



El Nahual's Bi-Monthly Newsletter

Free/Gratis
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Happy New Year!
¡Feliz año nuevo!

www.languageselnahual.com
27 Avenida 8-68, Zona 1, Xela
(502) 7765 2098

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Adiós to Charlie and Sharon

Last newsletter, we said good-bye to Graham Henderson. Graham is still talked about today and asked about all around town (i.e. Margarita at Blue Angel). There is a small group of people who have come through our doors that carry this kind of air about them that keeps their presence in the hearts and minds of the El Nahual community long after they have left.

Today, I have the pleasure of inducting two new members to this dignified club. Charlie and Sharon were the coordinators when I arrived here as a student with virtually no Spanish ability and a fair share of anxiety over meeting new people in a brand new country. I can say without hesitation that from the time I arrived on Linea Galgos, both Charlie and Sharon made the transition so smooth and positive that I was ready to stay forever by the second night. Of their many strengths, their ability to make all feel welcome and their ability to create such a positive sense of community among all students and volunteers sticks out as one of their greatest triumphs.

Charlie Sutherland, The refined British gentleman with a penchant for shirtless dancing below Kokolokos (ask him), was someone who could inspire anyone

to believe in what we do here at El Nahual. His conversations with potential volunteers at Blue Angel and his descriptions of the programs with new students on the roof of the school left an example of leadership that will hopefully survive in this position for years to come. His hard work and dedication to continue the growth of the school where Graham and his predecessors had left off still bears fruit today through his connections made in the various universities he contacted and his other ambitious projects. Charlie was a wonderful teacher and a wonderful leader and we all hope that his contributions will be met with equal rewards as he continues with his life outside El Nahual.

Sharon Ramos, our official Guatemalan representative with her own unique penchant for the sidewalk outside of Salon Tecun (ask her), was one of the longest running volunteers at El Nahual. Her goofiness and good attitude served to make her the unofficial face of El Nahual. If anyone during my time here represents everything we stand for and are trying to accomplish, it would be Sharon. Where Charlie inspired, Sharon enlivened. It was impossible to have a bad day at El Nahual when you had Sharon waiting in the office to talk to. In addition to Sharon's good attitude, she was a

tremendously dedicated worker who spent many weekends answering E-mails and working on newsletters while drinking frapuccinos at Cuartito. Sharon's dedication is best expressed in her willingness not only to switch jobs from Volunteer Coordinator to International Coordinator when asked, but also to temporarily do both jobs at once while waiting for her replacement as Volunteer Coordinator. Sharon returns to LA as a legend within the El Nahual community and will surely leave the same mark in her future endeavors.

Now we begin again with new coordinators, new students, and new volunteers. Things keep changing here, but the contributions of the past guide the programs so that we will never take a step backwards, but rather continue to build upon the strong foundation all of our past members have left us. In this Newsletter, we'll take a look on how things ended up during this crazy end of the year and how we are looking ahead at the New Year with new projects and continued growth.

-Alex Melton



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Jovencitas Program

Whether you are from Guatemala, the US, Norway or China being a young adult is difficult. Finding your place in the world, discovering who you are and understanding your surroundings can create situations where most young adults are challenged and inexperienced, and one bad decision can lead you to the wrong path. Conditions here in Guatemala do not always help our students (our future) to grow into confident, strong willed, healthy and educated individuals. This is precisely why El Nahual was created and has continued to grow every year. This year we are proud to have initiated “the Jovenes” program where one of the classes given will be life skills.

The objective of the class is to give the students the skills and knowhow to face difficult situations

that are a part of growing up, their community and reality. The class is held by two volunteers; Kate Scott Buckholz and Monica Celine Gundersen and stretches over a period of seven weeks. Each week we will give an hour lecture on a subject, combining information-based classes with interactive activities. The idea is to not only provide the information but also prepare for, or perhaps practice how to act in different situations. The subjects that will be covered are; young girls and leadership, human rights, peace, violence against women, self esteem and body image, reproductive and sexual health, and HIV and AIDS.

At the moment of writing, we are one week into the course and had a successful class talking about class rules, the atmosphere wanted during classes and playing different

icebreaking games. The kids seem interested and motivated to tackle these subjects that might be a little bit controversial in these areas. As one of the teachers of the class, it is exciting and interesting being part of this new project; being able to help give young kids a better opportunity in life, challenge them a bit, educate them and also introduce them to a different way of thinking.

The hope for the future is that this class will be an ongoing project that is integrated into the curriculum, and of course that the kids will be better prepared of what ever comes their way, and grow into the confident, strong willed, healthy and educated individuals, that we know they have ability to do.

