

KGAP newsletter

available online at www.kgap.org

Warm Greetings from Connie Vanderhyden

KGAP Coordinator

I hope this newsletter finds all of you enjoying the holiday season, surrounded by your friends and families! This is definitely a time to express gratitude and KGAP has many reasons to be grateful, particularly because of the continuing support and interest we receive from our friends, families and communities! Thanks to all of you for staying with us over all these years!

This coming January I will travel to Guatemala with a group of friends who have also accompanied the community of Chaculá over the past years. We will be present to celebrate the 25th anniversary since the return to Guatemala, a milestone in the life of the community and in the Kickapoo-Guatemala Accompaniment Project.

This year KGAP has been presented with several new opportunities to extend our support in Chaculá in the areas of education and healthcare. We have also been asked to join with other sponsoring communities in the NISGUA network to provide financial support for Tal Netter-Sweet, an accompanier on the ground in Guatemala right now. Additionally, a former accompanier with links to the KGAP community, Claire Bransky, will be working in the NISGUA office in Guatemala as a communications fellow. KGAP is able to provide some financial support for her outreach and education work as well. We feel grateful and honored to be able to support these broader accompaniment efforts right now and hope you enjoy reading Tal and Claire's reports in this newsletter. I also encourage you to check out the NISGUA website (www.nisgua.org) for ongoing updates and information about Guatemala, accompaniment, justice and accountability.

One of my great pleasures in the fall of every year is receiving letters from Chaculá high school students, recipients of KGAP scholarships. They are always sincere expressions of gratitude to all of you in the KGAP network for your interest and support. This year I have also received several letters from teachers in Chaculá, short biographies of their journeys to become educators. You will be able to read one such story in this newsletter by Miriam Carrillo Funes and more will be published in forthcoming editions.

I have just received a proposal of how the community will utilize the 2019 KGAP education fund. Here is where the education funding will be directed in 2019:

Scholarships for 18 High School Students

Monthly tuition for all 65 participating middle school students (Instituto Básico)

Additional expenses for 6 middle school students who need extra financial support.

A generator to provide electricity when the power goes out (often!)

Band instructor salary

1 computer for the Primary School Director

Administrative expenditures for the Primary and Middle Schools

Paint for the Middle School (outside walls)

We were able to increase our annual education donation this year because of the Youth Initiative High School Fundraiser on November 3rd. The YIHS students were enthusiastic about fundraising for Chaculá in advance of their upcoming journey to Guatemala in March, 2019. Shawn Lavoie (YIHS teacher) and Tim Beck (former Pleasant Ridge and Westby High School student) will lead the 3½-week trip, including 8 days in Chaculá with my assistance and presence. This March delegation will also include Jennifer McGeorge and Kim Dowat, midwives from our region. They will be providing another training for Guatemalan midwives, assisted by Luisa Rivera, Andi Alexander, and myself.

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Biography Of Miriam Nohemí Carrillo

translated by Connie Vanderhyden

I am Miriam Nohemi Carrillo and I arrived on this earth on October 12, 1989 in the village of Sinaloa, Comalapa, Chiapas, Mexico. I am the daughter of my beautiful single mother, Maxima Carrillo Funes, from the beautiful country of Guatemala. Because of the internal armed conflict in Guatemala, my mother and her family were forced to take refuge in the neighboring country of Mexico. When I turned four years old (1994) my family returned to Guatemala and since then I have lived in the village of Nueva Esperanza, Chacula, Nenton, Huehuetenango, Guatemala. Since I was very small I have enjoyed playing soccer and, of course, I like to study. In Chacula I studied in the primary school and then, because of my mother's enormous sacrifice, I was able to study at the Chacula middle school. Since my mother was a single mom with two children, my younger brother Alejandro and myself, it was very difficult for her to help us get ahead. But she was a very hard worker, making delicious breads for sale. This was the way she could obtain the money to pay for my tuition and other supplies in middle school. My childhood was very difficult because of the economic situation and from a very young age I had to work, helping my mother make bread and taking care of my little brother when she was working.

