

Sigue la Lucha: The Changing Face of a Revolution

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ABSTRACT

...to be a revolutionary, there must first be a revolution. The isolated effort, the individual effort, the purity of ideals, the desire to sacrifice an entire lifetime to the noblest of ideals means naught if that effort is made alone, solitary, in some corner of Latin America, fighting against hostile governments and social conditions that do not permit progress. A revolution needs...an entire people mobilized...who know...what the people's unity is worth.

Dr. Ernesto "Che" Guevara

INTRODUCCIÓN

To put Guatemala in perspective, one must not only consider its ancient civilizations and modern social structures, but appreciate the overarching narrative of the land. One should attempt to see the story as an author sees his or her novel—from above, in its entirety—realizing that what is happening in the present has also happened in the past. The story is one long continuum with no event exempt from the forces that govern them all.

Guatemala's dazzling geological diversity is the setting for a civilization more advanced in its understanding of the cosmos than any other before the technological age. Guatemala is home to jagged and unforgiving mountains, festering and earth-shattering volcanoes, and a department so large and so densely covered with rainforest that only recently are its millennia-old secrets beginning to be unearthed.

Gigantic Mayan cities, and the majestic temples that define them, have been uncovered in only the last half century. These sites had lain untouched for hundreds of years and were overlooked by European prospectors and missionaries that scoured the land for human life. Their discovery sheds light on a civilization that dominated the Yucatan Peninsula for thousands of years. The proud tradition of the Maya has been best preserved in Guatemala by the millions of direct descendants of these original civilization builders. In Guatemala today over 20 Mayan dialects are still spoken, and the population is comprised of nearly 70% indigenous Mayas.

Indigenous populations of the world have stood little chance of preservation since the exploration age, and the Spanish conquest of what is now Latin America is a poignant example. Nearly all of the Native Americans living throughout Central and South America had been effectively conquered by the end of the 16th century. They went on living largely as indentured servants to the wealthy Spanish land owners who had assumed control of the area and its people. For 300 years this system persisted until Guatemala, along with much of Latin America, won its independence from Spain in the first half of the 1800s.

Sadly, the freedom won on the battlefield did not transfer to the freedom sought by the peasants. Once the Spanish viceroys were expelled, it took little time for ambitious venture capitalists to seize ownership of the fertile lands. Wealthy investors from Europe and the United States converged on Guatemala and soon capitalized on the tropical fruit and coffee that grew there. Caught in the midst of these economic operations were the tens of millions of Maya who carried on, largely oblivious to the decisions being made to shape their fate.

Most important of all the companies taking root in Guatemala during this period was the United Fruit Company of Boston. The United Fruit saga in Guatemala is in many cases tragic and alarming, as its deputies worked tirelessly to exploit both the governments and laborers that rested squarely under its thumb. By the early 1950s the company dominated over 550,000 acres of the most fertile land in Guatemala, of which less than 15% was actually put under cultivation (Schlesinger, Kinzer p. 75. 1982). United Fruit was one of a small group of an oligarchy that enjoyed nearly complete control over every facet of the country. According to the 1950 census, 2% of the population owned over 70% of Guatemalan land (Schlesinger, Kinzer p. 50. 1982).

The string of dictators that shrewdly governed the country was loyal only to the aristocracy of which they were part. They gladly facilitated exploitative policies set forth to wrest any shred of freedom possessed by the poor. Labor codes, vagrancy laws, and unpaid labor for public works projects left the citizenry of Guatemala dejected and ill. Its infant mortality rate was above 60% in rural areas; one shocking example of many, showing the vicious corruption and contempt that plagued the government and oligarchy that reigned (Immerman, p. 25. 1983).

At last, in the 13th year of President Jorge Ubico—perhaps the most repressive Guatemalan leader to date—a revolution was born, and a population impassioned. In October of 1944 a group of teachers, students, laborers, and peasants seized power from Ubico and began what would later be called *la Primavera*. *La Primavera* was a ten year period that saw the election of a school teacher as president, and the sweeping social reforms that came about under his ideal of “spirited socialism”.

Juan Jose Arévalo was the first democratically elected president in the country’s history, and he began an epoch in Guatemala that would later be looked upon with nostalgic longing by the entire peasantry of the country. Arévalo’s “spirited socialism” was a truly idealistic undertaking; he explained it in this way:

[We do not aim for] ingenious redistribution of material goods, based on the foolish economic comparison of economically different men. Our socialism is going to liberate men psychologically... To socialize a republic is not simply to exploit industries in cooperation with workers, but before this to make each worker a man in the absolute fullness of his psychological and moral being.” (Immerman, p. 25. 1983).

