

KGAP newsletter

Twenty-five Years of Solidarity

by *Connie Vanderhyden, KGAP Coordinator*

I hope this Summer 2019 edition of the KGAP newsletter finds you well, enjoying the welcome change of seasons along with your friends and families!

This year I have been very fortunate to take two journeys to Guatemala with amazing travel companions. In January I traveled to Chaculá for the 25th anniversary celebration of their return to Guatemala. My dear friend, Martha Pierce, organized a delegation from Chicago including the following friends: Lucy Pierce, Sidney Hollander, Kay Berkson, Michael Swartz, Steve Schippers, and Barbara Gerlach. I met this group along with Jonathan Moller and Viviana Parra and we all traveled together to see our Guatemalan friends and express our continuing solidarity with the village of Chaculá. I have traveled to Guatemala many times with several people in this group and it was particularly special to be with Barbara Gerlach again. Along with Martha Pierce and others, we were accompaniers on the return to Chaculá in 1994 and were placed in the same refugee camp together, getting to know the families quite well from the very beginning of their return journey. I really enjoyed visiting families with her in Chaculá since this was her first visit in many years.

We had an enjoyable, sentimental visit that was shortened due to the political unrest in the country at the time. We were advised to leave the community on Sunday, a day before our original plan, because there were demonstrations planned all over the country that would stop traffic on major highways for hours at a time. The demonstrations were protesting President Jimmy Morales' actions to prohibit the entry of members of CICIG into Guatemala and

his plans to discontinue their anti-impunity investigations in the country. For more on this important issue please follow this link to the NISGUA website where you can also always see updates about Guatemala: <https://nisgua.org/portfolio-items/active-technical-coup-unfolding-guatemala/>

As many of you may remember, every other March since 2001 we have been taking Viroqua area high school students to Guatemala. This year marked the 10th such journey. I organized, coordinated and led the first trips and have continued to meet the groups for the final 10 days of their journey, including home-stays in Chaculá. My partner in organizing, planning, and now leading the trips is Youth Initiative High School teacher, Shawn Lavoie. Shawn does a spectacular job preparing the students and guiding them through the various stages of their Guatemalan experience. His co-coordinator/teacher this year was Tim Beck, originally from Avalanche, WI. Tim was a student of mine at Pleasant Ridge Waldorf School and visited Chaculá with the 2nd high school group in 2003. These two young men were amazing, capable leaders and when I met up with the group I could see that the students were well prepared for their time in Chaculá. Eleven of the students are either juniors or seniors at Youth Initiative High School in Viroqua and one attended YIHS for a semester and is now graduating from a high school in Minneapolis. Here they are: Perla Grenier, Kele Ramsay, Gillian Leugers, Bryer Larson, Celie Dockry, Jay Katara, Mahala Belling Dunn, Jae Arnold, Tucker Hughes, Myra Thimmesch, Jane Benton, and Amory Lenarz.

25 Years of Solidarity, continued on page 2

Update from Guatemala

By *Tal Netter-Sweet, GAP Accompanier*

There's a sign by a bus stop that I pass on afternoon runs through my neighborhood in Guatemala City. The sign is sponsored by the Guatemalan Forensic Anthropology Foundation (FAFG), a non-profit that exhumes clandestine mass graves from the time of the Internal Armed Conflict, working to recover the identities of victims using forensic analysis along with survivor testimony. Additionally, FAFG collects DNA samples from survivors in order to identify and return the remains of their disappeared family members. Having the physical remains of loved ones who were forcibly taken, murdered, and left in unmarked graves allows for their proper burial—often according to traditional Maya customs—and for long overdue healing.

