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Volume 23, No 3 - September 2011

Hooked: Midwest & Guatemalan Textile Artists Create A Better Life for Maya Artists *by Jody Slocum*

Over my years of working in Guatemala with Farmer to Farmer I've gotten involved with various projects around Lake Atitlan.

My background as a rug weaver has fueled my current focus on preserving the textile traditions of the Maya people. These artists produce some of the most sophisticated and complex weaving in the world. The challenge today is how to foster the continuation of the textile traditions while producing artwork that is saleable to foreign consumers.



Leandra, rug hooking student

The most pressing issue for every Maya artist is the need for more money to support their families and schooling.

For the past six years Mary Anne Wise and I have been involved in various textile projects in Guatemala. Our current rug-hooking adventures came out of our conversations with Fair Trade groups about their need to find more ways to expand the income-earning potential of their members. Mary Anne makes her living making hooked rugs, and she saw the great potential for rug-hooking in the combination of Maya artistry and the immeasurable supply of recycled clothing available in Guatemala. We pitched the idea of introducing rug hooking to Ramona Kirschenman, the director of Oxlajuj B'atz' (Thirteen Threads), a nonprofit that focuses on education and empowerment of Maya women artists.

Since January, 2009, Mary Anne and I have taught four workshops on rug hooking in Panajachel, Guatemala.

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Editors note: To learn more about Oxlajuj B'atz' Thirteen Threads visit: www.thirteenthreads.org

Guatemala's Elections

by Jody Slocum

The Guatemala election is on September 11, 2011. This has been a violent election season with over twenty murders of candidates. The former General Otto Perez Molina and Former First Lady Sandra Torres were the main presidential candidates but on August 9th the Constitutional Court barred Torres of the National Unity of Hope party from running, though Torres divorced her husband in order to legally run, the court voted to Guatemala's constitution bars family members of any sitting president from running for office.

Several candidates have been censored by local media leaving it very difficult for them to compete in the race. This leaves Perez Molina with a large lead in the polls and Human Rights groups very concerned. Perez Molina was a military general during the Guatemala civil war and was directly involved with systematic acts of torture and genocide. He also has been implicated in being involved in the murder of Archbishop Gerardi, the author of the book Guatemala: Nunca Más (Never Again). This book was the culmination of years of investigation into the Civil War and included statements from thousands of witnesses and victims of repression during that time. Gerardi placed the blame for the vast majority of violations on the government and the Army.

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Friendship and cultural understanding among rural people...



Farmer to Farmer is organized to build mutual friendship and cultural understanding among rural people so that we might better understand and accompany each other in our common struggles. We seek to promote peace within ourselves, within our community, and across international boundaries. We envision agriculture that is sustainable and respectful of the earth, and one that remains in the hands of the people who live on and work the land. We support grassroots agricultural projects that are democratically initiated and managed. Our decisions about a project are guided by the respect that characterizes the relationship between friends. As an organization, we affirm the sacredness of the earth and work for and respect the rights of all people and cultures to self-determination.

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Farmer to Farmer
 PO Box 303
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info@farmertofarmer.org

www.farmertofarmer.org

Student Scholarships

by Jody Slocum



Christina, Scholarship Student

Thanks to all that donated for the student scholarships. Also thanks to all members of Farmer to Farmer. We are happy to report that in June we gave out our biyearly scholarships to 22 students, including five university students. With your support we look forward to continuing to help these families send their kids to school. Farmer to Farmer members will be traveling to Guatemala next January to give out the

next scholarships and visit the weaver's families, coffee farms, etc.. Look into our trips and contact us if you are interested in joining us in traveling to Guatemala or Honduras in January 2012.

Election . . . Continued from page 1

Annie Bird (co-director of Rights Action), Jennifer Harbury (Human Rights Attorney) and Kelsey Alford-Jones (director, Guatemala Human Rights Commission-USA) recently requested that Juan Méndez, the Special Reporter on Torture in the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, investigate Perez Molina for human rights violations committed during the country's civil war.

