



# FOTOKIDS Fundación de Niños Artistas De Guatemala May 2008

## Letter from the Executive Director

I am writing this in the afterglow of taking 4 kids to see the Dalai Lama as part of the 4-day event called *Seeds of Compassion* in Seattle. The kids invited by *Bridges to Understanding* and funded by *Child Aid* stayed with families in Seattle who were so full of love and so pleased to have them there. The four Fotokids students had a wonderful experience.

Three girls from Santiago; Deysi, Holy and Josefa were 6 of 15,000 students that were selected to present his holiness with a gift from Fotokids. The girls from Santiago Atitlan had their mothers hand-weave a white scarf with beautiful birds embroidered on both ends.

The girls were told they shouldn't touch the Dalai Lama for protocol reasons but he took the folded scarf and placed it on his shoulders. He put his hand on the back of Josefa's head as she handed him a copy of our (*collectible*) book *Out of the Dump*. His expression was a little puzzled looking at the title of the book.



Deysi presents scarf to Dalai Lama by Werner Monterroso

The girls went to schools and attended classes showing off their Santiago culture, teaching how to embroider and make tortillas at the classes' request. "Seño," they said to me, "some of the students tortillas were square."

Werner, the fourth student, is a 16 year old boy from Mezquital in the City. He spent his time with a press pass photographing the various events with professional DSLR cameras and lenses. It was for me a moving experience to watch him working alongside internationally renowned photographer Phil Borges, going from languidly propping the 300 mm lens on his knee and then moving swiftly to catch a shot.

The girls were caught up in the excitement to be with the Dalai, and Josefa worked with other Seattle students to write her thoughts in a blog.

After a full week in Seattle we took the train to Portland where Kate McPherson invited us to visit her daughter Elin's art school. Child Aid sponsored an exhibit of Fotokids in the Mark Wooley Gallery. The exhibit looked great, and the kids were shining stars. I mentioned to Werner as we were leaving the reception how proud I was of all of them. He's quite a bit taller than me but he put his head on my shoulder and started to cry.

These trips I think more than anything really change kids' lives. It pushes them out there, makes them important, shows them they are valued and that the world is

a big place. Werner on his own initiative has signed up for an English course and told me he has already read half the book.

Meanwhile back at the ranch we are planning this summer to build two new classrooms on our roof. We can surely use the extra room. Particularly now that we want to start the media classes for high school girls from poor barrios. That combined with the fact that all the teachers and staff are working in cramped quarters, there is a distinct shortage of classroom space.

It looks as if we will be doing a series of digital stories with young people from some of the poorest areas of Guatemala, including the highlands. The kids will tell their own stories on how health and education opportunities, or more likely the lack thereof, affects their communities. We will be doing this as a contract work for AED, Academy of Educational Development. Our advanced students will be running the courses.

*Jakaramba!*, the student-run design studio is pushing forward on two fronts, one in looking for new clients (they sold 8 photographs for the lobby of the new USAID building) and they have allied themselves with a local graphic arts printing business. Not only will they do professional training but have said they will throw overflow work our way.

The Centre of the Image, our other source of financial input, has given a series of successful workshops, on DSLR digital camera operation with Centre coordinator Manuel Morillo and a popular studio lighting workshop with Valerio Vanni. Valerio is teaching the kids studio lighting and I have seen some innovative “advertising photos being done by our middle school group the Chapulines.

What a perfect course for that age group, photographing themselves.



Publicity- Center of the Image by Abdias Perez and Gerardo Petzey

Honduras- Guaruma, our Honduran Fotokids project, is being filmed by the Miami Hispanic television show, Rojo Vivo. Mac Stone our Director of Photography there is leaving much to our sorrow. It hasn't been easy finding someone to replace him, both photographically and with the necessary language skills.

I got caught in the American Airlines debacle where I flew from coast to coast. First I was invited to speak at Bowdoin College in Maine- The travel conditions made it a trip to remember. After two cancelled flights I arrived 32 hours later than planned. Luckily a kind friend of a mutual friend happened to be going to Maine as well. Her husband drove down to the Boston airport at 1 am to drive us back to their home where they graciously put me up for the night (at 4 am)- The next morning I spoke to students there and was very impressed with the college, the students, and the teachers.

We had a mothers meeting with a parent teacher conference when I got back. Just to give you an idea of the problems people face I wanted to relate to you my talk with Cindy's mother.