(For the complete article and accompanying links to pictures and videos, please see: <https://talnettersweet.weebly.com>)



Shawn Lavoie and Bryer Larson demonstrate juggling in Chaculá

25 Years of Solidarity, continued from page 1

Our youth trip experience in Chaculá has gotten better and better over the years as the Básico Institute teachers, students, and host families prepare and organize daily activities to encourage lots of interactions for our students in the community during our one week stay. We keep very busy with service work, games and sports activities, excursions, and opportunities to meet together in order to hear stories and personal perspectives from various members of the community. In addition, Shawn always teaches a dynamic class to help all the youth get to know one another. Tim and Shawn also helped our students plan and put into motion an afternoon of classes for the students from Chaculá. The classes offered were: juggling, dancing, painting, and card games. Every evening our student group had a gathering to reflect and share with one another before returning to their host families. They were very engaged in the experience overall and aware of how much they were learning every moment. There was lots of improvement of language skills and oh so many deep thoughts and comments revolving around social justice issues.

Most of the student activities with the youth from Chaculá took place in or around the new Instituto Básico classrooms. We were delighted to see how well this new addition to the school infrastructure is being utilized and glad to know KGAP has contributed to many aspects of its development. In addition to many high school scholarships each year, KGAP currently is subsidizing the tuition for all students attending the Instituto Básico and contributes extra funding to cover any additional expenses for students who would not otherwise be able to attend at all due to lack of resources. The school is vibrant and active, the teachers and students are dedicated and enthusiastic. THANKS TO THE KGAP SUPPORTERS for making all of this possible!

I absolutely love introducing Chaculá to the youth from our Wisconsin community and spending time together in this place that I know and love. I told the students before we traveled that they would be considered *acompañantes* and *solidarios* in Chaculá. I believe they understood what I was talking about during and after their time in the village. They commented on how everyone really wanted them to be there and that they began to understand how they are part of this continuing relationship we have had over the past 25 years. It was an honor and a joy to travel with this group of young people and their teachers. Our community should be very proud of all of them and I thank you all for adding depth to our community-to-community relationship with Chaculá! Indeed we also are infinitely grateful to the teachers, students and their families from Chaculá for being excellent, caring hosts. Many tears were shed upon our departure on both sides of the van windows! Please enjoy reading Shawn and the students' reflections. More photos and a few videos from the trip can be accessed on the KGAP website (www.kgap.org).

But wait! The March trip also included another incredibly special and beautiful experience! Gunderson nurse midwives, Kim Dowat and Jennifer McGeorge came on this journey with the purpose of teaching a 2-day midwifery workshop in the neighboring village of Yalambojoch. This plan had been in the

works for many months and was made possible THANKS TO donations from KGAP SUPPORTERS.

The KGAP funding covered food, housing, and transportation for 40 midwives, several useful tools for each midwife, and 2 Mama Natalie birth simulator kits to leave with the clinics in Chaculá and Yalambojoch for training purposes in the future.

Luisa Rivera was with us to help organize and facilitate the workshop and together, she and I provided interpretation into Spanish. Our midwife friend and host from Yalambojoch, Petrona Gomez, interpreted into the local Mayan language, Chuj. Andi Alexander blessed us with her excellent photography (and accompanying) skills and Marty Pearson and a new visitor to Chaculá, Dennis Wonless, helped us register the participants and were steady assistants over all. We were able to rent space in a conference center built by a Swedish man, Per Andersen. It provided a beautiful environment for the workshop and housing for the midwives. Please enjoy Kim and Jennifer's articles and Andi's beautiful photos of the experience.

Our March journey ended in Guatemala City where the students and some of the adults from our group participated in an amazing day with NISGUA staff and members of a Guatemalan activist youth group, JODVID. We had a full day of dynamic activities together – sharing stories and strategies, laughing and playing, and enjoying getting to know one another. Many of us had met one of the JODVID leaders, Alex Escobar, on the fall 2018 NISGUA speaker's tour. Alex came to the Viroqua area and spoke at an event at the Kickapoo Café in Viroqua along with other youth activists from our region. We truly enjoyed the connections we made with JODVID and also the time spent with NISGUA staff members, Becky Kamp, Martha Schmitz, Claire Bransky and accompanier Tal Netter-Sweet. As you may remember from the winter 2018 newsletter, THANKS TO KGAP SUPPORTERS, we have been sponsoring part of Claire's communications fellowship and Tal's accompaniment stipend over the past several months. We are so fortunate to be part of the NISGUA network and able to contribute to the broader issues of accompaniment, justice and accountability in Guatemala. I hope you will enjoy reading Tal's latest friends and family letter, included in part in this newsletter with a link to the complete article on their blog.

