



Aug 6, 2011
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Exhausted but happy, meet the volunteers from Northwest High School, Cedar Hill, Missouri, just after returning from a hike in the jungle guided by Alejandro.
From left to right, Shannon Selsor, Alejandro, Shawn Weber, Rebecca Merlenbach, Andrew Stieren, Megan Propes, Taylor Olsen, Justin Scherr, Katelyn Shelby, and Ashley Schmied –

RECENT NEWS

We've been very, very busy here at The Bridge. Much of the month here may have been school vacation, but there have been lots of goings-on. We were visited by a "volley of volunteers" from a high school class in the USA. We were invited to a special presentation at the home of a Tribal Elder inside the Reserve. They acted out the story of the arrival of the Conquistadores in their culture 500 years ago, and what's evolving from that. Some of the stories in this issue will give you some idea of what it's like to live and work in this neck of the jungle. We'll show you about going "Bike To School". Then there are some funny and not-so-funny bits about living and working in this developing nation. Finally, we'll bring you up to date with more of the wonderful volunteer action here at The Bridge.

A VOLLEY OF VOLUNTEERS

The volunteers from Northwest High School jumped right in and went to work. **Katelyn, Megan, and Rebecca** got to work adding art to a new sign for El Puente. **Justin** worked on wire brushing the mold off the gate. **Andrew** got busy looking up European newspapers that would accept press releases by email. **Taylor** and **Shawn** help out by putting another coat of preservative on the small gate. **Shannon** and **Ashley** helped Nanci with the gardening project, where Nanci's showing Bribri moms that they can grow their own food.

Thank you, guys and gals!

CELEBRATION OF A LEADER

Nanci and I were invited to a gathering at tribal leader Timoteo Jackson's home. This is an annual event to honor the life of Pablo Presbere, the last king of the Bribri tribe. We participated in ceremonies honoring his death. Presbere was a leader of the rebellion in 1710 against the Christian evangelism that had been going on. The Spanish hadn't managed to conquer the Talamanca area where the Bribri lived, and the church wasn't going to do it either. Churches were burned, and things got pretty violent. Presbere was arrested, and sentenced to death by beheading.

As you'll see in a foto, I got to try my hand at traditional Bribri construction.



Getting ready – we put a shelter up using traditional Bribri construction



Timoteo Jackson explains about the presentation while Graciela Vargas translates.

Timoteo also talked about the need to blend the old with the new, and create something that works in the here and now. To make the point, the performers first danced a traditional Bribri circle dance to chanting and singing, and then switched over to a dance with more modern music.



First the circle dance – no electronic music



Then a more modern dance – boppin' to a hoppin' rhythm

I had the fun of being dragged into the circle dance, where the chanting gets faster and faster. The action proceeds until people start falling down, amidst great laughter.

Then the story part of the presentation begins. To begin, a group of Bribri women are gathered around a campfire, preparing a traditional meal as they have done for thousands of years.



And then... and then??

The battery on my camera went out. So I'll have to describe the remainder of the presentation.

As the Bribri women were preparing the meal, a group of Conquistadores were tracking them down, following the smoke of their fire. When they got to the fire, they grabbed the women and threw them into a group center stage. Then continued looking for other women, and as they found more they dragged them to the group being piled up.

Timoteo then threw a little humor into the situation. He apparently knew that there was a family from Spain sitting in the audience. As those playing the role of Conquistadores continued their work, one of them went to the Spanish family and grabbed their teenage daughter, dragging her into center stage and piling her up with the Bribri women. Fortunately everybody involved got the joke, including the Spanish family. Eventually the Bribri women were herded away, leaving the Spanish girl to return to her folks, laughing all the way.

Timoteo continued to explain – that the women were taken to Spain, and released into the general population, where they lived their lives and raised children with mixed Bribri and Spanish blood. “We all may have mixed blood in our bodies”, he said, “and we need to be getting along with each other – be happy with each other.”

Quite a performance!

BIKE TO SCHOOL

Bicycles are important here. They're the primary mode of transportation, along with taking the bus or walking. Visitors here for a long time know it costs less to buy a bike instead of rent one. That's why it was really cool when a visiting family decided to donate two bikes they bought to The Bridge as they were leaving. At the same time we received a really nice donation from someone who won a charity lottery her employer was sponsoring. We used some of her donation to buy a third bike, and then gave them to three Bridge Kids in three separate families.