-Monica Celine Gundersen

The Garden

In the spirit of the New Year we have decided to revamp the garden. We will begin by building a new, sturdier greenhouse just outside the garden plot. This baby has a wooden frame that won't give into the billowing gusts of wind rolling over the fields. It will keep our seedlings safe and warm within the next few months. The fence around the perimeter of the garden is slack in many places and now offers little protection from the dangers of the outside world: roving gangs of dogs, and cows that eat anything within the range of their tether. This includes our compost, fruit trees, and any other vegetation they can get their mouths on. We are reposting and reinforcing the fence, first weeding and hacking away at the vegetation that has crept in around the perimeter.

As always we are maintaining ongoing projects in the garden such as: composting, mulching, loosening and enriching the soil, and shooing away nosy animals. We are hoping to get a feasible water supply in the next few weeks. Although our compost looks pretty damn good we are embarking on a mission to utilize the abundance of cow patties in the neighborhood to use to up the nitrogen content in our soil. It will still be a month or so until we are ready to plant, so we will be mulching our beds or spraying them down with water to make sure our top-soil does not blow away.

We have high hopes for a variety of delicious, miraculous vegetables this year (I, for one, am expecting a jack and the beanstalk type

story to happen here). We have a strong crew of interested, knowledgeable volunteers who are excited about getting in the dirt and plenty of projects to satisfy. We hope to be able to feed the amazing kids from the Jovenes program with the veggies from the garden come summertime.

-Tenaya Schnare



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Meet Katherine and Alexander: A Refined Lady and a Distinguished Gentleman from the North (our coordinators)

Name: Kate Buckholz, Volunteer Coordinator

Age: 28

Birthplace: Danbury, CT.

Your theme song: "32 Flavors"-Ani DiFranco

Why are you here in three words or less?

¿Porque no?

Favorite spice?

Ginger

Optimist, pessimist, or realist?

optimist

Salsa (the dance) or salsa (the sauce)?

The dance.

If you could commit one book to memory, which book and why?

Long Walk to Freedom by Nelson Mandela, because it was one of the books that inspired me to do what I am doing.

If you had to sing karaoke, what song would you sing?

"Camisa Negra," by Juanes (a.k.a. mi novio)

Country you'd most like to visit: Three-way tie: Colombia/Brazil/Argentina

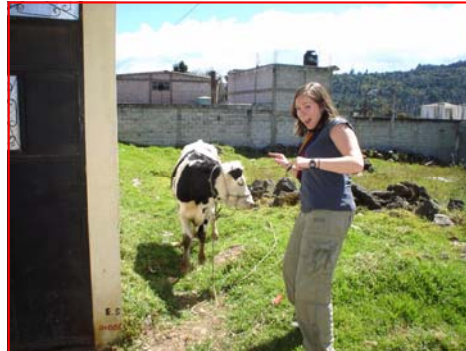
What's your favorite baseball team? Yankees. Not a question. Born and bred.

Biggie or Tupac? Biggie, East coast!

Favorite and least favorite things about Guatemala...

Chicken bus *ayudantes*, blue corn tortillas, and Xela the dog

Hill of *polvo*, *Mano Dura*, and sleeping in a wool hat.



Name and Title: Alex Melton, International Coordinator

Age: 26

Birthplace: Lancaster, PA.

Your theme song: "Hard Rains 'A Gonna Fall" -Bob Dylan

Why are you here in three words or less? I want to.

Favorite spice?

Cayenne

Optimist, pessimist, or realist?

Optimistic realist

Salsa (the dance) or salsa (the sauce)?

I like them both hot, but the sauce warms my belly.

If you could commit one book to memory, which book and why?

"Man's Search for Meaning" by Viktor Frankl, because it reminds me of the relative smallness of my personal problems and the good that can come from adversity.

If you had to sing karaoke, what song would you sing?

"In da Club" by 50 Cent

Country you'd most like to visit? Peru or England

Favorite baseball team? Tie between Arizona Diamondbacks and Boston Redsox

Reggae or reggaeton? Reggae

Biggie or Tupac? I just want to stop the violence, man. I'm with P Diddy on this one. Stop the war.

Prince or Michael Jackson? Bob Dylan

Favorite and least favorite things about Guatemala...

Finally a country where I'm good at basketball, and Xela, the dog,

Xelawho magazine

Construction at Candelaria

Cantón Candelaria is situated south of Xela on the western slope of the Cerro Quemado facing the Volcán Santa Maria. Places do not get much more beautiful than this. The school at Candelaria as of now is too small for the 200 children attending classes. The teachers make the best of what they have, working in every space they can find including small shacks and outdoors.

The construction of the new school, funded by the government F.I.S., started at the end of August 2007. Sixty

families in the canton give a hand to make the project a reality since funds to pay laborers are almost non-existent. This is where El Nahual volunteers step in as a very welcome extra workforce.