I would also like to add that the combination of the adult and youth journeys turned out to be a very rich experience for everyone concerned. The students were highly interested in the work of the midwives and also in hearing from all the adults on the trip. The adults enjoyed the students' energy and open, honest emotions and reflections. There is something quite magical about being together in Chaculá: time out of time, as my husband Thomas says.

I am thrilled to see strong relationships developing between so many wonderful friends from Wisconsin (and other places in the U.S.) and our friends from Chaculá and Yalambojoch. ¡Thanks to all who continue to hold the people of Guatemala and Chaculá, in particular, in your hearts! And thanks for all your generous support over the years that helps propel our relationships and good work in Guatemala!!

Continuing Her Work

by Marty Pearson

My relationship with Chaculá started in 1998. My wife Jeri, who passed away in 2015, was a KGAP accompanier then. In this community she is known as Jerina and over the years we traveled back together several times. I was there last in 2016. I helped dedicate the cancha the community built with the memorial money given in her name. The people of Chaculá talked about her big heart and told me to be patient joy would fill mine again.

So I expected this would be a bittersweet trip. I knew I would enjoy being with old traveling friends. I would meet new traveling friends. I would enjoy time with Chaculá friends, showing them pictures of my granddaughters and greeting the new members of their families. There would be meetings and we would talk about education, the clinic and local politics. I would eat wonderful homemade tortillas cooked on brick and clay tiled wood stoves. There would be solidarity, hugs, some crying and talk of shared loss.

All of that did happen on this trip, so did the unexpected. At the border in Gracias a Dios I did not expect to see groups of child refugees in the shadows on side streets, waiting to cross over. In the middle of a clear night in Yalambojoch I saw a long line of trucks crawling up the mountain road to Bulej. Hauling

smuggled soft drinks from Mexico I was told. I did not expect the purple walls of the room where the midwife workshop was held. When the Chuj comadronas came into that room wearing their bright colorful traje it was spectacular. Wow! What an impressive group of strong women.

The Spring Hotel in Guatemala City at the tail end of this trip was the most bittersweet. Years ago Jeri and I would start and end our Chaculá trips at this hotel. I am glad that Shawn, the NISGUA folks and the youth group JODVID had so many good activities planned for us and his students that I was kept very busy.

A few days after getting home I was a participant in a zoom conference call with Claire Bransky from NISGUA along with my traveling friends and others. Claire talked about the continued threat to indigenous communities by illegal mining, murdered community leaders and the corrupted Guatemalan government. The United States foreign policy is just as bad as it was in the 1980s. The need for solidarity and accompaniment continues.

Around this same time Andi posted a video of my traveling friends along with my Chaculá friends bouncing around in the back of a pickup. We are singing hopeful songs.



*Youth Initiative High School students and staff, NISGUA staff, and JODVID Guatemala youth activists
photo by Andi Alexander*

The KGAP Midwife Project

by Kim Dowat, Certified Nurse Midwife, PHD

I have been to Chaculá, Guatemala ten times! I have been lucky to be friends with Connie Vanderhyden and to tag along on her adventures. I first came to Chaculá to learn about the community and as a Nurse Midwife, offer health care services for mothers and babies. KGAP has been supporting the clinic financially for years and with that help, the local clinic became fully staffed. Over time there was little for me to do because the clinic was open most days. They did not need my clinical skills, so I thought we could offer workshops for the local clinic staff and midwives.