Farmer to Farmer has heard first hand accounts from the members of our group in Santiago Atitlan about the brutality and killing the army inflicted on the general population. My first visit to Guatemala was in 1992 and each person I met had a personal account of loss, either a family member or friend that was killed or "disappeared". We hope this election brings a new president that will stand up for human rights and a better future for all in Guatemala. The Maya people have suffered enough.

For more information go to Rights Action: www.rightsaction.org or Guatemala Human Rights Commission: www.ghrc-usa.org.



Peace Corps Reflections

by Craig Adams & Lucy Altemus

Craig Adams and Lucy Altemus, Farmer to Farmer founders, returned to Wisconsin in spring of 2010 from their two-year Peace Corps work in Ecuador. They are getting ready to move to Cuenca, Ecuador. Before they left we asked them to write about their Peace Corps experience.

From Craig:

When you go on a F2F tour to Guatemala, Honduras or Ecuador, you mostly have a good time. At first the sights, sounds, smells and foods are new and exotic. The landscape, people and architecture are fascinating. Sure, there are moments of anxiety, irritation, even sickness, but generally the exhilaration of losing one's self in a different culture dominates. Suddenly, on day eight or so, something changes. A new dynamic kicks in. Now you don't want to be there any longer. Everything seems askew: the language, the people, their customs, the scenery all seem strange, even irritating. Your fellow travelers no longer seem so amiable. Thanks to the travel gods, you have a roundtrip ticket home and you return with a much deeper understanding and appreciation for another culture.

Contrast this with the Peace Corps experience where you serve in another culture for over two years. For at least the first six months your experience is much like the one described: a constant exposing of yourself to the reality of a different land and culture with almost simultaneous feelings of attraction and repulsion.

However, if you can endure (many do not) six months or longer, something softens. Something happens to your cultural ego and your resistance to letting go of it. You finally wear out your identity as a North American and become identified with the country you are now living in.

You now feel immersed in the new culture physically, psychologically, and socially. What a relief to feel at home in your "home away from home". There is a sense of feeling free to deepen your ties to others living there. You develop close friendships and social connections, getting more involved in community activities. You feel ready to invest yourself totally in the fabric of life there. Your last year of service is good. You speak the language adequately; your immune system works to protect you from disease, and you know how to get things done (or know when things don't need to be done). Then, suddenly, after more than two years, it's time to go home!

"Hey," you say, "I'm not ready to go home. I can't remember exactly what home in Wisconsin was." Now your new country feels like home. You have come to love its landscape, people, food and rhythm of life. Life with all its sadness and joy is basically good there. But your service is over so you have to go home—to confusion, bewilderment, strangeness and even shock—and the process starts all over again. So where am I now? I have been back to Ecuador three times in the last year and one of those visits included a short visit to San Bernardo where I was stationed in Peace Corps. Having people recognize me and call my name brought deep, raw, tear-producing joy that left no doubt as to my connection to that place.

Here in Wisconsin I have had moments of the same kind of joy revisiting with friends seldom (or often) seen. As Lucy and I prepare to leave Wisconsin to live and start a café in Cuenca, Ecuador, I now realize that I am at home in both Wisconsin and Ecuador. I don't have to choose. They both chose me.

