



September 1, 2011
© 2011 Barry A. Stevens



Tilly Smout is shown here interviewing "Rollie" – the man who runs the Municipal government in the area, about the Microloan Program.

RECENT NEWS

It's been a really busy month here at The Bridge. We've been having interviews with community leaders and potential borrowers in preparation of restarting the microloan program. Two little boys on fire are growing up – and digging in. Serving children who go to a school with problems. Helping a troubled family get stronger. Laughing my way through the bureaucracy.

SMALL LOANS CAN DO BIG THINGS

Interviews are in process, gathering information to determine how best to restart a formal microloan program through El Puente. Mathilda "Tilly" Smout, a graduate student from Australia, well-versed in the several types of micro lending programs in use around the world, is here to help us figure out how best to restart that program. We're talking with as many people as we can – community leaders, business people, and potential borrowers including the Bribri we serve through The Bridge.



Nanci, lower right, and Tilly, seated next to her, are seen talking about microloans with some of the Bribri women who come to The Bridge.

ERIC'S GOT A GOAL IN MIND, BROTHER DANNY'S WORKING HARD

Eric, one of the Bridge Kids, has got a goal in mind. He's suddenly started to get serious about schoolwork.



A current shot of Eric, the Futbol Hopeful



Danny, seated, is working on homework. His brother Erasmo is looking on.



Nanci thought you'd also like to see a better photo of Danny

Erick wants to become a professional futbol (soccer) player. We'll do all we can to help! He came to me the other day when no one else was here, and asked me to help him with English homework. We had a good time!

Danny is 19 years old. He's also gotten really serious about finishing school. He is taking both 5th and 6th grade classes – at the same time!

I can't wait to see how this comes out!

SCHOOL'S IN – AND OUT – AND IN – AND OUT

We're still seeing many days where some of the Bridge Kids who come through here get ready and walk to the Puerto Viejo school only to be turned away. Perhaps the Special Ed teacher wasn't there today. Or a meeting for the school administration, or a beauty appointment for the teacher. Maybe one of the teachers is sick - again. Whatever.

We do our best to give the Bridge Kids that are sent home something to do. They can read books here, maybe watch a movie, use the internet to find things of interest, perhaps print out some homework.

The Bridge sends students to twelve public schools in Costa Rica, and the Puerto Viejo school has been the most problematic. We're also making sure that this information is being fed back to the Ministry of Education.

We're holding the vision that good things can happen at this school.

SOME SUPPORT FOR A FAMILY

There's a family here that has been of particular concern to us. Some time ago, we had to cross the line between being a safe haven for people to come, and make the difficult choice to seek the support of the authorities. It has been a slow start with PANI (the local acronym for Child Protective Services), but they finally got things into gear in the last couple of weeks. In a meeting at their offices in the town of Bribri, they spent four hours on the case, interviewing Nanci, the children and their mother, and handing out assignments with time deadlines. Orders included parenting classes for the mother, alcohol rehabilitation for the father, even assignments for the schoolteachers involved. We provided bus fare to get them there, and Nanci went along as a participant in the session.

It's wonderful to see progress for the children!

LIVING THE VIDEO

Is This Real – Or Is It A Movie?

You'll remember the video I sent you in the past newsletter – about what it's like to get something done in Costa Rica? Well, I've been working on getting my residency resolved, and I've been living that video. And believe me, the real life thing is almost better than the video.

The fun began when I got an email from my attorney saying "You've been approved!" There were three bank deposits I had to make to cover various aspects of the process, including prepayment of the plane ticket that would be needed if the government ever decides to throw me out. Then I had 24 hours to go to San Jose to visit Migracion!

It started with a 4½ hour bus ride to San José, and a taxi ride to an in-town bed & breakfast named Casa Alfie. After a wonderful overnight stay, I got up at 6 AM to make sure I got to Migracion and got in line by 7 AM. In theory I should get inside, get processed, sit for a foto, and be out of there. No problem, right?

The first visit, on a Friday, I got to Migracion an hour early. There were no lines. No people waiting. No taxis lined up along the side of this very wide street, wide enough to accept parked cars, traffic, and five different waiting lines. I walked up to the guards at the gate and asked "When can we go in for residency?" He said that they were closed for these processes on this Friday. I'd have to come back another day.