From the time I began middle school I talked with my mother every evening about my desire to continue studying to obtain a career and be able to work to help her and my brother to improve our situation. When I remember this my soul hurts and tears begin to flow because my mom would get sad and cry, telling me it was impossible to send me to high school to study because of the expenses of tuition, housing, food and travel to Huehuetenango. I wanted to continue studying so much that I would plead with her until one day she told me she was going to emigrate to the U.S. as that was the only way she could earn enough money to pay for my schooling. This was very sad news because although I wanted to study I didn't want to be left alone, without my mother.

On March 8, 2004, my mother began her journey in order to satisfy my dreams of completing my schooling. Without a doubt, I suffered so much upon her parting and even more when I found out that she had been left alone, lost in the desert in her effort to cross into the U.S. I thought the worst would happen and I wouldn't ever see her again, feeling very guilty because she had gone to work to make it possible for me to continue studying. She was picked up by immigration

and deported to Mexico and after 2 months she tried again and managed to cross into the U.S.

After swallowing this bitter pill, in 2005 I prepared my bags and traveled to Huehuetenango with many dreams of being able to study to become an early childhood teacher and achieve my great dream. My degree took 3 years and I only traveled to Chacula during vacation times to visit with my brother who was then living with my uncle, Jubinal Carrillo Funes, who is like a father to us.

In 2007 I graduated as an early education teacher, thanks to the unconditional support of my mother, my uncle Jubinal, and also the KGAP scholarship program. Connie is a great woman and friend that I consider to be part of the family.

Thanks to her and the solidarity of all of you who collaborate together, many young people have received scholarships and have been able to realize their dreams.

In 2008 I began to look for work and in July I was able to find a job in Chacula in the school where I was a student. This was the moment when I could call my mother who was still in the U.S. and give her the wonderful news that also made her very happy. I remember that I told my mom that I had a job and it was time

for her to come back to Guatemala. After two more years she did return and my dreams were complete as I had a job and also had my mother with me too!

In 2011 I became a mother when my son, Josue Alejandro Carrillo, was born. My mother, my brother, and my son are the engines of my life and in 2012 I started my university career, studying to be a professor at the middle school level. This is a three year course of study but I couldn't finish. I only completed one year because I am a single mother and it was hard for me to continue studying and working. Nevertheless, it is clear that some day I will finish and achieve another of my dreams.

I continue to struggle day by day, enjoying my work in the primary school. I gain a lot in my work with my kindergarten students and now I can say that one of my dreams has been achieved. I also like to work with the middle school students in the Chacula Basico Institute. I struggle and work every day for my family and to feel accomplished in my life.



Josue, Maxima and Miriam, photo by Andi Alexander

Baile de Muertos: KGAP Fundraiser

by Shawn "Juanito" Lavoie

The Rooted Spoon Restaurant is full on a Saturday night. Day of the Dead décor adorns the space: an altar with candles, papel picado, skull balloons, calaveras y flores. Little children line up to have their face painted, parents line up to fill their plates with burritos and their cups with horchata, and old friends chat in booths as the latin music from DJ Chris Dunn starts to pick up.

The scene is set for another successful show of support for the Kickapoo Guatemala Accompaniment Project. Connie comes to the mic to greet everyone and to thank them for their support. She reminds everyone what we're supporting tonight: a 25 year relationship with the people of Chaculá/Nueva Esperanza. I remember how when I've led student delegations to Chaculá, the people there have often thrown a big dance party for us in their community hall. That's what we're doing here. Connie passes me the mic and I call people to the dance floor for a salsa lesson. 30-40-50 people—I don't know, so many—squeeze on the dance floor to learn some simple steps. My four year old daughter and seven year old son dancing close-by, I see a room of dancers, ranging in age from 60s to toddlers, enjoying the latin beat and ambience and communal warmth on a chilly night.