I'm still working on shedding my individual ego that I cling to. I'm thankful for my Peace Corps experience. It helped me to painfully shed some of my cultural

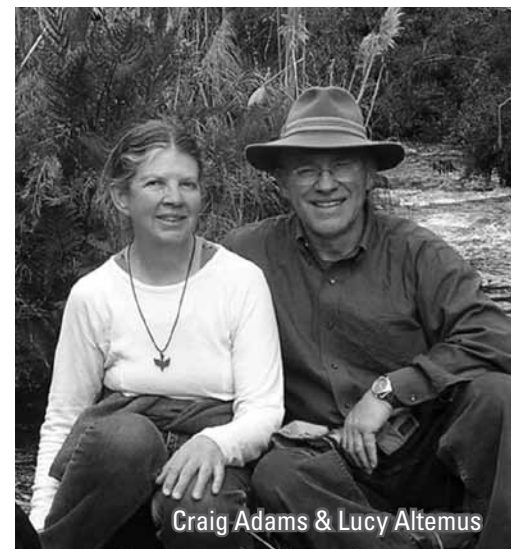
ego, that cultural lens that we have internalized which determines how we see the world and reality. Now I see I can really feel at home in more than one place. Now I see we are all truly one, and that brings me a lot of joy.

From Lucy:

1. Representing the U.S.A. Ambassadors are official state representatives sent to live in other countries. Peace Corps volunteers are, like it or not, non-official representatives that very much influence the impression that host country citizens have of the U.S. For me, this was an awesome and at times overwhelming responsibility. It was important to be friendly, fair, sociable, hardworking, tidy, frugal, and compassionate. I needed to share my energy, skills and ideas without arrogance or judgment. Some days I felt tired, lonely, sick, unsociable and just wasn't up to it. Well, I guess they learned that people from the U.S. are human, too.

1. Sharing U.S. Culture, our thrift sale. At the end of our two-year service in Ecuador we had accumulated a small household full of stuff: Craig's tools, our furniture,

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Craig Adams & Lucy Altemus

“In Defense Of Food” An Eater’s Manifesto by Michael Pollan

Book Review by Jay Gilbertson

We are pleased to share this book review by Farmer to Farmer member Jay Gilbertson, author of the Madeline Island series and co-owner of Hay River Pumpkin Seed Oil.

From the first sentences, “Eat food. Not too much. Mostly plants.” I wondered where the heck this guy was headed. I mean—we are eating food. But, come to find out, the last thing that most folks are chowing on is anything but food.

Pollan has pulled together an eye-opening study, or perhaps it could be considered a revelation, of just exactly what Americans are eating. It can all be lumped into what most refer to as (drum roll) The Western Diet. He defines it as a shift from eating leaves to seeds. The four most produced seeds in America? The four most subsidized seeds in America? The four seeds most chemically altered and used to produce over 17,000 new food products in America? Give up? Soy, corn, wheat and rice.

Those four innocent seeds account for two-thirds of the total calories we consume. That’s a lot of fake food, people, and the fact that those fancy-schmancy pre-packaged NON-food products have the marketing power of 32 billion bucks a year overwhelms the force of tradition (think Mom) and has unfortunately left us in the hands of science, journalism, government and marketing to tell us what to eat. Honestly, do you really think that that “nutrition-packed” bar, chip, cracker, cereal, bread, icy-soda, burger-helper, yogurt-on-a-stick, is actually good for you? Think again, please.

So many of us simply want to shove something in and get on with things.

What’s the rush? Wonder why the French can eat all that heavy food, slug wine and finish things off with some rich pastry? They eat together, they eat food, they eat slowly and their portion sizes are much smaller than Americans’. Take a look at grandma’s china and I’ll bet you dollars to doughnuts it’s about half the size of what most of us have in our cabinets today.

I think one of the most compelling factoids in this fact-packed (and well sourced and footnoted) volume is the indisputable, as well as unfortunate, fact that over two-thirds of Americans are obese. There’s also been an enormous increase in diabetes, especially in our kids. Why has this happened? Pollan, with a great deal of clarity and example, suggests that we truly are what we eat and isn’t it time we spend a little bit more on real food and a little less in front of the TV, computer, or Game-boy? If you’re concerned with the health of yourself as well as the health of your family, I can’t recommend this book enough. It should be required reading for every high school across America.