My attorney was very surprised. "Go back on Monday", she said. So, weighing the alternatives, I returned to Puerto Viejo. On Sunday, another bus trip to San José, a taxi to Casa Alfie, and after a good night's sleep, another taxi ride to Migracion, again arriving at 7 AM. I was about number 40 in line. At eight sharp, the gates opened, and we were led to an inside waiting line. As I passed by a young woman armed guard, she intercepted me and put me in a line with pregnant women and women with babies – a "preferencia" line. (It must have been the gray hair.) I was now the fourth person in line. I could hardly wait! This will be EASY!

We went inside, and it was very quickly my turn. Glancing at my paperwork, the receptionist said "There's a new rule. You now have to pay the CAJA (medical insurance) first, before coming here. Have you done that?" I shook my head no. She motioned me to the door.

By now, I was a mixture of peeved and mildly amused. The more I thought about that video I sent you in the last issue, the more I started to laugh. I called Nanci and told her what happened, and that I was having a good laugh over it. I called my attorney. She was a little angry. She hadn't seen the video – I couldn't convince her to laugh. She made an appointment for Monday, two weeks away. She offered to go with me, and take me to the Attorney Window – a much faster process.

Sunday, two weeks later – another bus trip to San José... you know the drill. In the morning, I took a cab back to the bus station, where it was much easier for my attorney to pick me up. She parked near Migracion, and we walked in, passing all the lines of waiting people, straight in to the Window. The process took just over one hour.

Next, into yet another line – this time to get my photo taken. My attorney wanted to come along, to make sure things went smoothly. The guard almost didn't let her in, since the room was very crowded. But... she got in. I sat near the front, where I could hear my name being called. As is my custom, I sat down and started talking to the people around me. After only a few minutes went by, I heard my name being called. Up I bounced, and into the area for photos. As I was sitting down, the woman behind the desk was apparently already taking pictures. By the time I settled in and started to get my smile up, she said "Listo" – (done). No time to smile. The photo lady gave me two options. I could leave now, and wait two weeks for the cedula to be mailed to my PO Box, or... I could pick the card up there in one hour. What do you think I said? Of course – one hour!

I explained to the attorney, and set her free – back to her office. Then I had lunch in the nearby cafeteria – a nice piece of fish and some vegetables. Thirty minutes later, I went back to the photo waiting room. As I entered the door, I heard my name being called again. Back into the photo area I went! As I entered, a young woman flagged me down and handed me my cedula.

I looked at the photo... winced... pointed to the picture, shook my head and said "No es mio" (It's not me). She giggled.

But... I'm now a legal resident of Costa Rica!

For some reason, they process the men first, then the wives. Next, it's Nanci's turn.

PUT YOUR SHOES ON BARRY, DON'T YOU KNOW YOU'RE IN THE CITY?

That line from an old song came back to me as I sat in the bus on the way to San José. It seems the tropical climate had rotted through the leather strap on the new sandals Nanci bought me. My sandal was hanging crazily from my left foot. I had already noted that real men don't wear sandals around here. They wear a pair of Nike sneakers, or sturdy work shoes. I don't own a pair. Here I was, with my broken sandal flapping around on my left foot.

We got off the bus at the rest stop in Limón, a Chinese restaurant named Centuli. Nanci and I have been coming through this place for years. I talked with the owner. Sizing up the situation, he came back with some special shoe repair tape. He helped me wrap it around the broken shoe. Voila!



Use # 10,001 for Duct Tape!

People didn't even seem to notice. When they did pay attention to my accessories, they were much more amused by the pink bag I was carrying. This particular bag was intended for little girls in, say, kindergarten. Even my attorney got a chuckle out of that one.

In the midst of my reverie over the new shoe, the bus horn honked several times. Oops, that's me! Back on the bus! Off to my appointment at Migracion!

VOLUNTEER CORNER

We showed you a sign for El Puente being painted by some wonderful volunteers. We thought we'd show you the final result.



Next – a steel pole, some cement, and a new sign will appear along the road. We have had volunteers pedal here on bicycles and go right on by, some getting as far as Hone Creek before they call for directions. This sign on the road should be a big help!

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** – 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!

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.

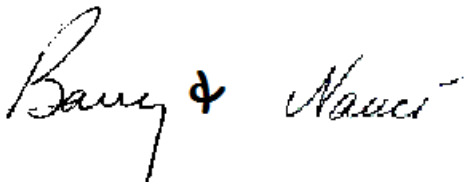
Do it NOW! You'll be glad you did!

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

Go to the **newsletter archive** www.elpuente-thebridge.org/weekly

See some **Video clips** showing activities at The Bridge www.elpuente-thebridge.org/video

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