This event was conceived by the group of Youth Initiative High School students who will be traveling to Guatemala this February and March. Together we dreamed up ways to support KGAP in advance of going there, and got excited about a dance party. Viroqua needs more booty-shaking, we decided. Students, parents, and friends of KGAP worked together to decorate the space, prepare the 200 burritos, set up the music, and, of course, clean up! The team effort not only raised around \$1600 for KGAP, it helped our group begin to form and raised awareness in the community about this special solidarity relationship we work to maintain with the people of Chaculá.

¡Que sigamos bailando!



Photo of Chacula, by Andi Alexander

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In conclusion I would like to share with you a small part of "The Power of Presence", a NISGUA publication from March, 2015. As I have often mentioned to the students, the midwives, and other visitors to Chaculá on our KGAP delegations, the community considers all of us to be accompaniers and they truly appreciate our on-going commitment and friendship.

"In part, our accompaniment work is our recognition of the interconnected nature of global oppression; as people living in the global north, we have a responsibility to prioritize and amplify the voices of those most impacted by injustice. As such, the advocacy work of our network is deeply informed by relationships built on longevity and trust with the Guatemalans we accompany – in some cases that longevity spans several decades. As an organization that values relationships and long-term commitment, it has been and continues to be an honor for us to have accompanied these struggles for so many years. Being present alongside those who bear the brunt of U.S. economic and foreign policy, we have witnessed the importance of U.S. cultural and political transformation in the reduction of human rights violations in Guatemala. We are grateful to be part of a grassroots network that has been willing and able to adapt to the evolving circumstances, while striving towards mutuality and collective liberation in our solidarity work."

KGAP continues to thrive over the years with the amazing energy and support you all have helped provide. Thank you so very much! Donations can be sent to:

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Many thanks to all of you for your continuing interest and support. January 2019 will be the 25th anniversary of the return to Guatemala for Chacula and, therefore, the 24th year for KGAP!

Introducing Claire Bransky NISGUA Communications Fellow

Dear KGAP community,

My last name probably sounds familiar, eh? I am the niece of Liz and Paul Bransky of rural Gays Mills and have spent quite a lot of time in the area. While I grew up in Duluth, MN, I came down most of my childhood summers to “help” on the farm; you may have seen five year-old me selling my flower bouquets for 25 cents at the Viroqua Farmers Market. In college I studied Political Science but fell more in love with farming, so I spent almost every summer leaving school to come work at Liz and Paul’s farm and Driftless Organics. As I’m sure is true for a lot of you, I just keep finding myself called back to the Driftless area. I now consider it one of my three homes, right alongside Duluth and Guatemala City.

I have now started to work as a Communications Fellow for NISGUA, Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, the same organization through which I volunteered as an accompanier. The position is new to me and new to NISGUA; this will be our first fellowship ever! I will write articles, maintain the website, manage social media, translate interviews, and continue to build relationships of trust and mutual solidarity with our Guatemalan partners.

As opposed to accompaniment, in which I mostly provided a physical presence to dissuade violence, as a fellow I will focus on carrying the stories of struggle and resistance back home. The hope is to dissuade violence by educating and mobilizing people to fight the foreign policies and multinational corporations that cause it in the first place.

I want to deeply thank all of you for sponsoring my communications fellowship. Whether as accompaniers or fellows, we NISGUA volunteers aren’t able to do this important transnational solidarity work without the financial, emotional, and political support of you folks at home. In the next year almost anytime you see a NISGUA publication you can know that you had your hand in making it possible through your support of me. Thank you! Please know I am always excited to answer questions and dream about a better world with anyone. You can reach me at clairebransky@gmail.com or on WhatsApp at +502-4090-3679. And you can read my former letters as an accompanier at www.branskygap.weebly.com.

Appreciatively,
Claire Rose Bransky



Claire Bransky

KGAP recognized by North-Central Council of Latin Americanistas (NCCLA)

NCCLA (North-Central Council of Latin Americanists) is an organization of university professors from at least four states who teach issues relevant to Latin America. This year at their annual conference at UW Eau Claire it was announced that KGAP and Connie Vanderhyden would receive the “Award of Merit” for “outstanding achievement in bringing to the general public a greater awareness of the nations, peoples, and cultures of Latin America”. We appreciate this recognition and want to express our gratitude to the members of NCCLA for their interest and support. Special thanks go out to Marta and Bill Katra for your support and enthusiasm.