These workshops focused on obstetric emergencies; emergencies in childbirth that must be managed immediately, in the home, by the midwife attending the birth. Problems like shoulder dystocia, when the head delivers, and the shoulders get stuck, or postpartum hemorrhage, when the mother bleeds too much after the delivery, require immediate action. In addition, if a baby is stressed at birth, the baby will not breathe. Neonatal resuscitation is another skill that must be used immediately and precisely. Fortunately, these problems do not happen that often. But unfortunately, because the skills are not used every day, an obstetric provider, whether a doctor, nurse or midwife, can forget the steps. In the U.S., we practice these skills in workshops every year. I wanted to provide this kind of workshop to the midwives and nurses in Chaculá.

The workshops started small, just a few staff from the clinic and midwives from the neighboring communities. Over the years, however, the workshops grew with more students each year. Some of the midwives have taken the workshops several times. Petrona Gomez is one of those midwives. She is a dynamo of a woman in a tiny Guatemalan body! She was trained by her mother, Maria, as a traditional Mayan midwife. She later went on to become a RN. Since graduating, she joined a professional organization for traditional Mayan midwives. Through this organization, she works with the Ministry of Health to promote the traditional midwives who attend most of the births in this very remote region of the Northern Guatemalan Highlands. Through her initiative, these midwives were able to attend our biggest workshop ever. Because of Petrona's leadership, we had over 40 midwives from 8 different communities attend these training sessions.

On our part, we brought supplies, equipment, teachers, and translators (and a photographer), to run the workshops. We brought two "Mama Natalies". This birth simulator is a device that the teacher wears, thus becoming the pregnant mother.

The wearer can then demonstrate any birth emergency. With two birth simulators, five resuscitation babies and the necessary ancillary equipment, we were able to have multiple stations with various emergencies over two days. Each midwife was asked to master the steps for each emergency. We covered postpartum hemorrhage (the most common reason for maternal death worldwide), shoulder dystocia and neonatal resuscitation. We demonstrated the steps of each emergency and the midwives then practiced until they felt ready to be tested.

The workshops were serious and intense. The midwives were very serious in mastering these emergency skills. They shared stories about the difficulties in working in such a remote region, including lack of equipment, government support, pay, and time away from their own families. We listened to stories of babies and mothers that died, despite their best efforts. We silently understood some of these losses could have been prevented with proper equipment, essential medicine, emergency transport, and access to higher-level services, most of which they do not have.

But there was laughter and smiles too. There was the nervous laughter that happens under pressure when being tested in a group. We all laughed at each other stories of successes and disasters averted. There was a special recognition when we realized that the knowledge

in the movement of our hands transcended language. We did not need translators when we spoke with our midwife's hands. We all felt proud when each midwife in turn mastered the skills that they knew would be lifesaving. And finally, everyone was beaming when each midwife in turn got her certificate of completion. We had two intense days together. We connected beyond language and words in shared knowledge and in lessons learned.

The KGAP midwife project (newly named) had taken on a life of its own. The midwives in the Chaculá region are interested in more of this kind of education. They shared with us that hands-on training is meaningful and effective in mastering emergency skills. For me, the entire trip is an experience I would not miss. Guatemala is magical as always. The landscape, the colors, the people are all part of that magic. The group we traveled and worked with was exceptional. Petrona and her family shared their home and meals. Andi Alexander's photography captured the color and vibrancy of the day. Jennifer McGeorge, my co-teacher, kept us going over two long days. And Connie Vanderhyden and Luisa Rivera worked non-stop interpreting. As a team, from two countries and over three languages, we made this year's workshop a success.



The Midwife Workshop Team

Photo by Andi Alexander, also a member of the Midwife Workshop Team

HEAD, HANDS , HEART

by Jennifer McGeorge, Certified Nurse Midwife

May my head and my hands work in the service of my heart.

In March, we traveled to Guatemala & the community at Chacula. We had been invited up the mountain to Yalambojoch to offer another midwifery emergency skills workshop to 40 Mayan midwives from surrounding communities. The midwife participants spoke Chuj, and other Mayan languages, a few spoke Spanish, and none spoke English. We speak different languages and come from different worlds, but we are united in caring for women and babies, and it was evident that the workshop participants were all devoted to this service work—head, hands, and heart.

