



December 10, 2010
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Wow an 8 foot tree in the living room! I can't believe it fit.

RECENT NEWS

We wish you all a very merry Christmas! You won't believe what happens on our porch at 6 o'clock in the morning! Nanci the Artist is at it again, creating flutterbys – I mean butterflies! We talk about an old saying that just might need a new interpretation. Here comes the Microfinance program!

MERRY CHRISTMAS & HAPPY HOLIDAYS EVERYONE!

It's clearly Christmastime at The Bridge, and Nanci and I would like to wish all of the very best in this Holiday season. We feel like it's Christmas all year around as you support us, and the Bridge Kids and their families in so many ways.

Nanci found a white tree this year. This is an artificial tree that we can use over again. She says she refuses to chop down another tree. Nanci the Artist and the Bridge kids went all out. They recycled some used CDs and DVDs that would no longer

play, and some small votive candles that had been burned down to their aluminum containers, and turned them into sparkly, colorful ornaments. They had a great time.

Willi, one of the young Bribri boys in the School Program, wasn't sure about it: "Trees are not white!" he exclaimed with his hands on his hips. "Trees are **green!**"

Nanci took him over to the computer. They searched for pictures of a white Christmas – and found fotos of trees covered with snow. "Trees can be white, Willi."

Willi nodded his head. I guess the white tree now passes muster.

"CHOCO"

It's 6 AM. It's barely daylight, and I've fed the chickens and the cats. Nanci and I have just settled into our first cup of coffee. We spend some time reading together in the morning before we get up to background music of morning birds, howler monkeys, flocks of parrots, and chickens – a veritable "cackle-ophony" of Nature sounds.

Then – there's a metallic "click" as the latch on the outside gate is opened. A batch of Bridge Kids has just walked for 40 minutes from their home in the jungle to get to school – our back yard is their first stop. What's the first thing on their mind? "Choco!" We're on!

We make a small breakfast for the kids, so they have a little something in their bellies before they get to school. The children we know here don't like cereal – it's not a normal part of their diet. Rice and beans would be perfect, but Nanci's not about to go that far at 6 am So its chocolate – "choco" – and some crackers, and bananas if they're available.

The kids clean off the jungle mud, change into school clothes, and come into the porch, where we have "choco" and crackers waiting.

By about quarter-till-seven, they're ready to be off to school. If it's raining, we call a taxi so they can stay dry on the way into town.

Back to our coffee and reading time. . . . Now, where were we again?

NANCI DOES BUTTERFLIES

She's at it again – this time, with paintings of butterflies.



This little guy in the front row is the famous Blue Morpho butterfly, who makes the air around him glow a brilliant blue when he opens his wings. On this side, however, we see a great design that had people here looking at it and saying “is it *real*?” Nanci jokes and says “Yes, I have a trained butterfly. He follows me everywhere on his little nylon leash!”

This, too, is also a recycled art project. The butterflies are painted on the foam bottom from Moofie Cakes – store-bought cakes that we sometimes use for birthdays, when there isn’t enough time to bake one using the toaster oven.

Wouldn’t surprise me if you saw more of these beauties!

“THE BRAINS THAT GOD GAVE A CHICKEN”

Remember that old saying – “he had the brains that God gave a chicken”? It’s usually meant to be an insult. There may be another view.

You’ll remember that we got chickens instead of Budget Pest Control. The chickens do a GREAT job of keeping the place pest-free. BC, (Before Chickens) we had a four-inch tarantula in the soap dish, fer-de-lance snakes in the house, scorpions running across the floor, some rather impressive looking but otherwise harmless spiders, and much more insect wildlife around the place. Now, ninguna (not one) fer-de-lance, almost no more scorpions, and most of the miscellaneous spiders – gone.

Watching the chickens get through their days and their lives has been quite an adventure. Mommies are territorial, and protective of their young. They teach their chicks how to scratch for food.

I had a little morning routine with Goldie, a beige-and-white hen who jumps into the porch in the morning, expecting her “special hand feeding”, which I get a kick out of giving her. After enough beakfuls, she stops and looks down at the ground... my cue to start feeding the others. Once she’s hatched a batch of chicks, however, her behavior instantly changes. She “talks” me into her morning feeding, but then reaches into my hand to get a single corn kernel, and drops it on the ground in front of one her chicks. Then, she repeats that for each of her chicks – and then goes back and starts over with the first one. She is displaying “The Brains That...”

Then, there’s the matter of The Cat Door. We have a sliding door on the patio, so that cats can get in and out. We sometimes slide the door shut when we don’t want neighboring traffic on the porch – especially now, when the rooster Corky has his food out, and the neighborhood cats, typically unfed by their owners (“Go and catch your own darn dinner – that’s what you’re for!) try to get into the porch and eat Corky’s dinner.



Here's the sliding cat door

For 7 years, the cats have not learned to slide this door open – they don’t even try. When growing chickens want to get into the porch, they simply slide the door open. Somehow, they’re born knowing what to do. They have “The Brains That...”

Just maybe there ought to be another interpretation of that old saying...