Here is a woman who is a widow, probably in her forties and the sole support of 5 people. Her only son, who was helping put bread on the table, was working in a sweatshop last month and fell off the roof and broke his foot. With pins and plates in the foot he is unable to work, as is her oldest daughter who was wounded in an assault last year and lost the use of her arm. The mother told me that Cindy was crying in her class and told the teacher it was because now that her mother is unemployed she wouldn't get enough food.

The mom works as a washerwoman and this year lost two of her clients. One too old age and the other refused to pay a tax levied by the gangs and was murdered. She makes Q20 quetzals a day (that's less than 3 dollars) and she said to me, "What can I do with 20 quetzals?" You better believe food prices are rising here and we are being affected by the world food crisis. And Cindy's mom has 5 mouths to feed on <\$3 while the basic food for a family of five is almost \$300 a month now.

### **WHAT'S NEW WITH THE KIDS**

Fourteen-year-old Yamilett continues to have health problems or maybe just bad luck. You will remember how she was hit by a car in September, had her gallbladder taken out in November, well in February she awoke one morning and couldn't move her legs. She was diagnosed as having myelitis, a paralysis of the spine. I grabbed her just before some clinic her parents had taken her to wanted to do exploratory back surgery! The pain was so bad she wept every time we moved her even a bit. We borrowed a wheel chair but when it wasn't available, we tied her into my office chair with wheels. Two MRI's, an electro test and a month of steroids means she can now

walk but nerve pain has now traveled to one side of her face. Her mother and Aunt both with the big frilly ruffled aprons that the market women wear, would lift her into and out of the car on the many doctors' appointments we went to. During the last visit, the neurologist mentioned that it might be hysterical paralysis. Yamilett feels (wrongly after I spoke with her mother) that her parents took this to mean she was faking the pain and inability to walk, or worse yet crazy.

Andres' mother is succumbing to breast cancer and he naturally feels helpless. No one really believed the first cancer diagnosis as the doctor offered to lend the money for the operation to be paid back with interest. The mother didn't want a mastectomy or for the family to go into debt.

On a happier note, Andres and Gerardo are working on our photo agency and plan to do face to face marketing in the next couple of months.

Holy's mother who speaks no Spanish was worried about sending her daughter to see the Dalai Lama fearing it might be an Eastern sect that would threaten her evangelical upbringing. Didn't happen.

Evelyn is getting more involved with our school administration and will be helping Graeme out with the workload. They both have gone to meeting on NGO management. Evie and Vivi are still teaching the HIV classes and we have two 15 year old kids there that seem not to be responding to the antivirals. They have been in and out of the hospital.

Linda did a weeklong photo assignment for an international meeting of the Guatemalan Tax Board (the SAT). She took photos all day long that were put up on a giant screen in the conference room.

I'm hoping she made contacts there for any problems in the future!

Berlin is doing location scouting and photography for a new international movie to be produced in Guatemala.

Nancy Morales continues to work on the book design for a United Nations publication written and photographed by Michaele Cozzi.

Marta and Linda are writing a script for a 4-minute digital story produced by the advanced students on the project to be put on our web site- [www.fotokids.org](http://www.fotokids.org)

Also on our web site are links to some of the kid's earlier videos, mostly in the horror-genre. Dylan Howlitt, who recently paid us a visit and who worked with kids back then has put them on youtube for us at- ESWIN

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eT5GdsXljvE>

LA MUJER COYOTE

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kq6wPziQ6QM>

EL SOMBRERON

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwycyWkuLI0>

EL HOMBRE DE LOS BOTOS DE ORO

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x54I2YynoHM>

A good link about the project is on the blog of Need Magazine

<http://www.needmagazine.com/blog/2008/03/18/creative-expression-changes-kids-lives/#more-15>

Our 2003 award winning Australian Foreign Correspondent piece is at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azpveltKU3U>

## How you can help!

Although we need educational sponsorships we always need money to pay our small staff of older students who teach and help pay building maintenance and light bills.

**Remembrance! Give a tax deductible Foto-Link or Educational Scholarship to one of the new students in your name! Comes with a cute card made by the child & gift enclosure. Details and credit card info:[www.fotokids.org](http://www.fotokids.org)**

**(U.S.Tax Deductible) Checks should be made out:"San Carlos Foundation/Fotokids" and sent to: FotoKids, PO Box 661447; Miami Springs, FL 33266**

Log on to [www.fotokids.org](http://www.fotokids.org) and click on **Pay-Pal** at the bottom of the home page **Checks made out to Fotokids without San Carlos Fdn are NOT tax deductible**

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Our book is now available online on our website at [www.fotokids.org](http://www.fotokids.org) and can be paid for with the PayPal button.



Dalai Lama puzzles over book cover photo by Werner Monterroso