

Welcome to another broadcast of the rarest and most irregular newsletter on the planet!

In this edition:

It's FRIENDS that make the world go round, not money!

House building isn't for wimps

Master roaster teaches enthusiastic students

An unforgettable journey into the boondocks

(Check out photos of all the stars featured at <http://www.crossroadscafe pana.com>)

CELEBRATION OF FRIENDSHIP

We enjoy so much here because of dear friends who give of their time and talents. First of all, the new coffee roaster of which I wrote last time, was sitting like a white elephant for months in the backroom - mechanical/design problems was causing major frustrations. Then, in May last year, in walks our buddy Ian, from Maine. He appeared like a heaven-sent angel in the doorway and Michael knew at once, "Help has come!" Ian immediately assessed the grave situation, strapped on his tool belt and headlamp, and dug in for three days. When he emerged again, the roaster was running like Lance Armstrong on the Tour d'France. Since then the red engine has roasted tons of coffee successfully. We don't know how we ever did it in the past with the little 5 pounder. Ian, we salute you and will not soon forget thee!

Kasia and Lungi are playing the violin because of friends' kindness. Dean Cole from Music City, Nashville, brought down a brand new violin for them last October. Next, our Japanese friend Mihoko, who lives here, offered to teach them. She and her son, Jay, comes every Wednesday afternoon and the four of them jam. They have progressed through "Twinkle Little Star" and I think they sound pretty good. When Dean comes back he'll be sitting down for a kitchen concerto! Mihoko, we are forever in your debt for doing this!

We spent the Easter week camping on our friends' property outside San Jose Chacaya (pronounced just like that - say it out loud!) It was a blessed retreat from the restlessness of living on Calle del Campanario and the bustle of serving coffee to the big wide world. Listening to only whippoorwills at night and doing just what we feel like in the daytime, we were thoroughly refreshed. We are humbled by the kindness shown us by Juan and Betty in allowing us to hang out there among the pines and poplars.

For the longest time the girls wanted to build a tree house on Mooibos, our property outside town. Their dad's time and energy are limited and their mom doesn't know how. They finally approached two of our friendly customers/friends. For the past ten Mondays the twosome have applied their muscle power for and directed the troops for this worthy project. It is a sturdy platform between two cypress trees, with a rope railing, rope ladder and trapdoor galore! The view is stunning and it looks very inviting (until you are peppered with darts from the hostile inhabitants!) Thank you, Brennan and Jonathan, for patiently enduring the chatter of two excited kids and giving your time and skill to bring them so much joy!

Our school books and lots of other luxury items are continuously carted down from the US in friends' suitcases. What a blessing! Then, when they fly back, they carry coffee up and mail it to thirsty customers. Don't you just love it? None of this would be possible if it wasn't for such willing mules! The biggest miracle is that they keep offering their services: "I'm coming in a month. What do you want?" or "I have space in my bags. Do you have coffee to be sent up?" (Another friend is working on a button with "I muled for Mike" and will hopefully soon be awarded to the faithful.) Bless all of you!!!



CASA DE CAMPO

We started building our house exactly two years ago. Some of you know the slope of the building site and how everything is done by hand - the blessed hands of only three guys (currently Hilario, Gilberto and Pedro). At the same pace it will probably take another two years before it's ready for occupation. We are nonetheless encouraged by the progress and result. The walls are made with river stone and we are making sure the drainage is done well. The first level (living room and kitchen) is done and the next level has been excavated (we are doing a step-foundation to avoid as much disturbing of the land and utilizing the hill instead of fighting it.) The builders are finishing the retaining wall and the next phase will be digging foundations for the second level. Even though this project is taking impossible amounts of patience and brain power, we are gratified by the beauty of the growing structure, driven by the dream and convinced of the value of the investment.

ROASTING APPRENTICEHIPS

Periodically Michael is approached by aspiring coffee enthusiasts, desiring to learn the art of coffee roasting and/or designing and building coffee shops. This past year he formally trained two young men and a few others informally. Chris has a dream to roast coffee in Mexico and James plans to open a cafe in Georgia, USA. Akira (from Japan) spent several months hanging out at the shop and our house, learning all he could to take with him to Nygoya, Japan. Even though having these guys around demands a lot of his time (he really pours himself into them), they prove to be a huge help once they are roasting. Of course it provides great company for Michael too - guys talking guys' stuff and so on! (The sons he never had!)

ZONA REINA

We met Greg and Helaine Walton seven years ago - two South Africans running a middle school in a hard-to-access area of Quiche, Guatemala. It is a small community made up of ex-refugees, only about 400 families who were re-settled there nine years ago. The only way there used to be by foot or small plane. A year ago a "road" was completed and now even small mini-van taxis drive in and out. They still have no electricity and the majority of the houses are made of wood planks. I think it rains 90% of the year, resulting in very green hills and red, muddy trails.

Since our meeting we have dreamed about visiting them, but sometimes the journey was too daunting or we just couldn't take the time. (It takes a whole day's travel just to reach them.) October last year we finally took the giant step and loaded up our rig. We drove for about five hours on newly-paved roads, however windy. When we reached a small town called Chicaman, we parked the van at a safe place and transferred ourselves and stuff to the Waltons' Landcruiser. There were nine of us: Greg, Helaine and their daughter, Gigi; Akira; Jorge, one of their teachers; and the Robertses. Luggage consisted of a donated trampoline and solar equipment for the school, among other usual items from civilization. From here we bounced along for six hours on a rough dirt trail, crossing the Cuchimatanes mountains. It was only about 40km, but the condition of the road demanded a snail pace. Right before we reached their village, St Anthony of New Hope (that's the translation anyway), we had to drive through a one meter deep, thirty feet wide river, twice!

We spent three delightful days, staying with some of the teachers, visiting the school and enjoying time with our friends. It was an inspiration to see their project and how much they give of themselves to that community. Kasia and Lungi enjoyed dressing and playing with Gigi; Helaine and I babbled non-stop (in the old days we used to say in Afrikaans: "Ons kuier hond uit'n bos uit."); and Michael and Akira worked on setting up the solar trackers and trampoline. (If you can, look at their website and consider helping - they need teachers, or praying: <http://www.la-libertad.org>)

Our return trip happened by air. We flew out with a pilot from Agape Air. It took only twenty minutes! We looked down on that beautiful country with brown rivers snaking through lush, green forests, overwhelmed by the unbelievable location. The rest of our adventure involved a pickup ride on some more back roads, a long-awaited trek to a coffee farm of one of our suppliers in Huehuetenango, some major transmission problems of the Ford and repairs, till we finally arrived home safely a week later.

I hope you feel informed and connected with us again through my musings. Tune in again some unknown time in the future for another edition of...LIVE AT THE CROSSROADS!

