



December 12, 2012
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*Christmas in the tropics – decidedly different – and yet,
amazingly the same!*

RECENT NEWS

Wow, this has been a wallop busy time here at the Bridge – this was originally to be a November issue, and now a happy belated Thanksgiving and Pre Christmas issue – sent to you on 12-12-12! The Bridge Kids have been zooming around taking exams, some getting ready for graduation from Elementary School. The Community Kitchen regularly serves hundreds of folks. Always, we deal with the usual emergencies, and help if we can. Many positive things are afoot here, and we'll delight in keeping you all informed! Here goes!

A BRIDGE THANKSGIVING

We'd like to say "Thank You!" to those wonderful souls who showed up for the benefit Thanksgiving Day Dinner given for us by Alfred Richardson, at Casa Alfi's in San Jose. We were delighted to take Ronualdo – one of the Bridge Kids – up with us for his first time out of this area and into "the big city." He managed to find wildlife even there.



Ronualdo was at first a stranger in a strange land – buildings, cars, people hurrying along the street – then, he found these pigeons. He began the process of settling in to the city.



This delightful feast was shared by good friends, shown here with Nanci and Ronualdo at the head of the line, and Alfie, the chef who outdid himself watching over things at the rear of this foto.

When Ronualdo was out walking along the pedestrian mall, terrified, he found these pigeons, which settled him down some. Usually not very talkative anyway, he said not a word until later when we got to the more familiar jungle greenery of Naranjo, where we were honored to spend the next few days.

All day we got to smell the wonderful feast cooking in the kitchen. When at last, the tasty repast was kicked off with a trip to the salad bar.

And then...



Connie Foss, from Puerto Viejo, Barry, and Victor Sanabria (Alfie's accountant) getting ready to dive into the meal!

The meal was served. Barry, completely at home with serving soup, got into the act. Then with the help of the hotel staff, a great meal was had by all!

Thank you, Alfie – and all of your wonderful staff!

THANKS GIVEN!

Nanci Stevens

As I wrote this, we were only days away from Thanksgiving, I wanted to bow my head to all of you in gratitude for your continuing support of this thing we call "The Bridge" – the most meaningful work I have ever been privileged to do.

Like a freight train pulling into a station. the powerful year 2012 in just a few short weeks will come screeching to a halt, as a new and possibly different world unveils itself to us. 2012 has been a most incredible year. Old thought systems are giving way to new, with a positive and healthy orientation to the planet. We are about to birth something so different there are as many speculations as there are people making them.

And all the while, during all the planet's stretching and growing pains – droughts, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, government and corporate foolishness, catastrophic storms, oil spills, even the Earth's North Pole moving around, you – The Bridge participants, have not forgotten us, the little pocket of people with Hope along the Caribbean shores of Costa Rica.

As a combined power, you have helped to educate 126 children this year, giving those children a running chance in the world. You have kept the healthy food flowing at the Community Kitchen, giving these children and their families the strength to get to school and to look for work each day. As they say down here, give yourselves "una grande aplausa" We can never know the future ripples flowing out endlessly from your generosity.

Mired in the muck of details, I don't often take the time to stand way back to see the overall picture of what The Bridge, with your help, has become – a sanctuary, a place where Hope springs, an oasis for the weary and discouraged.

Barry and I are so aware that in every quadrant of the world there are people hurting and calling out for help. There are so many worthy causes. But it almost doesn't matter where we place our concern, our time, talents, and treasures. Every act of unselfish love helps us to elevate the whole. We are so thankful that you have chosen to support this particular endeavor, and so are the people you serve. It's no small thing to know there's a hot bowl of soup for a man and his family on a morning when torrential rains and tourist-high prices make earning a living impossible.

As 2012 draws to a close, I pray for all of us a renewed love for each other and for our beloved planet that has nourished us for so long. May we always put Her first in our consciousness and our work.

That said, our hearts go out to you this Holiday Season. Lift a glass of Holiday cheer and congratulate yourselves for a job well done!

Because... we have an opportunity to do it all over again! The 2013 School Year starts up in February. So dust off your wallets, and sharpen up your prayers. We've only just begun!

May the peace of the Lord descend upon you and lighten all your loads.

