did you tell the mom?" I asked. "Yes", she said, "I told Coco's Mom. I said as mother I knew she would want to know that her son had assaulted a neighbor." The mom looked at her and said, "Who are you?" Where do you live?" Then slipped her hoodie off a shoulder to show off her gang tattoos, and asked again, where she lived.

Our lawyer and Marco Tulio's sister had to leave their houses abandoned after extortion death threats.

Werner and Abdias had a gangland style machine gunning across from their house in Mezquital, 13 injured, 2 killed. Four guys in an SUV with automatic rifles opened up on a Sunday evening after church crowd, just to sow terror.

But for me the saddest of all was the story of Maritza's brother Walter. Maritza is no longer with Fotokids but years ago was one of the kids that lived with her family as squatters on the railroad tracks. Her older brother Walter was always her protector and really a nice upstanding good-looking boy.

Always religious, he became an Evangelical pastor. Do you know one of the only ways that the gangs will let you go is, if you are in your twenties, married and you take up religion? Walter, living now in Santa Faz, one of the most dangerous areas of the city where walking across from one street to the other can get you killed, was "saving" a lot of gang members thus enabling them to leave the gangs. I guess he was way too successful.

One Thursday night while he was in church alone prying a guy entered, put his arm around him and shot him dead.

Do you know how hard it is to raise a good boy in these neighborhoods? Do you know what a good kid who helps out his mom and sisters is worth? I went to the funeral and Maritza came over to me and fell on her knees sobbing. I cried for days afterwards.

Natural disasters at least you can do something after the fact. Gang killings, kids living and growing up in fear? I don't know-Little Aby, Berlin and Evelyn's daughter was sitting in grandmother Mely's with her parents when a stray bullet came through

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the tin roof and landed a foot from them. A kid shouldn't have to live with that kind of constant fright.

I'm not sure what we can do; the moral fabric here has been ripped to shreds. The only thing that I know we *can* do and do pretty well is take the little kids and start right away with teaching them values as well as creating a safe space for them. Their taking photographs provides them with not only a creative outlet but a sense of pride and group identity.

What's new with the kids

With younger and younger kids involved in gangs our latest class addition is **Werner** and **Abdias** class of 5-7 year olds from Mezquital. They are teaching 50 kids-not all at the same time! Doesn't matter though, its like trying to teach cats as they wander around the room or cling onto the teacher's arms. Werner and Abdias though are enchanted with them.

Abdias came back from a couple of months in Nicaragua with a group that did development work in rural poverty. He came back excited and ready to start up his own group to help in providing nutrition for alcoholics in Mezquital. It has proved a rough going, as they want the soup but not much else...a learning experience.

The Jakaramba design team is doing an intense job for World Emergency Relief interviewing participants and photographing their project in Guatemala. **Linda** has been doing the writing. **Andres, Gerardo,** and **Berlin** are taking the photos with **Werner** and **Abdias** as apprentice photographers.

Vivi continues to visit student's schools as our social worker and as a liaison with educational sponsors. She has also taken on keeping track of our inventory.

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Damaris is working in the project as an administrative assistant. After her mother was murdered last year, her sisters and father ended up living with an aunt and her two less than kind daughters. She is completing her high school on the weekends so being at Fotokids during the week and earning a bit of money is a blessing.

Design4kids is holding their 4th workshop at the beautiful Posada de Santiago on the Lake June 17-25. Professionals in art, design and photography work with Fotokids students to fulfill the needs of a real client in a one week intensive workshop where new skills in Adobe Photoshop, Lightroom, and Illustrator are taught and used.

Ten Fotokids students from the City and Santiago will be participating this time. Matt Strain from Adobe has helped us out with software donations. Those of you who are interested to teach should sign up for the next one to be held in November of this year. (Dates to be announced and follow the blog this time -see; www.design4kids.org)

Fotokids and ex- Fotokids have been sending in photos of the volcano eruption and Tropical Storm Agatha. You can see them on the Fotokids page in FaceBook or we will soon have them online in our gallery at www.fotokids.org

How you can Help

Actually you have done enough. If anyone has an urge to help out Marta with construction costs on her house (to buy cement block to replace the tin and put n a cement floor) you can do it on PayPal (put a note its for Marta) or send a donation check *Make checks out to:*

San Carlos Fdn/Fotokids and send to:
Fotokids. P.O. Box 661447, Miami, FL
33266 make sure you do say it's for Marta.



*Santiago Atitlán begins the long clean up of mud
from Agatha photos by Andres Sosof*