Accompanier News

Hello! My name is Tal Netter-Sweet (they/them/theirs pronouns), I'm from Philadelphia, and I recently graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio where I studied History and Latin American Studies. I'm now living in Guatemala, working as an international human rights accompanier with the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA). I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to share about my experience in Guatemala with the KGAP community, but first off, I want to extend an enormous thank you for sponsoring my time here. Your support means the world to me, as well as to those we accompany.

During these first two months working as an accompanier, I have spent many hours sitting and waiting—whether it be in a courtroom in Guatemala city, or on a bus traveling to another region of the country. While these long periods may seem laborious in the moment, it is humbling to remember that the people we accompany have been continuously fighting for justice for decades.

Just a month and a half after my arrival in Guatemala, ex-special forces soldier Santos López Alonzo was convicted of crimes against humanity and the murder of 171 people during the massacre in Dos Erres in 1982, a now non-existent village located in department of Petén. (He was acquitted, however, of two crimes pertaining specifically to Ramiro Antonio Osorio Cristales—the young boy López Alonzo abducted from Dos Erres during the massacre, illegally registered as his own son, and subjected to years of abuse.) To zoom out a bit on this case, López Alonzo is the sixth person convicted in relation to the Dos Erres massacre.



Tal Netter-Sweet

But even before these legal processes began in 2011, FAMDEGUA—an organization we accompany and one of the plaintiffs in this case—worked tirelessly to exhume the bodies of those killed in Dos Erres, as well as identify potential survivors and reunite family members. (You can read, listen, or watch for more information about the Dos Erres massacre and FAMDEGUA's efforts in fighting for justice.)

But even as these legal processes were beginning in the country's capital to bring those who committed the Dos Erres massacre to justice, other crimes were being committed across the country in the town of El Estor, on the coast of Lago de Izabal—crimes that would similarly travel at a snail's pace through the courts. In 2009, during protests against a nearby transnationally owned mining project, security forces of the mine shot and killed community leader Adolfo Ich Chamán, as well as paralyzed a bystander, Germán Chub. The subsequent legal process is still ongoing, and Adolfo's wife, Angélica Choc, faces continual threats and intimidation due to her involvement in this pursuit of justice. Furthermore, she and many others in El Estor are also resisting the tremendous destruction caused by mining in the area—mirroring similar movements in resistance to transnationally owned mega-development projects all over the country. As Germán stated simply when I visited El Estor several weeks ago, “we continue suffering but we continue fighting” (*seguimos sufriendo pero seguimos luchando*). (You can read more about these events as well as the current legal case in Canada [here](#).)

These experiences during my first two months working as an international human rights accompanier have provided me with the opportunity to further reflect on how the themes of transitional justice and the defense of life and territory are connected. While the Dos Erres case deals with crimes committed during the 36-year internal armed conflict, and the case of El Estor relates to more current issues, providing accompaniment to both cases has strengthened my understanding of the connections between Guatemala's past and present. During the internal armed conflict, hundreds of thousands of people were killed, and countless others displaced from their land. Decades later, several mega-development projects exist in the very same sites where villages were annihilated, and all over the country transnational corporations continue to threaten the territory and way of life of countless Guatemalans. These experiences lead me to reflect on similar patterns in the US—Native American resistance to the construction of pipelines, for example. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to spend the next several months providing accompaniment to such inspiring human rights defenders here in Guatemala, and to further strengthen my understanding of the wide-reaching connections that can be made through this work.

MANY THANKS TO OUR DONORS!

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KICKAPOO/GUATEMALA ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT (KGAP)

KGAP is a project of Youth Initiative High School, a 501c3 nonprofit organization registered in the state of Wisconsin. Contributions are tax deductible. In addition, KGAP is affiliated with the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA) a national non-profit organization that supports many projects and efforts in Guatemala. **See www.kap.org for more information about the project.**

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