Nanci

AN "ALMOST DONE 2012" REPORT

We thought you might be interested in a snapshot report of what you have helped with so far in 2012, taken from a log book we keep on the activities here.

WITH YOUR HELP January - November 2012			
School Program	Community Kitchen		
Students In School "Bridge Kids"	People Served	Bowls of Soup	Bags Of Food
126	4,029	7,655	235

The School Program helped those Bridge Kids attend 16 schools in Costa Rica and 4 in Panama.

Counting heads, the Community Kitchen served just over 4,000 people so far this year. Nearly all of them ask for seconds on soup. And then there are those family-size bags of food we trade for work at the Community Kitchen.

We are in the final lap in 2012, getting ready for the Christmas Party on Saturday Dec. 22. Many wonderful volunteers have been helping make gifts, and decorate The Bridge for the occasion. Casa Amma has also offered to pay for the food costs of the party – Thank You Casa Amma! The tribal leader has said he'll be coming. I have a feeling it's gonna be a great day!



Volunteer Jennifer Lang at work again, this time serving soup to Katie, on the left, and a newly assimilated member of her family.

DEALING WITH CUSTOMS

No, we're not talking about the social customs here. Rather, getting donated goods into the country without having to deal with paying customs fees. We're absolutely thrilled with the response from you folks, sending school supplies down as a donation for the Bridge Kids! Thank you so much! Recently, however, it feels like something in the "flow" has changed in the way the Aduanas – Customs people – handle the incoming materials.

First there was that initial encounter with a great donation of 145 backpacks that flew in from the USA, and now presumably are still resting comfortably in a warehouse in Heredia. There is a Customs' fee that should not have been charged, and a per-day rental fee for the warehouse space. Combining these two charges, the cost is now greater than it would be if we bought the backpacks here. It's not clear how, if at all, the situation can be resolved.

Then, we had a donation of school supplies mailed to us, and they were held up at a post office in Limón, again waiting for the payment of customs fees. Nanci had to go all the way to Limón, about an hour and a half away, to get that resolved. She explained who we are and what we do, and a (one-time) customs fee was computed – 72 colons (about 15 cents). The round-trip bus fare was about 3,000 colons.

I'm again feeling the wonderfully funny message from that video about Costa Rican bureaucracy, which if you haven't laughed over it recently, you can see at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXWZ3uAEKsw> Dealing with customs now, I'm feeling like we're still a part of that video.

One thing is clear. There needs to be a message posted on the outside of every box or package that is sent or brought down here, clearly identifying the contents for use in a non-profit, not for sale. I'll word up such a sign, in Spanish and English, and put it on our website for downloading by anyone who needs it.

I've prepared a "Message For Customs" in two sizes – one for boxes, and a slightly smaller one for envelopes. You can download them from our website, and print the one you need for the outside of a package you might think of sending. They can be found at www.elpuente-thebridge.org/message-for-customs Download one or both of the JPG files at that location, and print them out as you need them.

Then, to send a box or envelope, use that super-wide clear Scotch tape to tape the message across the flaps on a box cover, or the back of an envelope. If the box is particularly large, perhaps one sign on each side and the top where it opens would be useful.

And – having said all that – Thank You so much for your support!

FLORA AND FAUNA

A cute children's toy came along with some donated goods recently – a little teddy bear with HUGE eyes, which, for the present moment, is sitting and staring at me while I write this note. We'll call him "Fauna".

Then, there's a very great example of rainforest climate vegetation growing outside our window, an impressively huge mushroom that sprung up within a day or so, nurtured by the extreme tropical climate – about an 8-inch tall mushroom. We'll call it "Flora".



Flora, meet Fauna – Fauna, meet Flora! Sitting down, Flora is a whopping 5 ½ inches (16 ½ centimeters) tall.

This beautiful mushroom popped up in two days. I posed the duo for this photo on the second day, then brought Fauna back inside. The following day, Flora lost her head – it flipped over and fell upside down on the ground. The mushroom's life cycle lasted about four days,

“WHERE DOES ROOT BEER COME FROM, MOMMIE?”