The state of the collective mind of the peasants of Guatemala was in definite need of such a psychological change after knowing nothing but forced labor and repression from the country to which it belonged. Arévalo would make good on his promises through legislation and reform unlike the country had ever seen. He changed labor codes, eliminating the oppressive vagrancy laws that bound the peasants, and at last gave them the right to organize. After seven years of the revolutionary government, the average pay for an agricultural worker rose from 15 cents a day in 1944 to 80 cents a day in 1951. (Immerman, p. 47 1983) Perhaps even more telling of the new government’s commitment to the poor of Guatemala was the decline of the infant mortality rate an average of 2.5% each year during the ten years of *la Primavera* (Immerman, p. 55 1983). As labor and health services improved, so did education. Being a teacher by trade, Arévalo took on education as a special interest. During his six years in office, more than 6,000 schools were built, the curriculum was reformed, and teachers were at last treated and paid fairly (Immerman, p. 60. 1983).

The successor to Arévalo was a young military general named Jacobo Arbenz. Arbenz was one of the leaders that were able to take military control away from Ubico only six years previous. Arbenz’s reforms would prove far more controversial than the idealistic ones championed by Arévalo. The new focus was on the issue that lay at the crux of the injustice carried out by every ruling administration since the conquest: land reform.

Land expropriations began in 1952 with the government offering the United Fruit Company the price that the company claimed for its tax purposes. This came to an amount of about \$3.00 per acre. In response to this offer, the United States State Department, not United Fruit, sent an official to reject and demanded \$75.00 per acre instead (Schlesinger, Kinzer, p. 76.1982). It was apparent that these two sides were at the beginning of a difficult road, but few foresaw what a tragic and violent journey laid ahead.

On June 27, 1954, Jacobo Arbenz officially resigned as president of Guatemala. The coup that led to his resignation would live on in infamy as causing one of the darkest chapters in the history of the CIA and the US State Department. The masterminds of the coup were CIA director, Allen Dulles, and his brother, Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, both of whom had done significant legal work for United Fruit while civilian corporate lawyers (Mendelsohn, Pequenza, 2001). The extent to which members of the State Department and the CIA were inextricably linked to United Fruit is breathtaking, and worthy of research, but is not the purpose of this work.

Needless to say, the saga of the coup of Jacobo Arbenz is laden with conflicts of interest and international intrigue. The American people, however, were largely unopposed to the action taken by their country as they saw the coup as another victory against creeping communism in the hemisphere. Fueled by millions of dollars and the sharpest minds in propaganda, the United States government and United Fruit were able to subvert Guatemala’s democratic system for the economic interests of a private company.

The effects of this coup are immeasurable. One can attempt to quantify the misery sustained by the Guatemalan people during the nearly 40 years of civil war that would follow, but the task is far more complex than numbering the dead. The Guatemalan people lived without hope for a lifetime, then, for ten years, finally received the fairness and sense of worth to which every human is entitled. To have this snatched back by a thief in the night is a fate that these people could not bear.

The guerrilla movement was born shortly after the coup by deserting members of the military. These men would lead the resistance for many years, growing incrementally and maintaining the fight for human justice begun in 1944. It would not be until the early 1980s that this story would make an unexpected and dreadful shift.

For many years the civil war in Guatemala remained largely clandestine with most operations being small and without a significant impact anywhere outside of Guatemala City. Rural areas were especially isolated from news of the conflict. It was known, however, that rural communities were providing the guerrilla movement with much of its food, shelter, and information. Almost 20 years into the conflict, the Guatemalan government drastically altered its methods of warfare. During the regimes of Presidents Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efraim Rios-Montt, the

Guatemalan military undertook a campaign against the peasants that would result in loss of life and displacement on a level never before seen in modern Latin America. The term *scorched earth* was the term used to describe the systematic massacres of 626 villages. Throughout the war, the number of mobilized guerrillas was never more than 4,000. The genocide undertaken by the Government of Guatemala and its supporters is responsible for more than 200,000 deaths or disappearances. Well over half of those people were indigenous Mayan *campesinos*.

The guerrilla movement was being fought under four different banners. These different factions were clearly fighting for the same objectives and in similar ways, but they had yet to unite formally until February 7, 1982. Three of the four revolutionary groups fought mainly in the highlands where the largest Mayan populations are. The other group, *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (Rebel Armed Forces or FAR) was that of the Petén. This is the largest and most remote of Guatemalan departments. It is home to dense tropical rainforests and very little human settlement. The people whose story I wish to tell are largely from this place, and have chosen to stay in it despite many reasons to flee.

This is a story of a group of people who share this history, they share these memories, they share these stories, and they share this future. They have chosen to be forever bound to themselves and to their land. Although some have gone and some have returned, the continuation of their story is sure.

I would like to introduce you to a group of people. They have chosen Nuevo Horizonte as the name of their home. *New Horizon* is a perfect title for the story of the people and ideals that generate this community.

LA PAZ, Y EL SUEÑO

The intensified violence that took place in the early 1980s served to either draw more people into the guerrilla movement or to increase the number of refugees fleeing to Mexico. The men and women about whom I have written chose the path of the former. In Nuevo Horizonte live the guerrillas who joined the resistance during the darkest period in modern Guatemalan history. After living clandestinely for decades these women and men, along with about 3,000 of their comrades, signed peace accords with the Guatemalan government. This cease-fire led to the demobilization of the rebel forces at a camp named Sacol.