Guatemala is considered a resource-poor country in many respects, but this systemic lack is highlighted when it comes to healthcare for indigenous people and especially when it comes to maternal-child healthcare in the Highlands. The northwestern Highlands of Guatemala are a critical area of concern in terms of global maternal-child health and maternal mortality. In spite of resource lack, these midwives strive to provide quality care and they are motivated to learn skills to prevent & manage obstetrical emergencies.

Regardless of technology level or resource availability, a midwife's most basic tools are her head, hands, and heart. Thinking with our heads and feeling with our hearts, our hands are instruments of our thoughts and feelings. We use our hands to smooth a brow, catch a baby, rub an aching back. In the workshop we all held hands in our welcome circle; we blew on each other's hands to demonstrate the strength of a resuscitative breath; we used our hands to apply compression to a uterus to treat a simulated hemorrhage. We also used our hands to communicate across the linguistic divide when an interpreter wasn't available.

The workshop classroom was light, airy, and painted in bright colors. The morning the workshop began I was readying my head, heart, and hands for the day. Preparations had been completed with my co-instructor midwife, Dr. Kim Dowat. As the midwives were signing in, I began to look again at a photo exhibit on the wall. There was a map of the region that showed where massacres were committed by the army in 1982. The tiny village of Yalambohoch was marked along with 16 other communities. Stark images followed, of human remains & clothing being disinterred from the surrounding hills. Photos showed these same disinterred remains arranged on the floor of the very same classroom I was standing in. This may sound gruesome, and while it is horrific, the images were also of people witnessing their history and honoring those who had suffered that they had lost to senseless violence. My head and my heart could hardly contain what I was only bearing witness to in photos—this was a harrowing lived experience for local residents and families. And then I realized that in the heart-stretching way of life it was possible that we could teach skills at this workshop that could potentially be used to save a mother or a baby descended from a victim of the massacre. Life and death right there in the classroom on a bright morning, present on the mountaintop.

And then it was time for the workshop to begin and I turned away from the images of history, violence, and death to the work

of the now, life, and birth. With a big smile on her face, our host, Midwife Petrona welcomed us and informed us that on the Mayan calendar it was the Day of the Seventh Serpent with Green Feathers, an auspicious day to begin the workshop. There was much laughter and many smiles in our introductory circle and we counted 524 years of midwifery experience between all of us. And this, too, is the work of the midwife, that we can face heart-wrenching grief and then turn to continue and try to bring our best to the mamas and babies we serve—open hands, open minds, and open hearts.

I am so grateful to have the connections with the people and midwives in and around Chacula. The mutual appreciation and open dialogues are a welcome and warm experience. I also want to mention the excellent team I travelled with: Connie, Andi, Kim, Luisa, Marty, and Dennis. We all worked to make the workshop a success—thank-you! My trips to Guatemala have been filled with opportunities for growth, learning, and sharing and I can't wait to go back. Gracias a Connie for enriching all our lives by maintaining such an abundant & long relationship with the chaculense people!

Building Bridges, Not Walls: The YIHS Guatemala Trip

by Shawn Lavoie, YIHS Teacher

“Se hace el puente al andar”--Gloria Anzaldúa

The “Build the Wall” chant has resounded vociferously through our political discourse for several years now and the underlying sentiment, sometimes hidden underneath the partisan debates over the scale and construction material of the border wall, is the notion that the United States ends—culturally, legally, compassionately—at our southern border. The line between Americans and Mexicans or Guatemalans or any other Central or South American people can and should be definitively drawn and enforced. There is US and them and the bigger the fence the better the neighbors.

In stark contrast to this sentiment, for the last 18 years the Youth Initiative High School has been building a bridge, modest as it is, between the US and the people of Guatemala. Every two years we send a group of teenagers and adults from this community to build relationships with people and organizations in communities down there. Our relationship to Guatemala stems from the efforts of Connie Vanderhyden who in the mid-1990s was a human rights accompanier with a group of Guatemalan refugees who were returning to their country after over a decade of living in exile. From this first connection in Chaculá (Nueva Esperanza) came the desire to maintain these relationships, to expand the circle of accompaniers and solidarios, and to invest in building the bridge.