Why, from the roots of trees, of course! Or so it would seem in this foto, taken in the roots of one of those giant 500-year-old trees that grow in our yard.



As I took out the garbage one day, I found this view waiting for me. While it seems almost funny, it symbolizes problems in this area, with a pristine jungle environment receiving the waste from our culture. I snapped this shot, and put the bottle in recycling.

Recycling here is different than back in the US and other more developed nations. Seeing this bottle reminded me of something we've mentioned some time ago, but with Christmas and the School Program coming up, it's worth mentioning again.

Plastic And Recycling

Wherever possible, please remove the plastic packaging from things you send down. There's no place to put that plastic in the jungle! Wrap gifts in dish towels or clothes for shipping. Save the plastic for the recycling center near you! If the item you're sending has instructions printed on part of the plastic container, we'll have to find a way to deal with that down here. But... that mountain of clear plastic packaging – please give it a final resting place at the recycling center nearest you!

VOLUNTEER CORNER

Not so long ago, we had a wonderfully enthusiastic volunteer visit with us. So, ladies and gentlemen...



*... please say "hello" to ... Sian Hughes,
volunteer, long ways from the UK!*

She jumped in around here and helped out with the Community Kitchen, and she brightened up the place with that smile of hers. We also learned that she brightened up quite a few other places around town practicing her profession – graphic design. Thank you, Sian! She went home to the UK to visit family, and I understand that she's booked a flight back to "her jungle home" on January 7! Yay!

IT'S 2013!

We're getting ready for The 2013 School Program!

This year, you put 126 children in 16 schools in Costa Rica and 4 in Panama. We can't wait to see how *next* year works out!

Nanci's already buying a few of the things the students need – shoes, uniforms, and some basic supplies. She's preparing the log book, with the current student list and lots of extra room for the new Bridge Kids.

We're recruiting a few good volunteers, with cars, who want to help with the transportation to and from Bribri, and with the fitting of clothes on groups of eager school children.

The costs for an entire school year for a student have been averaging out to \$150. Initial expenses are around \$75. Then, not long after the start of school, there are expenses for books, sometimes doubling the startup cost – or more – as soon as teachers figure out which books they want to use. Later, there are copies of exams, special fiestas, and copies of teaching materials. By the time everything is done, it can be pretty pricey.

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Get ready to join with us in supporting the 2013 Bridge Kids as they build a better future!

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.**
- **Go to GoodSearch and look into searching the Internet, shopping online in 1,500 brand name stores, and even dining out at participating restaurants** – all of which will provide a donation to El Puente, and it won't cost you one penny extra. <http://www.goodsearch.com>
- **Look at our list of critically needed supplies** – <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org/page26.html>
- **Consider helping us long term by becoming an intrepid Monthly Pledger** – go here and see what that's about and how to get it done. www.elpuente-thebridge.org/pledge

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** <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org/pledge>

Make an **Immediate Donation** <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org/page30.html>

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

One thing PayPal will do is allow contribution in foreign currencies. Right Now, I have added the British Pound to the list of currencies accepted. If there is interest in donating in any other currencies, let me know, and if PayPal supports it I will add it in.

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

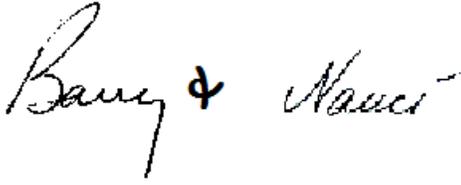
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Thank you for your support!

Well,

...djmiache

Enjoy!

Handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry & Nanci". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

IF YOU HAVE TROUBLE SEEING THE PICTURES

...go to <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org/weekly> and download the DOC or PDF file with the date of this issue.

Go to The **Bridge Website** <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org>

Download a **Powerpoint presentation(PPT)** or a **narrated slideshow/video(AVI)** <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org/present>

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

Go to the **newsletter archive** <http://www.elpuente-thebridge.org/weekly>

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

See us in action in the CNN News Report at <http://bit.ly/yQSV0Z> (Push the "CC" button for English subtitles)

More video including El Puente in a **Surf For Life video** at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ywkO7OZiY>

There is also a video on El Puente by Actuality Media available at <http://vimeo.com/46201540>

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