Here are just a few things Pollan suggests one consider:

- “Pay more, eat less.” It’s simply a known fact that good food is going to ring up higher. Yet many Americans that eat on the cheap seem to be able to afford that extra phone or deluxe TV or...
- “Eat Meals.” Defined as sitting down at a table (imagine) and eating an honest to goodness meal. We are becoming a nation of snackers and eating less and less together. For about a fifth of 18- to 50-year-old Americans, eating now takes place in the car. What?
- “Don’t get your fuel from the same place your car does.” Think those gas station aisles are packed with fruits and veggies? Not.
- “Eat Slowly.” By eating fast, we tend to eat more and not give our bodies the chance to realize

we’re stuffed.

Bottom line in this fascinating and empowering book is that the only way we’re going to get healthier is by realizing most of the stuff in our cupboards isn’t even food and that real food could possibly bring us back to real health.

This book is available at your MORE public library system, visit www.more.lib.wi.us. Feel free to contact Jay at jrg@chibardun.net.

Some websites to consider for more information:

- www.eatwellguide.com
- www.eatwild.com
- www.foodroutes.org
- www.localharvest.com



Farmer Profile- Who Grows this Coffee?

by Andy Gaertner

During our January 2011 trip to Honduras we met Don Chico in Comayagua at Adalid's house, where we were planning our backpacking trip to the cloud forest.



Don Chico picking coffee.

He had come by to check on a coffee de-pulping machine that Adalid was fixing for him. Adalid introduced us because Don Chico (Francisco Alvarado) is in the coffee co-op, and I started to tell him all about Farmer to Farmer. After a little bit, I figured out that he was in a hurry and we decided to wait for the whole story. Even through my cultural barrier, I could tell that he was a man on a mission. Later, when we stayed at his house, we discovered that this is his constant state. He is into everything and moving forward on all fronts.

During this year's visit to Honduras I was determined that we would visit the community of El Sute, where some of our coffee came from last year. Last year when we came, several farmers from El Sute had walked two hours to join the meeting we had with farmers from El Tamarindo. So this year we decided to go the extra distance to see their farms firsthand.

To get to El Sute, we took the road from Comayagua for about an hour of bumpy dirt roads all the way to El Tamarindo, where we continued on a new road for another 45 minutes through pine forests climbing up

and up all the way to the communities of El Horno and El Sute. We had climbed a total of over 3000 feet from Comayagua, and now at every turn we had a fantastic vista. When we got to El Sute, we stopped at the first house along the road and we were instantly greeted by Don Chico. We did not know it yet, but for the next 24 hours we would be under the spell of his frenetic hospitality.

Instantly we were brought up to see the compost piles. They had been working with the culture and growth of microorganisms to fertilize the coffee plantation and he was eager to show the results. Along with Zac and I, we also had Hector (an agronomist) and Adalid (the president of the co-op), and Don Chico was checking to see if he was doing it right. They talked about the finer points of organic fertilizer and then we went to see the hoophouse where they dry the coffee beans. Eventually we ended up in a wooden shack in his front yard, where we drank coffee and waited for the other farmers from El Sute to show up.

Here in the shack we came to appreciate some things that make El Sute different from the other communities we have visited on the mountain. There was a blackboard on the end wall with the proceedings from a meeting of the "Caja Rural" of El Sute. The Caja is a mutual lending group, where the members each make an initial investment to build up capital. Then the members in the Caja use the capital to make loans and investments within the community. This benefits the recipients of the loans and over time builds the capital. On the blackboard we could see that the Caja members had investments in a pick-up truck, beef cattle, and organic

fertilizers. Don Chico's house appeared to be a center of both the Caja and the coffee co-op because the truck was parked outside and there were several grazing animals tied up in various locations around the house.

Inside the shack was a Lenca flag. The Lenca are an indigenous group which historically occupied most of central Honduras. From Don Chico we learned that although El Sute and El Horno just recently got their first roads, the communities are very old, dating back to colonial and pre-colonial times. The people take pride in their native heritage, and continue to identify as a native community. This is in contrast to Rio Negro and some of the other mountain communities founded in the last 50 years as people move into the mountains to grow coffee. In fact, in El Sute coffee growing is relatively new. When I was there 15 years ago in the Peace Corps, the whole region was a patchwork of corn and beans and pasture, with very little coffee.