The roof is now in place and the floors are in the process of being tiled. The school is estimated to open its doors in about three months, give or take. El Nahual volunteers have been helping with the work, hauling buckets of dirt, digging the holes for the new latrines, helping to tile and clean up the work site. We are all extremely happy to be

helping out with such an important project that directly affects the lives of the *niños* that we love love love!

-Alexis Chazerand



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A Sampling of 2007's Top Events

Dia del Niño

Reaching back to October, the Dia Del Niño celebrations were a huge hit at El Nahual. We had two fiestas during the first week of October. One fiesta was exclusively for the kids and families at Canton Candalaria. The second fiesta, which took place at the zoo, was a mix of the Manos de Colores kids from El Nahual and La Cuchilla. These two parties were both tremendous successes and two of the largest we have thrown at El Nahual.

The Candalaria party was held in the morning on October 1st at a local futbol field near Candalaria. Many El Nahual volunteers, including Joe Loudon (see photo) came to honor the kids and have fun playing sports and other games. The festivities included snacks and sweets along with gifts for every niño in attendance. It was a great time for the kids, the families, and all volunteers involved.

The party at the zoo was an ambitious undertaking as the hundreds of



students in attendance had to walk in groups from their respective schools along busy streets and through chaotic intersections to get to the zoo for the party. We all made it there alive and everyone met up in the giant gazebo in the center of the zoo. We followed with games like three legged races, tag, and just general roughhousing. The day concluded with a giant bowl of fruit salad, bags of candy, and more gifts for the kids.

Día Del Niño was a great experience for everyone involved. The idea of the Dia Del Niño is a progressive and exciting holiday that many volunteers left wishing to carry the tradition back home to their respective countries. In a country where so much is expected of these kids that we've all come to know and love, the Dia Del Niño is an essential reminder to the kids and to the community just how important and valuable they are for today and for the future.

—Alex Melton

Benefit Dinner at Entremundos

Mid-November, a time when many North Americans were preparing pumpkin pie and stringing holiday lights on their homes, the El Nahual community was busy preparing pupusas, enchiladas, paper maché piñatas, and niño self portraits framed with rice and beans. For weeks the volunteers planned art classes themed around the upcoming "El Nahual Benefit Night and Nino Art Exhibition;" a menu was planned, the space booked at EntreMundos and teams of volunteers headed off with armfuls of flyers to post in all the usual haunts.

The day of the event was delightfully hectic, started off by a trip to the market. As the morning progressed, El Nahual was filled with the smells of comida típica while Mariela, Lilian, the women from

the cooking course and several volunteers chopped, sautéed, stuffed and fried. Volunteers, Spanish students and afternoon Manos de Colores niños peered into the kitchen to identify the source of wafting yumminess.

Several volunteers went to EntreMundos early to set up and when guests arrived they were greeted by a candlelit room filled with artwork beautifully displayed. There were piñatas strung across the room, flowers and candles on every table and volunteers running to and from the kitchen heating the food driven down from El Nahual in the back of Don Jorge's pickup truck. Then, slowly but surely the room filled with guests and the holiday cards that were for sale started flying off the shelves. There

was music piped through various MP3s, mountains of food consumed and a generally excellent start to the holiday season!

The evening ended up a success due to the dedicated work of our El Nahual volunteers- we made enough money to cover the rent for our new house with a little left over for our programs and holiday celebrations with the niños!

-Kate Buckholz



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Primary School Graduation

There are gifts you receive through intentional and obvious channels like a child on Christmas morning sitting plump in a pile of wrapping paper. And there are always surprises planned by loved ones which are touching by nature, but somewhere in the back of your mind are expected, no matter the excited shock you are able to muster... But then there are *sorpresitas*, small surprises, that are intangible invaluable indescribable.

One day you might find yourself standing in an almost uncomfortably warm room on the second floor of a Guatemalan school celebrating the graduation of 10 primary school students, all over the age of 13, three of whom are married and starting families, but who chose to spend every Saturday for two years pursuing a degree that will open the door to high school. And you stand proudly, willing the tears back into your eyes as you listen to the Guatemalan national anthem and watch women in *traje tipica* with their hands to their hearts singing along the realization hits that you are being handed, without asking or expectation, a gift valuable beyond imagination.

And then someone's *abuelita* approaches

you after you have handed the certificate of graduation to her grand daughter and her almond shaped eyes fill with tears, a tiny droplet stuck in the burst of creases created by years of Central American sun, and says thank you over and over for giving her *nena* a chance. Never a hand out but a hand up.



You might catch yourself in the middle of a market searching for the perfect *barilete* to fly in the November wind- during this the month of sun and kites, celebration and mourning entwined like lovers in a dance. You look down the aisle of stalls, past the *churros* and *pupusas* and catch sight of a group of pall bearers silently carrying a coffin that is

smaller than you want it to be. Leading a procession toward the cemetery where just days ago they celebrated the life everlasting of their ancestors and are now about to bury one more, lovingly tucking her in for *sueños dulces* one last time.

