



# *Fotokids*

## *Fundación de Niños Artistas de Guatemala*

**October 2006**

### **LETTER FROM THE EXEC. DIRECTOR**

September the month of celebrations! Guatemala's month of Photography Foto30 and our anniversary, 15 years old! The only problem with a 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary that I see, is that I am supposed to sum things up succinctly and be able to answer questions like: "What was the most significant incident to happen in the 15 years?" "What has made the most impact on you? On the children?"

I figure this is another book. Even curating the exhibit, where we had a smallish gallery space that would accommodate only 30 photographs, was a challenge in decision-making.

Having said all that, I have to admit we have come a long way from holding classes over a mechanics garage on the fringes of the dump to our new schoolhouse at the end of Avenida de las Americas! Incidentally, we bought the house! Still have some to pay off but can't thank all of you enough for helping out in a big way! We received about \$50,000 in house donations.

The real advances though are of course, not in the material gains that are helping us to develop into a recognized media arts school, but in the achievements of the kids. Sometimes it just blows me away to think of what they have done and continue to do with the opportunities offered them.

At the anniversary party many of the students who had dropped out of the program came back to visit. With a few

exceptions it was sad to see how their lives had kind of stalled, as opposed to the kids who had the tenacity to stick with the project and seemed to have everything ahead of them

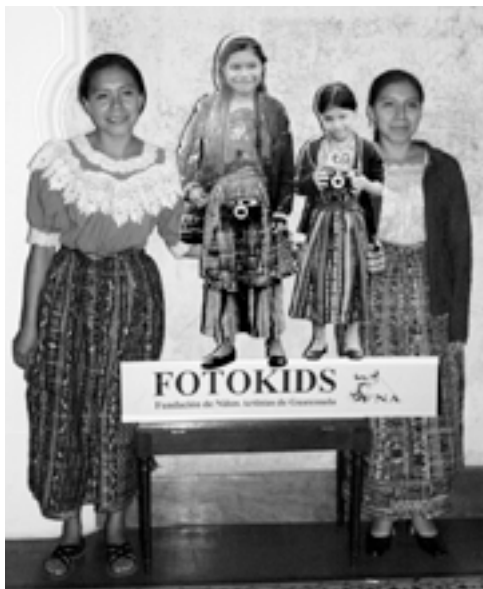
Even if you consider what the young people of Fotokids have accomplished only since last October, let alone past years, the list is a long one. Students have had their work appear on BBC online, had several local TV programs done on them, traveled to Uganda to take photographs for World Emergency Relief and subsequently had a solo exhibit.

They appeared in a Reuters article that went worldwide, presented their work and gave school talks in Orinda, California, and directed a computer center and Photoshop classes in El Tejar. The students placed in the Photo Imaging educators Association annual competition with a traveling exhibit that goes to 7 countries. A well attended exhibit and many newspaper articles were part of a very successful exhibit at la Fábrica de Imágenes in Morelia, Mexico.

Individuals have been finalists in the national science fair, won first prize at the National Art School for photography and others produced, shot and edited a video that the World Bank is thinking of distributing. Not to mention the collective contributions of students who organized, matted and framed our Anniversary retrospective exhibit.

Anyhow, that's a lot to digest, so let's move on to specifics. The anniversary exhibit turned out well - It was held in the beautiful historic post office that is now an arts center and about a hundred people showed up, a good turn out, including many of the kid's families. It was great for them, besides being proud of their children; it gave them a good night out. The City brought in people to make tortillas and boquitos. Our 22 large vinyl posters, highlighting the history of Fotokids and the many projects we have been involved with, looked great hanging in the hallway.

During the exhibit inauguration the students presented me with a beautifully designed card with photos of them all and little messages. When I spoke of how I admired them, and was pleased most of all that they had turned out to be caring compassionate people, I almost teared up. (I had to keep thinking, gold watch, going to give me a gold watch, to relieve the pressure). Rosario and Marta posed alongside the life size photo of them that was used for our first show in Tokyo in 1992.



Marta & Rosario next to their younger selves

All this against the physically beautiful but brutal background that is Guatemala.

Two incidents reflect some of the *reality* of what happens here.

Bety our Santiago Atitlán coordinator told me that Salvador, one of our students, had left the program. A mother was complaining in the streets to anyone that would listen, that Salvador had taken a photograph of her daughter. When I asked Bety to explain that, she told me this following:

*“A boy will take a photograph of a girl he wants to place a spell upon, either to make her fall in love with him or for revenge and then take it to Maximón”.* (Maximón is a local pre-Hispanic deity who, with the help of offerings of candles, chocolate, and alcohol, is still quite active in witchcraft proceedings).

*“The girl, enchanted, will disappear from her house during the night and in the wee hours of the morning she will be found at a crossroads of four corners, without memory, and completely nude”.*

She will then be considered unfit to marry within the community. Bety says that she has seen this and that it is true.



Maximón himself, photo by Dave Ixbalan

Despite this, we are thinking of expanding the Santiago program. The idea would be to set up a permanent teaching facility there, one that the kids could use to do home work in as well. It would be staffed by a full time photo volunteer and supplemented by our older kids from there. We would have professional photographers do workshops there for the

paying public both Guatemalan and international.