Here's Ronualdo, with his first bike



Mauricio proudly shows off his "new" bike



And Maria, now in Colegio (High School) just can't control the grin.

Thanks to **Debbie, Bruce, Tim, and Kayla** for the two bikes they donated! We've noticed that the bicycles are being passed around within the families of these bikers. That's cool!

WHAT'S IT LIKE TRYING TO GET THINGS DONE HERE?

Getting things done here can be – umm – exciting. Some might say – frustrating. Others just grit their teeth and go.... “Grrrrrrr!” Still others who have been here a while just burst out laughing when “stuff happens.” In this developing nation, things that you might expect to go smoothly seem to have... to put it mildly... their own pace.

The following YouTube piece is a wonderfully humorous look at a part of the culture here. The situation portrayed, as a young woman goes into a government office, is a *slight* exaggeration, but I gotta admit that it does sometimes feel just like this.



Enjoy!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXWZ3uAEKsw>

A GAME CALLED “TELEPHONE”!

In another view of the culture here, there are simply frustrating things that happen.

I was seated at my computer, working on this issue of the newsletter, and I heard chain saws, nearby but not next to the house. Sometimes, a chain saw is a normal thing used to clear away fallen trees on a property, so I thought nothing of it. Until, that is, I heard one of the giant trees go down. That's a very loud, dramatic sound, and once you hear it, it stays with you. So does the feeling of the shake when the tree hits the ground. I went outside to see what was going on. A chain saw crew was at work in a lot across the street. Just then, another tree started its final descent.

I hurried back to the house to call MINAE, the agency that enforces laws against just exactly what was happening. I hoped to get their attention and have someone come out on an emergency call to at least find out if the workers had permits to do what they were doing. I called. They took the usual information, and then gave me four other numbers within MINAE that I was supposed to call! So I called them all. Each gave me yet another number within MINAE. By the time I was finished, I had collected nearly a dozen numbers. As I made yet another call, the fun REALLY began. The man on the other end of the line said “You need to call the Police in Puerto Viejo.”

By now, my “Frustration Index” was climbing steadily, but I picked up the phone and called... the police. The man on the line said “But you need to call MINAE”. A memory of a cartoon flashed in my mind, in which two people were talking to a third, and the two were pointing at each other, much to the frustration of the third.

I made one last call to MINAE. After explaining the situation again to the man who answered the phone, I told him “At this moment, I need to call the newspapers La Nacion, Tico Times, and TV News Channel 7. It's the only thing left for me to do - the trees are still coming down.” The MINAE person said something very interesting, “Please” – and he emphasised these words “**do call those people. That is very good.**” He followed up with “no one can do anything. Our rules make it difficult.” And he said again “**please** talk to the newspapers.”

Apparently, I was not alone in my frustration.

I called the newspapers.

So far, nothing.

A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN TONIGHT

Very rarely, things happen that are a concern.

There's been an ongoing battle between a hotel owner who built two hotels within a section of the Maritime Zone – “don't touch” land along the shore – designated as a reserve, where nothing in Nature is supposed to be touched. We're told he dynamited a big opening in the coral reefs to allow passage of boats for those staying at his two hotels. A big no no. They were built right on the shore, breaking all the rules. He was told the hotels had to be taken down. For many years, the matter was stalled in the courts.

As it became clear the time for stalling was over, the owner reportedly stirred up fear and anger in the neighbors. They took to the streets in loud, violent demonstrations. For a couple of days parts of this peaceful piece of paradise were transformed into something we're more used to seeing in big-city TV news reports.



A protestor is hauled away from one of many roadblocks constructed to shut down this part of Costa Rica.

Roads were blocked, trees were felled across main streets. At two AM, we heard unusual activity near our house. As we looked outside, we heard a loud ZAAAPPP! and saw a bright arc near the electric transformer on a pole near us. As a car pulled quickly away, the electricity went off.

Later that morning one of your fellow subscribers visiting here jumped into his car and drove up to Hone Creek, where the biggest demonstrations were. He was rewarded for his effort with some bumps and scrapes and the lingering effects of tear gas that was being used to disperse the angry crowds.

