



Fotokids
Fundación de Niños Artistas
de Guatemala
March 2011

LETTER FROM THE EXEC. DIRECTOR

It's really good there is such a thing as a *New Year's celebration*. It ushers in all those feelings of a fresh start and leaving past problems behind. January, February in Guatemala the rains have stopped a chilly breeze blows in from the north and the flowering trees explode in purple, pink and yellow blossoms.

As you will recall 2010 was a bit harsh for us what with the robbery, floods, ash from the volcano and the murder of a student. It's a new year and we are sailing forth with optimism and excitement even as we glide into March.

Fotokids celebrates our 20th Anniversary this year!!! Pretty good for a project I thought I would do for just 6 months. (Or I could be seen as a kind of dawdler who took 20 years) I'm looking right now around the school, which is abuzz with the teachers and members of the design group Jakaramba. Time passes and Evelyn who lived in the dump and became a Fotokid at 13, is now the Administrative Director. She is married to Berlin who joined Fotokids at 12 years old from Mezquital and is the Director of Jakaramba the student design studio. Then there's the boys from Santiago Atitlán, Andres, David and Gerardo who were part of the program we began in 1997 for 6 years on kids affected by Guatemala's civil war-They are studying at the university, teaching photography classes for Fotokids, designing and doing the accounting. We are so fortunate to have 14 staff, all Fotokids' alumni, most in their mid to late twenties who have been with us at least 12 years. For a history of Fotokids' highlights buy our new book, *To Capture Dreams -20 years Fotokids* www.blurb.com

We are once again expanding our numbers with three new groups of kids. We will have 39 students this year in Santiago! A new class of

20- 4th graders, called the Conejos (*the rabbits* as it's the Chinese year of the rabbit and we are so part of the global community) are being taught by Andres as well as the returning 6 graders, the aptly names Squirrels.

David went and found 9 students from an organization that works with kids in wheelchairs and is teaching them design. Well, first he is teaching them how to use a mouse. Additionally he has to push wheel chairs up the rutted dirt lane to our Santiago house, but it's good exercise and hey he's 18.

Marta and Rosa in Tierra Nueva 2 are also adding new kids. As the number of bus drivers assassinated in extortion attempts continues to rise we slog forward adding new kids whose families have been destroyed by violence.

We have 8 donated IMAC from Computers for Guatemala that we are sending to the classroom there- you know it's weird I chose the parish there as a safe place to establish the classroom. All the murders have happened in the alley near the church.

What's New with the Kids (since people always ask...we have around 170 now!)

Eleven -year old **Jonathon** (I have mentioned him in past newsletters) has found out his grandmother is going blind. She is the only family he and his little brother have and she supports them by selling firewood. Other kids bully Jonathon because his parents were both in gangs and gunned down 4 years ago. We bought him a birthday cake last month and he broke down and cried when he saw it.

He remains so upbeat, even as he worries himself sick as to what will happen when his grandma will loses her sight in the predicted three months. You know the things these kids

face are beyond belief. I always feel self-conscious telling you all this horrible news, but I'm torn because it is the reality that we live in. To paraphrase our psychologist, *it's hard to create your own reality if someone you know has been murdered, and sometimes right in front of you.*

Jakaramba- Nancy Morales has left Jakaramba to fly off on her own doing freelance design, and although we will miss her, we applaud her pluck and initiative.

Jakaramba, under the excellent leadership of **Berlin** has tons of work! They are creating brochures, invitations, exhibition printing for local non profits, and for artists galleries, creating a series of logos and workshops for cooperatives up at the Lake, logos and posters for a political candidate, and doing the photo documentation for the Paiz Foundation's biennial cultural festival. **Jessica** and **Werner** took great photos this past weekend of a drag ballet, the Trokaderos of Monte Carlo. Jessica's first photo assignment of her budding career. (seen below)



Berlin has been giving private Photoshop lessons to 2 artists from Santa Fe who are having a museum show of their photos printed by Jakaramba (and they look gorgeous!) We have 2 new printers, an Epson 2400 and a 3800 (that does beautiful archival black and whites).

This next week Jakaramba will be doing the portraits for Antigua's Venetian Ball held in the ruins of an old church. We will be setting up a simple studio and printing out the photographs to sell on demand. You should see the costumes, incredible. We will be dressed in black jeans and black fotokids tee shirts (the tee shirts so we won't be confused with the waiters).

Also on the design front we are really fortunate to have volunteering Leslynette Vega a professional designer and graduate of Pratt Institute, teaching Adobe illustrator and graphic design to our teen age group.

I should mention here that we have another **Design4Kids** workshop coming up June 27th to July 3rd on the shores of the beautiful Lake Atitlán. We bring up kids from the City and Santiago, about 9 or 10 in total and do real work for a client, making a presentation at the end of the week. Check it out at www.design4kids.org - we need designers, printmakers and photographers.

Linda was selected as part of a juried conference of photographers to participate in a workshop with Guatemala's famous photographer, Luis Gonzales Palma. He took a picture of Linda at 14 when he gave a talk at our school. We have a copy he gave us (It sells for a ton of money) and it will be Linda's when she completes her degree in literature this year. It was a case of the model turned photographer.

Gaby and **Jessica** are starting a new class with 17 4th graders who go to a public school close to us in the City, a barrio called Santa Fe. We had the mother's orientation meeting yesterday and turned out to be all Dads! That's a good sign I think. We had scheduled the meeting for a day last week and they told us, "well good it wasn't then as there was a fire outside the primary school that morning." (No comment)

Honduras GUARUMA - Sandra ten Zitjhoff is leaving this month as Photo Director and she will be sorely missed. Replacing Sandra will be Benjamin Katz who has worked extensively in Central and South America with a strong photography background and expertise in

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graphic design. GUARUMA now has 70 students this year.