During our meeting with the farmers Don Chico powered up the generator so we could have electric light. After the meeting,

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Don Chico's grandson helping pick coffee.

Peace Corps . . .

Continued from page 3

kitchenware and clothing. We hesitated to give the stuff away, which might create jealousies. We decided to have a thrift sale, which we had to explain in detail to our friends in San Bernardo, and our intention to donate half of the money to a children's ecology project. The sale went well, a fun and memorable day.

3. **Promoting Peace.** You may wonder if the Peace Corps really promotes peace in the world. The Corps, has three official goals: share technical skill to people that ask for assistance; share U.S. culture with the people in the host country, and; share the culture of the host country with the people in the U.S.

All three goals are equally important and all three can promote peace. The first goal often overshadows the other two as a volunteer focuses on a particular skill. In my case, teaching English, gardening, goat care and cooking took up much of my time. The thrift sale described above is an example of sharing U.S. culture, part of daily communication and interaction. Number three was great fun, hosting visitors from the U.S., as well as leading the tour this past January and doing presentations here at home. Promoting peace is what drew me to the Peace Corps in the first place, and each aspect of my experience is part of peacemaking step by step, little by little.



Farmer Profile . . . *Continued from page 5*

piles of food were brought out and then we were offered a place to sleep in the same wooden shack. Although we had already made arrangement to stay in the school at El Horno, we were much happier here with Don Chico. The next day, Don Chico canceled his plans to go to Comayagua in order that he might take us to his coffee plantation. First he showed us the plantation by the house. We took numerous photos of his grandkids picking coffee, and then he brought us up the mountain to his other plantation. Along the way we saw the store that is operated by the Caja Rural. Each Caja member has to take a month off out of each year and tend the store.

From Don Chico's plantation we could see the whole valley. His coffee was dense and verdant, under an abundant canopy of shade trees. He and Adalid talked at length about managing the plantation, from fertility to pruning to managing the shade trees. It is exciting to see the synergy between the Caja Rural and the coffee co-op. It is also thrilling to meet someone as serious about his community as Don Chico. We will definitely be back.



Hooked Textiles . . .

Continued from page 1

On the last day of class, an off-chance remark spurred a couple of questions. The questions teased out stories. Simply put, no one was prepared for our students' emotional replies as they described the impact of rug hooking on their lives.

On September 22, 2011 three Maya women will arrive in Minneapolis to introduce themselves and their hooked rugs at an international hooked rug show at the Anderson Center in Red Wing, Minnesota, www.andersoncenter.org. This visit is the culmination of our rug-hooking classes, and the rugs are phenomenal. We feel very honored to host these Maya artists for their first trip to the U.S. and to introduce them to our communities here. We hope you can join us to see their rugs and hear about their lives at one of these events.

Schedule of events:

• **Sept 22, 2011- 7 p.m.**

Textile Center of Minnesota, 3000 University Ave SE # 100, Minneapolis, MN 55414-3357, (612) 436-0464 (www.textilecentermn.org) Rosa, Maria and Yolanda will present a lecture about their lives as contemporary Maya women and discuss the economic impact rug hooking has made upon their lives. To read these stories go to "Introducing the Artists" on page 7. Hooked rugs available for sale. Open to the public, nominal entry fee payable at the door.

• **Sept 23, 2011- 1- 5 p.m.**

Region-wide hook-in at the Anderson Center (www.andersoncenter.org). Free. Dinner available, \$10 with prior reservation. All area rug hookers are invited to bring a rug or two for show and tell, plus a current project. Come share your work and hook alongside our Guatemalan students.