As the roads were finally cleared, the time for stalling was over. A larger-than-usual bulldozer was trucked into the area, protected by a police escort. Most of the heavy equipment around here is colored yellow or white. As if for emphasis, this brute of a machine was colored red. The demolition of the hotels was begun, with furniture and all other contents of the hotels piled alongside the road. The materials were picked up and thrown into cars and trucks almost as soon as they hit the ground.



This bulldozer was busy “bringing down the house”

It took almost a week, but both hotels were taken down. Judging from the road traffic, the remains were still being carted away in dump trucks as this was written.

Do you remember Ricardo, one of the Bridge folks? He recently got a microloan for a motorized bicycle so he could get to his nighttime security job. He was working in one of the hotels that were taken down. That's what really brought this action home to us. When we posted his situation on a local Facebook group, we learned that two local hotels and a retreat center were looking for a nighttime guard. Looks like Ricardo may not be out of work after all!

GECKO LOVE

On a lighter note – there are other life forms living in this house. We are not alone.



Two geckoes, one inside, one outside of our porch screen, circled around each other for some time on a recent afternoon

These two were quite a pair, looking like they were trying to figure out how they could get together. We like the geckoes here – they eat mosquitoes!

We have no idea how their relationship is going to work out.

VOLUNTEER CORNER

As we've so often said, we're blessed with a flow of volunteers who come here ready, willing, and able to do the things that allow us to keep this operation running. We thought you might like to hear from one of them, **Ella Kalter**, who came to us from Washington, D. C.



Ladies and gentlemen, meet Ella Kalter!

As Ella walked into our home, she saw the picture of Amma on the wall, and was very excited. Turns out she spent some time living in Amma's ashram in India. As some of you may know, Amma just made a multi-city tour of the USA, continuing her hugging campaign. She's spreads good will and has hugged millions of people. And when schools and housing need to be built after disasters, she gets them built with donations. As Ella left, she made a commentary about her experience here at The Bridge, and we thought you'd like to hear it in her own words.

Getting off the bus in Puerto Viejo under the pouring rain, I see a small sign with my name on it "Ella Kalter". "That's me!" I think to myself. I approach the sign holder and see a woman with glasses and a big smile. I sigh with relief, I am not alone. As we enter El Puente, the cozy house that has become for many locals a safe haven, the hard rain hammering down becomes but a memory and I make myself at home with Barry and Nanci. Over the next few days I get to know the Stevens and the selfless work they do every single day to help put the native children through school, give families microloans to pay for essentials and feed the community three days a week. "This house is the size our bedroom was in the States," they tell me with pride. They gave up their comfortable lives in a comfortable society and although it was not their primary intention in moving to Costa Rica, are now dedicating their time, money and energy for special people who have become their friends. I am grateful to have been able to stay with the Stevens and learn that hope and love can be found even in the densest part of the Costa Rican jungle.

And thank you, Ella, for the time, energy, and spirit you brought here to share with everyone at The Bridge!

It's also time to meet another volunteer – **Lili Prince**. Once again she took on the detailed task of expanding the index for our newsletter. Now there's a "**Master Index for 2006 – 2010**" available on the website. If you're interested, you can go here and download the WORD document. <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org/weekly>

Thank you so much, Lili!

And thank **ALL of you** for your really outstanding efforts here!

YOU CAN HELP!

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** – www.elpuente-thebridge.org/page26.html

VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE

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

**The demands on cash flow are continuing to grow.
We sure appreciate your support!**

NOW's a GREAT time to contribute.

Make a **Monthly Pledge** www.elpuente-thebridge.org/pledge

Make an **Immediate Donation** www.elpuente-thebridge.org/page30.html

You can donate online using PayPal, or mail a check.

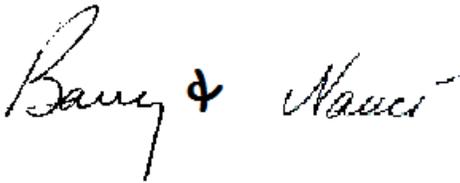
Do it NOW! You'll be glad you did!

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.

Go to The **Bridge Website** www.elpuente-thebridge.org

Download a **Powerpoint presentation** or a **narrated slideshow/video** www.elpuente-thebridge.org/present

Download **brochures in Spanish, English, or French** www.elpuente-thebridge.org/brochures

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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