(To read the the rest of this amazing article about the March trip, please go to www.kgap.org)

YIHS Students Reflect on Their Visit to Guatemala

from Shawn Lavoie

Here is a sampling of the stories of the students from Youth Initiative High School who traveled to Guatemala this February-March for 3 ½ weeks, including a week in Chaculá. 12 Juniors and Seniors with two chaperones, Tim Beck and Shawn Lavoie, were graciously welcomed into the homes of families in town. Along with students at the Basico Institute the group enjoyed a wide range of activities together, including a trip to the Laguna Brava, a culture night presentation and dance competition, hikes, futbol tournaments, and Carnival celebrations.

To hear more reflections from the students, look for the podcast the group made which aired on WDRT's Radio Free Space on May 25th.

From Bryer Larson, 12th Grade

Many people had told me that my life was going to be changed. And I knew what the words meant when they were said aloud, or when they passed through my conscience, but there is no way I could have felt what that means until my life was changed.

We stayed seven days in Chacula, making it our longest time in one place during the entire trip. We were assigned families to stay with and we ate meals at the house that we slept in. In my experience this allowed for a much more intimate relationship. I got to know my host brothers very quickly and I was eager to use my Spanish at every opportunity presented. I value my time in Chaculá very much because I had the chance to spend time in a family setting. I played fútbol with my host brothers and spent a lot of time playing guitar for the little children's entertainment. I shared my juggling balls with them and gave the boys some tips on how to practice. And I did all of this speaking Spanish. I developed and strengthened a relationship with my host family in a language that I was not comfortable speaking. I learned many things during this trip and although I knew my life was going to be changed, it was hard to tell that it was happening during the moment. It felt so natural to be with these people in Chaculá. I felt at home for the first time during my trip. I can hardly process all of the moments that I felt connected to the people, the town, my host family and the land.

This trip changed me in many ways, and the weird part is that I knew that was going to happen. I feel different about how I want to treat people and I feel different about how I want to treat myself. I have a deep appreciation for all those who work incredibly hard to have a fraction of what we might consider a right or privilege in the U.S. I hold a deep appreciation for all those who have ever been a minority in a foreign land. I hold a deep appreciation for those who shared their homes, their food, their time, their stories and their lives with us in Chaculá.

From Perla Grenier, 12th Grade

One day as I was walking through the neighborhood to my señora's house I saw these kids playing and they all were eating small bags of chips. As one girl walked away from the group

to her house, she finished her chips and as she turned towards her house she released the bag from her hand. The bag floated to the ground and was swept up by the wind, finally settling on the ground next to the other trash that decorated the streets. I felt a sudden sadness rush through me. I knew that I was in a developing country and things like pollution aren't exactly on the minds of people who are living each day to just put food on the table. But it still stuck with me. Because not polluting the earth is such a big thing in my life. And even though these people have completely different lives than me, and I knew that, it still affected me to see all the pollution everywhere.

Throughout the trip I noticed the amount of garbage and pollution that was so evident all around the country. One of the days we were driving through the mountains and there was a sharp drop off next to the road. And there were piles of trash just being shoveled over the side of it, being dropped into the forest. Everywhere you would walk or go there would be trash fluttering through the streets, piled up on the side of the road, scattered through the brush and vegetation. On Lake Atitlan there were tons of bottles just floating on the surface in the middle of the lake. In one of the towns, we were walking to go play soccer to a field located by an open hilly grass area. And as we reached the grass area, I started to hear rushing water. I noticed these crevasses that ran through the grassy hills. I realized that the water sound was coming from below but when I looked down, I was again struck with sadness for what we have done to the Earth. All I could see was water streaming over piles of trash, and it wasn't only in that one spot.