You might lose your breath each time you step out of your front door and catch sight of Santa Maria, silent sentinel soaring proudly into the impossibly blue sky. And then find yourself saying a silent prayer, *gracias a Dios*, for each day the *niños* return to school safely, a small smile playing on your lips as you listen to the English lessons through the wall... and yet in the same instant silently curse the system that force young boys to have to work gluing soles onto shoes instead of returning to study with us.

The world is an impossibly unfair place. The balance tipped very much in favor of few. And as much as we can try to give give give... the sand through the sieve flows ever North leaving behind just enough grains, carried on the wind like the November *bariletes* and the ancestral echo through the valley of Xela-ju.

-Kate Buckholz

The Election

Since the last newsletter, the Guatemalan Elections have finished and a new President has recently been inaugurated. El Nahualians who spent the summer months here are all probably quite familiar with the onslaught of political posters, painted rocks, and blaring mobile advertisements marketing the seemingly countless number of candidates for Guatemala's highest office (except of course for the military). After the first votes in September, Guatemala was left with a choice between Otto Perez Molina and Alvaro Colom. Perez, the candidate most likely to beat up your dad, ran on a semi-fascistic "mano dura" platform of security and stern looks. Colom, the candidate most likely to cry while watching "Love Actually", ran a semi-populist campaign directed at

reducing poverty and bringing a stronger voice to the indigenous populations in Guatemala.

In the end, Colom surprised many and came out the victor. While Colom is arguably much further to the left of his counterpart, many saw this victory as a win for the lesser of two evils. Many critics consider Colom to be a shadow of his former idealistic self, and a likely puppet for free-market western interests in Guatemala. While this criticism may in time prove itself accurate, Colom has promised to follow through with his campaign promises of fighting poverty and increasing indigenous rights and representation. He has promised to regularly meet and confer with the Mayan Elders National Council and he has promised to fight for increased social spending on job creation,

health, and education.

Colom was inaugurated in Guatemala City on the 14th of January and El Nahual and the rest of Guatemala will now get to see which version of Colom will prevail. Hopefully in the next newsletter, there will a positive update to report on Guatemala's new President. In the meantime, many of us look forward to "super-Tuesday" in the United States as the friendlier half of America decides on the next President of the United States. A new US President is surely something we can all look forward to.

-Alex Melton

Christmas Parties

The Manos de Colores project attracted more than 150 primary school children for the classes offered every afternoon during the public school's holiday recess. It was always very lively and both the volunteer teachers and the students prepared for the holidays and enjoyed making decorations and cards in the art classes, and learning English through new holiday songs, rhymes and stories.

It was also a lot of fun to plan the end-of-year farewell party: small gifts and lots of fruits were purchased and the volunteers divided in groups to wrap the gifts for boys and girls in "festive newspaper", and cut up the fruit to prepare a huge bowl of fruit salad. The idea was for all the children to participate in the activities and enjoy every minute of the party, so each of 10 volunteers was asked to design and prepare a game suitable for all

ages. The students were divided in 10 groups with children from all course levels, and one of the teenagers in our Jovenes Program was appointed leader of each group. The groups participated in all ten games, which ranged from pin the tail to the donkey to various sack races and relays to fill a bottle with water, run with a spoon of water in your



mouth, drop the balls in the holes, etc.

After many laughs and two hours of real fun all around, candy and a delicious fruit salad were enjoyed by all. The gifts became awards for the winners of all the games, which turned out to be all the children present, because everyone is a winner at Manos de Colores. Hugs and kisses followed, along with all good wishes for the holidays and the new year.

The school was very quiet during the next few days and the children were truly missed as all the volunteers started painting the walls and desks and cleaning the windows and doors to prepare the school to welcome the children to a new start in a couple of weeks.

-Mercedes M. Rey

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Top 10 best excuses to get out of Volunteer Work

10. My homestay family eats lunch at 4pm
9. They just made fresh brownies at Cuartito
8. I followed one of the street signs to El Nahual and now I'm halfway to Huehuetenango.
7. Otto Perez Molina beat me up and took my lunch-money.
6. I got lost in my hotel room in San Pedro
5. I joined a gang of street dogs and we pretty much just bark from three to five.
4. I dipped my hand in the Doña Panchas fondu pot and its gonna take the rest of the day to lick it off.
3. I'm having recurring nightmares about the school's bicycles and I need to call my therapist.
2. I woke up on the floor of Kokolokos and I think I just married a street vendor.
1. I sprained my leg tripping over one of the Quetzaltrekers beards.



In the upcoming newsletter...

- **Jovenes Program and Tienda**
- **Update on Construction at Candelaria**
- **Garden Update**
- **A New Top Ten List**
- **Colom Update**
- **Cooking Class**

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