The other episode also involves one of our students from Santiago, Diego. Diego was going from the project to the bus terminal on a city bus with his 35mm Nikon and 2 small digital cameras to work on his photo essay in Santiago on changing traditions.

A woman sat down in the seat next to him and put a gun to his ribs telling him to get off the bus. When he refused two men seated in back of him rose and hustled him off the bus. They shoved him into a pick up truck and took him to a dark place where they interrogated him for 2 hours.

These quickie kidnappings are becoming quite frequent around the City. Based on the fact that almost anyone can come up with at least \$3,000 or so (even the poorest can usually borrow from relatives and moneylenders) to save a loved one. For convenience's sake this is mostly perpetrated on Guatemalan not foreigners (takes too long for out of country bank accts and might involve embassies).

After they found out Diego didn't have a home phone, let alone a cell phone they roughed him up and let him go. They did however take his cameras.

I went to Santiago for the one-year anniversary commemoration of Hurricane Stan. A candle light procession wound its way through Panabaj in the predawn darkness, where the worst destruction and loss of life occurred. The government has finally found land to resettle the 774 families that lost their homes last year, at an exorbitantly inflated price.

I am still taking a sabbatical next March to write, both about the project and some analysis of what happened! In December of this year I go to Sao Paulo Brazil invited by Harvard to speak about Fotokids with others that have similar photography projects. That should be exciting I really love Sao Paulo having

been there for there NAFOTO, their month of photography in 1997 (invited to speak about *passion* in photography).

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

**Evelyn, Berlin and Atiliano** stayed up till 4 a.m. two nights in a row to get the food and everything ready for our anniversary party for about 60 kids. They made *ensalada ruso* which is a potato salad with tiny cut up vegetables and *churrasco*, beef roasted over an open flame. Both very work intensive. They also arranged for the mariachis who appeared blasting through the back yard doors, which made a couple of the kids scream.

**Linda** participated in the citywide symposium for new artists and did an installation throwing bloody clothes on street corners as a comment on urban violence.

**Atiliano** won his art schools first prize in Photography.

**David Ixbalan, Deysi and Maria**, all from Santiago were county finalists in the nation wide Science Olympics.

**Berlin and Atiliano's** film on mining operations in western Guatemala was so successful that the client has now asked for sub titles in English to be added, for international distribution.

**Yamilett and Karen** are going to St. Petersburg Florida for an exhibition of Fotokids work at Studio@620 in early November. They will not only be there for opening night but will participate in school visits and community inter cultural events. Yamilett recently has been interviewed as part of the month of Photography here. Those of you that speak Spanish can access the link online at:  
<http://www.sigloxxi.com/index.php?link=noticias&noticiaid=5315>

*"I prefer the 35 mm SLR to the digital camera. The digital is good for training and seeing what you have, but it's a little*

*cold.*” **Yamilett** (and I say this with total admiration) is the newest in long line of blarney spewing students. At 12 years of age she really knows how to speak on her feet.

**Hugo Chinchilla**, aged 11, in another press interview said he was happy with photography as he bought rolls of film, took photos and sold them to his friends (a savvy young entrepreneur).

**Nancy Morales** designed all of the vinyls that were hung as part of our exhibition as well as the invites for the exhibits. She has also been working with Bree to create a new web site. The younger students are all doing their web pages and learning web design.

### **HIV Program**

The program with adolescents and pre-adolescents diagnosed as HIV positive is now entering its third month and little by little we are establishing trust, a safe haven. We gave the younger kids a timeline to do on important events in their lives.

None of the kids from the orphanages claimed they remembered *anything* of their lives before they were put into the homes. Knowing this would require some of them to remember back only *three* years, we realized that the children were reluctant to talk or it was too painful to remember.

Feeling perhaps that the older girls intimidated the younger ones, I took the 14-16 year olds to another room where they spoke quite openly about the discrimination and isolation that they feel.

**Evelyn** eventually drew the young ones out by talking about her own experiences. Barriers broke down and **Jose Luis** said, “*yes, that’s like the time I came back from*

*the hospital to my house and when I got there my mother was dead.*”

This is what **Floralma**, age 12, told Evelyn. “*Well, when I was 9 my grandfather died (he was taking care of us) and I was very sad. Then the next year my grandmother died because she missed my grandfather so much. Then my mother died and then the following year they put me in the orphanage.*”

So much for a little girl to bear.

### **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 need money so there is time to be counted in!*

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

and sent to:

**FotoKids, PO Box 661447; Miami Springs, FL 33266**

Or use **PayPal** - Link at the bottom of the home page: **[www.fotokids.org](http://www.fotokids.org)**

### **Fotokids Schedule for Nov., Dec., & Jan. 2007**

Nov 2-10	<b>St. Petersburg, FL Studio@620</b>
Nov 25-Dec 5	Possible trip to <b>Ethiopia</b>
Dec 5 & 6	Messiah benefit for Fotokids in <b>Guatemala</b> and <b>Antigua</b>