Something else that didn't affect me until I actually had to do it was the burning of trash in Guatemala. I had walked by many houses that had little burn piles of trash but it didn't hit me until I was at my home stay in Chacula. I had a small bag of trash and I asked if they had a garbage can. They told me to just put it all in the kitchen fire where they cooked their food—which struck me once again. Every time I witnessed these moments of pollution and the sights of the trash being piled up on the roadside, I began to feel hopeless. Because the fact is pollution and the effects of it aren't on a lot of the people's mind in Guatemala and in other developing countries. They have far worse issues in their life than to worry about ecosystems slowly dying. Most people in Guatemala, every day, have to worry about the first basic necessities of life: getting food on the table, safety, their family, earning money to pay for education, and getting their human rights. And many people are not even educated in the subject of how pollution affects the earth and the ecosystems. Most Guatemalans only get education up to 6th grade paid for by the government and after that they pay for it themselves, which is really hard for many families. Many of them are unaware of climate change, and how you shouldn't litter, and why you shouldn't. In Guatemala there is little functioning infrastructure, there are no trucks that pick up loads of garbage and carry it to a landfill. Most of the time Guatemalans dump their trash in the river beds, off cliffs, or burn it in their backyard. A lot of the trash ends up in Lake Atitlan, which

YIHS Students Reflect, continued on page 7

YHIS Students Reflect, continued from page 6

then ends up contaminating the water. With all of these factors I could go into my room and just feel hopeless for the world and its future or I could be positive and be an activist and help start to change these factors in the world. So if I want to stop pollution I have to start with helping to stop poverty, help get education to those who have a lack of opportunity, and help build infrastructure in countries who don't have it. And so that's the big change that I want to make in the future.

From Myra Thimmisch, 11th Grade

I had been scrunched tightly in a sweaty microbus for four and a half hours between two of the other 12 high school students I was traveling with. My legs were sore after being pressed up against the seat in front of me, and sleep had not come easily thanks to the many potholes and speed bumps littering the windy mountain roads. Even if the roads had been smoother, I probably would have tried to stay awake anyway, because lying across someone's lap in that heat had proven to be a very warm and sticky affair.

The sun was out, and shining furiously, its hot fingers reaching in through the windows and brushing our sensitive gringo skin, turning us red like boiled lobsters. A burnt scalp was a real threat to those who had drifted off with their heads up against the glass, and I wasn't about to join them.

Tired and irritable, we pulled up outside of a brown brick building in Chaculá, the tiny Guatemalan village we'd been seeking since early morning. I yawned, my ears crackling from the altitude, and I swallowed to try and clear them further. It was then time to pick up our water bottles and crinkled chip bags, and step out into the open air. Hoping for a nice mountain breeze, even a warm one, I didn't hesitate to detangle my limbs from my neighbors and scramble out onto the short green grass awaiting us. It turned out there wasn't a whole lot of any kind of breeze, and all I could think was that we really weren't in Wisconsin anymore. We were given our backpacks after they were untied from the roof of the minibus, before being whisked inside the brick building by Connie who invited us to sit down. She then began to talk to our teacher about how this was the hottest day they'd had all week and how glad she was that we'd all made it safely and everything. Meanwhile, a few more people came over and began to introduce themselves to our sleepy group, but we were told to come outside with our bags again before they could finish.

There was a group of five or six local kids standing outside the door, but it looked like a lot more than that at the time. Somehow, they were all wearing tight blue jeans, and one girl

even had on a sweatshirt but seemed unphased by the heat. Both groups of kids smiled nervously at each other, and our teacher rattled off some Spanish and their group nodded, and ours tried the best we could to understand. We were then split up into pairs and introduced to a new host sibling, before walking off to meet the rest of the family.

My Spanish was pretty minimal and my new sister's English was close to nonexistent, but we made it work anyway. She asked us questions as we walked and the other Wisconsin student and I tried our best to answer and ask our own. When we didn't understand every word of the answer we combined our knowledge and pieced it together.