• **Sept 23, 2011- 6:30-8 p.m.**

Exhibit opening "Mary Anne Wise & Friends: the Art of the Hooked Rug" at the Anderson Center.

• **Sept 25, 2011- 7 p.m.**

Lecture at The Widespot Performing Arts Center, Stockholm, Wisconsin (www.widespotperformingarts.org) Open to the public, donation suggested. Rosa, Maria and Yolanda will lecture about their lives as contemporary Maya women and discuss the economic impact rug hooking has had on their lives. Hooked rugs available for sale.

September 27, 2011- 7-9 p.m.

Guatemalan Simply Dunn Schoolhouse, Downsville, WI, www.simply-dunn.com Open to the public, donation suggested. Rosa, Maria and Yolanda will speak about their lives, show photos, and their rugs. This informal gathering will be a time to meet the artists, and welcome them to our community.

For more information visit:
www.farmertofarmer.org.



Introducing the Artists

by Jody Slocum

Carmen

I am so grateful for Thirteen Threads and for the opportunity they gave me to be in this class. I am so grateful for everything I've learned here, for the way Mary Anne and Jody open their hearts and give to us everything.



Carmen

They hold nothing back. I can see that, my compañeras, we can all feel that. Before these classes I believed I was nothing. I was a low person. I believed that because I do not read, I can't write, I don't speak much Spanish, I've never been to school. If you are that way people see you as a low person. In the first rug class I did not dare to hope because I wasn't sure I could do it (the new rug hooking technique). But now I am selling my rugs and I have a different opinion of myself. I see the world different now and I am happy because I never thought that would be possible. I am not a low person.

Maria

I never went to school, I do not have a husband, I only have one son. I used to go to the mountains every day to get wood to sell. I sold it door to door. It was very hard

work, walking up and down the mountain. I worked like a man and I still feel the work in my body. It is shameful to rely on your children, but I had no choice. I am grateful for the opportunity to be in this class and for everything Mary Anne and Jody have taught me. Now that I can sell rugs (breaking in to tears) I do not have to go the mountain anymore. I am a lucky woman and I have a lot of gratitude for this opportunity.

Yolanda

Yolanda has sold all seven of the mats she has made since the first class. She is involved in all kinds of textile production work, from fair-trade scarves, table runners and napkins to her own huipils (traditional blouse). She is an active leader in her community, and her work includes a literacy program. When asked,



Yolanda

"With which technique do you make the most money?" she responded, "Rug hooking." How does she spend her rug money? She bought six faucets for six families in her small village. There's a new potable water project in her village, but you need a (complex) faucet to tap into the pipe. Yolanda bought the faucets! Note: you will meet Yolanda this fall at the Anderson Center.

Jessica

Muchisimo gracias por todo.... breaking down in tears - I remember the time Thirteen Threads offered the third rug hooking class and I was not selected to participate. I stayed home and felt sad, thinking about what was going on in the class. I spent the day weaving (on her backstrap loom) and feeling sad. But you called me on my phone and told me to come to class the next day and I want you to know how happy I felt then. I do not have the words to say how happy



Jody, Jessica & Mary Anne

I was. After that class I started selling my rugs and sometimes I cannot believe it. I am very grateful for a new way to make money. All of us feel this way. When the women in my group (who have taken the class) get together, before we start a hooking session we say a prayer to Thirteen Threads for this opportunity and how lucky we feel to learn this technique. We talk about you and Jody and we invite you to come be with us that day. You people were once strangers but we cannot believe it. You live so far away in the U.S. and why do you come here to work with us? It's very dangerous to travel, and yet you still continue to come and we do not understand but we feel lucky and we give thanks to God every time because there is no other way to explain it.





Support Farmer to Farmer's Work

Heading South in January

Plans are underway for January trips to Guatemala and Honduras. For more information please visit our website or email us at info@farmertofarmer.org or call Jody at (715)643-3603 or Andy at (715)265-4608.



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