Design4kids gave a photography DSLR workshop for the GUARUMA kids in January. It looks like the students may be photographing bird life as part of a study in the Cangrejal watershed, Pico Bonita National Park and surrounding cloud forest. Most of the work will be done in the canopy and will be a first in photographically categorizing Honduras' exuberant bird life.

Downer alert!

Okay well I have to tell you some of the very difficult decisions that have to be made and the tension that comes with living in so much violence. This is an excerpt from my notes. Some names have been changed to protect the innocent as well as the guilty.

We have a situation. Lucia comes from a family with a big gang problem. Her older brother Sergio is in prison and is considered one of the most vicious leaders of the 18 Calle gang in Guatemala. His particular group is called the little Psycho Killers. He is presently serving 99 years, the first person convicted of the new sentencing for femicide. He tried to kill his common law wife when she refused to hand over their child. She escaped but her girlfriend who was with her was murdered. He is also named in a gang rape charge of a young woman who was visiting another prison inmate. He was convicted of killing a bus driver and his assistant after the driver refused to pay extortion.

Sergio I have known since he was 12 as a young kid being trained to be a baker. His entire shaved head now is tattooed. He has no regard for his family and the danger he has put them in both with the rival gang the Mara Salvatrucha and the police.

He was injured in a prison riot last year and was hospitalized and given a colostomy bag. Lucia's fury toward him and what he had done to their family at that point melted away and she began to visit him in the hospital and again when he was put in maximum security. She said to me, "after all he is my brother. I don't know what

happened to him and why he turned out that way and I didn't."

Lucia has grown into a strong young woman from a scared 16-year-old girl that had gotten pregnant by Sergio's second in command. She finished high school, then went on to the university where she is studying business administration. Lucia 25 years old now has two little girls and has married the father of her children. She had her tubes tied after the last child. They moved away from the barrio where she and Sergio grew up, so that she could have a future and not be stigmatized or murdered. There had been drive by shootings and police were searching for the entire family accusing them, because of their connection with Sergio, of extorting bus drivers.

Lucia is in charge of the educational sponsorship programs and visits the student's schools checking on their grades and academic participation. She speaks with the kid's teachers and the school principals.

Lately she has acted as counselor to some of the students who the gangs want to press into service and urges them to stay in school. She was overheard telling them, "look you either stay in Fotokids and finish school or you end up dead." Kind of a more serious motive to stay in school.

On the Internet site of another non-profit that her mother had worked for I found Lucia quoted as saying that she had been lucky because I had believed in her and showed her she was worth something.

Friday I stay home usually to write and do things that require more concentration. I received a phone call from Evelyn that gave us both immediate churning stomach problems.

We have a videophone at the front door of the school to see who is there and so we can speak without going to the door. Mely our housekeeper answered the buzzer and it was two men on a motorcycle saying they were from a bank and asking if Lucia worked with us. Mely said she was not at liberty to give out any information. Lucia has no bank account.

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Two men on a motorcycle... Last year the country passed a law that said only one person could be on a bike as it was commonplace that assassins worked in pairs, the driver pulling up to a car or bus and the passenger letting rip with the gun.

These guys were definitely paid killers as Lucia had heard the rumors but refused to believe that there was a contract out on her. Someone had taken a photo of her on a visit to Sergio. Now they knew where she worked.

She had called Evelyn a nervous wreck and said but tell Señó Nancy not to worry because they just want to grab me not anyone else.

I called her later in the day to tell her we would arrange for her to get a month paycheck in advance so she could get out of town. Her younger brother and I told her that these guys weren't looking to grab her to talk, they were going to kill her. She was still in a state of denial saying why would anyone want to kill her? "She had a clean conscience and had lived a clean life."

"Lucia," I said, "it doesn't matter don't you understand? They are doing this as an act of revenge against Sergio. They think it might hurt him." (As an aside Sergio has never shown any aptitude for family empathy).

I always read the newspaper wondering if her name will appear on the list of the 17 homicides that occur daily. I hope she realizes that for her two little daughters' sake, if nothing else, she has to get out of town and break off any relationship with Sergio. If they have found her place of work it's only a matter of time before they find out where she lives.

Besides being afraid for Lucia there is the bigger problem of being frightened for the kids who come to the school. Will these guys put a gun up to the head of one of the kids and force their way in looking for Lucia or how to find her?

And yet this is her lifeline to any kind of normalcy.

Okay Good news again! I will be speaking at a TEDx event and I'm excited because amongst the speakers which include scientists, doctors and creative non-profits will be Greg Mortenson, a hero of mine who has built 178 schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan providing education to 54,000 girls.

TEDxGoldenGateED will take place on June 11, 2011 from 1pm to 9pm at Craneway Pavilion.www.edxgoldengateed.org/

Our 20-year retrospective exhibit opens the night of August 5 th at Canton Exposición 4 grados Norte z 4 Guatemala we are planning the big party (no details yet, any suggestions encouraged) late in July-

How You Can Help

We will need many more educational scholarships! ***There are two kinds of scholarships Educational which pays for a students traditional education \$300 a year, paid, monthly, quarterly or annually, and Fotokids Photography scholarship \$150 which pays for our teaching and materials expenses. All our programs are free to the participants. use PayPal button on the www.fotokids.org BUY OUR NEW BOOK ONLINE at www.blurb.com or www.fotokids.org homepage Show people why you support FOTOKIDS! GREAT GIFT!***



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