The walk ended up being a good 10 minutes through the town, and I was struck by how different the landscape was. Layers of mountains lined the horizon in all directions, and most of the trees we passed were covered in vines and air plants of all different sizes. The street was lined with bushes of large colorful flowers, and sounds of barking dogs, crowing roosters, and children playing was all around us. At one point a donkey began

to bray like a door on rusty hinges, and he soon received a reply from another further down the block.

Stepping through the gate to my host family's yard, I breathed in the smells of woodsmoke and fresh laundry. The house was rustic, and primarily made from rough grey brick. The kitchen consisted of three wooden walls and a tarp which may have once been a billboard ad. A hen and her brood of fluffy yellow chicks pecked at the ground under the table, and our host mom prepared dough for tortillas near the firefilled stove. She looked up

as we walked in and greeted us with a flurry of words we couldn't quite piece together. When we didn't understand she just smiled and gestured at the kitchen chairs before us.

Two little boys ran in, one holding onto a freshly picked orange which he cut in half and ate with red spices. We introduced ourselves the best we could, before sitting for an early dinner of beans, eggs, and hot fresh tortillas, which didn't stop coming. We watched as our host sister squeezed limes into a pitcher of water and stirred in sugar, before pouring it into glasses for everyone to enjoy. This was when I forgot about the heat and the tiredness of before, and began to appreciate the first moments of the incredible few days to come. Little did I know that that kitchen would soon feel like home, and those tortillas a staple part of our diet. Little did I know that by the time those few days drew to a close, I would hug the little boys and cry outside of our soon departing microbus.



YHIS students hear the story of the San Francisco massacre

MANY THANKS TO OUR DONORS!

Lerie Alstad Van Ells
Anna Jo Doerr and Shawn Lavoie (&
family)
Art and Connie Champnoise
Barbara Gerlach
Jon and Peggje Traver
Lamar Janes
Sharon Miessner
Marty Clearfield and Bonnie Wright
Marcia Halligan and Steven Adams
Roger Bertsch and Carla Christ
Diane Olhoeft
Patricia Conway
Betsy and Jim Farrell
Susan Nesbit
Kay Berkson and Sidney Hollander
Robert McDowell
Fred Dick
Marjorie Dick
Ann and Richard Heidkamp
Paul Bergquist and Carole Austin
George and Sue Drake

Judson Steinback
Maggie Jones
Al and Rosanne Schulz
Jean and Terry Beck
David Ware and Tamsen Morgan
Lars and Corina Bergan
Bill Brooke
Bill and Susan Townsley
Dawn Hundt (Paxam Foundation)
Robertta Ducharme
Paul and Paula Grenier
Ruth Agar
Diane Cooter
Jane Furchgott
Bill Seyfarth
Jerome McGeorge
Marty Pearson
Brian Kelly
Melanie Bordelois
Dennis and Barbara Wonless
Diane and Dan Hendricks

**All donations are tax deductible
and can be mailed to:**
KGAP c/o Connie Vanderhyden,
E9048 Pierce Hill Road
Viroqua, WI 54665

Special Thanks to the following KGAP Collaborators and Contributors:

Newsletter & website:: Maureen Karlstad & Tim Beck
Steadfast moral support: Tom Vanderhyden
Bookkeeping: Lamar Janes
Healthcare/Midwifery Volunteers and Consultants:
Kim Dowat, Jennifer McGeorge, Luisa Rivera
Photography: Andi Alexander
Education Project Consultants: Shawn Lavoie, Andi
Alexander, Marty Pearson, Luisa Rivera, Susan Nesbit,
Martha Pierce, and Maureen Karlstad
Delegation Co-coordinators: Martha Pierce &
Shawn Lavoie
501C3 support: Youth Initiative Board of Directors
Financial support and solidarity: KGAP family,
friends and community!!

KICKAPOO/GUATEMALA ACCOMPANIMENT PROJECT (KGAP)

KGAP is a project of Youth Initiative High School, a 501c3 nonprofit organization. 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. More information about NISQUA can be found at <https://nigua.org>