MICROFINANCE

Jump (Re)Starting the Microloan Program

You’ll remember that we put our Microloan Program on hold after making 29 microloans. There were two issues. First, we ran out of our own cash for the program – that wasn’t serious, since we had offers from other people who wanted to get involved and provide the needed capital. The second issue was the problem – I have only two hands. To be fair to the microloan borrowers, I

needed to be available for coaching on a daily basis. Although I could dedicate some hours a week, I was running the business side of El Puente at the same time. I didn't feel like I could do a good job at either of these roles if I continued to do both.

Later on, I was asked to give a report to the Municipality about our operation here. After 6 years, they were – uh, “curious.” After my wonderfully creative-Spanish talk for 30 minutes, they gave their reaction. The School and Food Programs were great, but they wondered how long it would take us to re-open the Microloan Program. To paraphrase what they said, “that was where the rubber meets the road.”

We received a Test Grant from a global foundation – an amount to enable the foundation to see more about us and how we operate. Their intent was to give us some breathing room and allow us to refocus our energies on the Microloan Program.

With the Test Grant in place, we are actively recruiting for a manager of the Microloan Program, and began the process of laying out what's next.

We also got a suggestion from the Foundation providing the Test Grant to recruit a graduate student from a university program in which the current best practices in micro lending were being taught. That would enable us to come up to speed on how to set up a more effective program. We have been in touch with such a grad student, and we're working out details. He will need travel expenses, a place to stay, meals, and we'll need a way to pay for that.

I'm pretty excited about getting this started. It will provide that “income generation” piece of the five things needed to help people “Break the Cycle Of Poverty”, as mentioned on our website.

DO SOME GOOD SHOPPING!

I just couldn't resist including this fun little video clip sent by one of your fellow Subscribers. It's about a man who just couldn't get his shopping to come out right. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Twivg7GkYts>

Christmas shopping can get a little hectic right about now.

You can save time, gasoline – and perhaps a trip to the doghouse – by shopping online using GoodShop. There are over 1,600 brand name online stores in GoodShop. And, each time you shop and select El Puente – The Bridge as your favorite charity, we get an average of 2%-5% of the purchase price as a donation – at no cost to you!

Some of you are already using GoodShop, and have told us that it's a great experience! **Get going right now – there's still time before Christmas!**

Here's a piece that GoodShop puts out describing how you can use their service to help El Puente this Christmas!

READ THIS BEFORE YOU DO ANY HOLIDAY SHOPPING!

Please make every gift count this holiday season. You can find coupons at more than 1,600 top stores (including Amazon, Macy's, J.Crew, Toys R Us, Best Buy, Gap and more) AND a percentage of virtually every sale will be donated to "YOUR ORGANIZATION HERE"

Just go to GoodShop.com, designate us as the cause you support and then click over to your favorite store and shop away!

Or, add our toolbar to your browser at <http://www.goodsearch.com/toolbar> - and your purchases will earn a donation for us even if you forget to go to GoodShop first!

There's no easier way to support us this holiday season! Please spread the word.

Just go to GoodShop and Shop Away, selecting El Puente – The Bridge LA Mesa as the Charity you're shopping for!

YOU CAN HELP US!

There are several ways you can help.

- **Send this email to people you know** who might also enjoy it.
- **Post a message about us on relevant web sites or discussion boards.**
- **Look at our list of critically needed supplies** – [click on this link to get to the “What Can I Bring?” page on our website.](#)

PLEDGE PROGRAM NEWS

We are blessed with 18 people who are in the "Intrepid Bridger's Club" – another brand new Pledger joined us last month! Your support is *invaluable!* Thank you!

A NEW FACEBOOK PAGE FOR EL PUENTE

Volunteers Claudia Michelberger and Kim Fluyt have started a new Facebook page for El Puente. Visit the page – leave comments – "Like" it, Tell your friends. Start an El Puente "buzz".

VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

**Thank You for the continuing support we have been getting.
You all are allowing us to continue to serve!**

NOW's a GREAT time to contribute.

Make a **Monthly Pledge** by [clicking here](#).

Make an **Immediate Donation** by [clicking here](#),
and donate online using PayPal, or mail a check.

Do it NOW! You'll be glad you did!

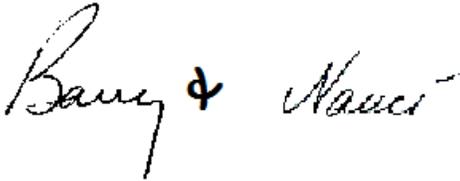
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Thank you for your support!

Well,

...djmiache

Enjoy!



IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE SEEING THE PICTURES

...go to www.elpuente-thebridge.org/weekly and download the file with the date of this issue.

There's a new Facebook El Puente Page – visit it by [CLICKING HERE](#)

Go to The **Bridge Website** by [CLICKING HERE](#)

Go to The **Bridge Online Store** by [CLICKING HERE](#)

Download a **Powerpoint presentation** by [CLICKING HERE](#)

Download **brochures in Spanish or English** by [CLICKING HERE](#)

Go to the **newsletter archive** by [CLICKING HERE](#)

See some **Video clips** showing activities at The Bridge by [CLICKING HERE](#)

CONTACT INFORMATION

Email: barrystevens@earthlink.net
nanci.stevens@gmail.com

Our toll-free number from the US is
1-866-462-7585
SKYPE: barry.stevens2