At the time of the signing, the guerrillas were classified into one of two groups, *con destino* or *sin destino*. This literally translates to *with destiny* or *without destiny*. The term *with destiny* meant that the person had family alive, a home to return to, or at least a plan for their life after the war. The people about whom you will read are those who were without destiny. Many had lost their families and homes to massacres. Some had lost track of their loved ones as they had fled seeking exile. These men and women were now guerrillas without a war, *campesinos sin campo*. With no one but their brothers and sisters in arms, these *compas* were brought to a camp named Papal Ja.

Here at Papal Ja the idea of a cooperative was born. Women and men here decided that to re-enter Guatemalan society, they would remain together as a group, as they had been for so many years before. At the heart of it all, after experiencing the horrors and joys that they had during the war, this group was stronger than family. They would take on this next challenge together, as they had done with each one that came before it. As the guerrillas received vocational training in mechanics, computation, and agriculture, they began to consider the idea of a cooperative. *¿Cuántos somos?* How many are we that choose to pursue this life?

From here, 117 demobilized guerrillas formed three brigades to visit three different farms and to choose their new home. The one chosen was a 900 hectare farm called *Horizonte*. A loan was received to cover the down payment, but a tremendous debt still remained. Here, on the land that would be their home, they began the task of designing the model of their community. Here they slept without beds, they lived without comforts, and they worked tirelessly each day for basic human needs. Three more brigades were formed to work on providing food, drinkable water, and shelter.

Within two years these three pillars of life were realized. These times were difficult beyond imagination. Although some would later return, 80 of the original associates abandoned the community due to the hopelessness that was often felt. Five women lost their pregnancies because of the harsh conditions to which they were exposed. To hear the stories of this period was humbling in a way that is too overwhelming to express in writing. This group of individuals had been to the brink so many times throughout their lives that these hardships could not discourage their purpose. The fact that they had won this chance to live for themselves was the greatest victory of all. And after two years in their new community each family had a house, food to eat, and water that was safe to drink. These are comforts that many in Guatemala still do not enjoy; a reality certainly not taken for granted by those in Nuevo Horizonte.

After the basic conditions of life were met, the community began to turn its attention to the next phase of building their lives. The first three buildings erected in the community were a primary school, a day care, and a clinic. This, more than anything, is a testament to the priorities of these people and the vision that they possess for

the future. Their vision is multi-faceted and carries with it strong ideals of environmental and social harmony. In the pages that follow I will present to you, as best I can, a community of revolutionaries. Their struggle is shared with many throughout the world, but indeed their circumstances are uniquely their own.

Part One

ACUERDOS DE PAZ

I had been in the community for only a few days when I was speaking about my project with some of the men and women who would be helping me through it, mapping out what it was my research required. They pointed me towards the people who would guide my investigation and provide me the full breadth and depth necessary to satisfactorily tell this story. On top of the list of books to familiarize myself with was the official peace accord signed by the members of URNG (*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*) and the Guatemalan government at the close of combat in December of 1996.

Compromises reached throughout the peace process leading up to the official cease-fire were trying on both sides, leaving both the government and the guerrillas wanting more concessions from the other side. However, at the end of it all, the visage of peace was enough to bring the combatants to the table and to a compromise. What the members of URNG did perhaps not foresee was the inability and disinterest of the government to hold up to the pledges it made during the drafting of the accords.

Among the promises made and broken by the Guatemalan government were numerous initiatives for economic aid and increased access to civic services. The guerrillas did not only negotiate on their own behalf, but on that of the entire *pueblo* of Guatemala. Present in the agreement were many calls for “rural development with emphasis in basic infrastructure (highways, rural roads, electricity, telecommunications, water, sanitary conditions, and of production projects for an amount of 300 million quetzals (\$43,000,000) annually (Acuerdos de Paz, p.171. 2001). It is unknown if during the signing, one or both of the sides knew that these implementations would hardly provide any of what they had intended, but the fact remains that in rural Guatemala a community has but itself. Despite its past tyranny and present ineptness, the government does not largely concern itself with the millions of humans it has helped murder or has forced to become refugees.

DONANTES

After spending 6 months in Papal Ja, the ex-guerrillas and their families arrived at a farm called *Horizonte* and started from scratch. They came out of the forest with no money, little or no knowledge in community development, and many assurances from the Guatemalan government of the provisions and civic assistance they would receive.

As former members of URNG, the citizens of newly named Nuevo Horizonte received a stipend from the European Union (EU) providing each family enough cinder block and other supplies to construct a 9x9 meter house. The EU spent millions of dollars on the peace process, including a summit in Oslo, Norway, and funded nearly all of the aid to be received by both return refugees and members of the armed resistance. First impressions of delegates from the EU and their willingness to orchestrate and fund the peace process had an effect on the men and women who would become Nuevo Horizonte. They clearly saw the means and characters of the international community as well as those of the Guatemalan government. At this time they knew that if they were to realize their dreams of sustainability, it would be through partnerships with groups from other lands. Although the importance of the assistance from the European Union cannot be overlooked, the partnerships formed with independent organizations would prove to be the true champions for the causes of the community.

The members of Nuevo Horizonte had no illusions about building their community all alone. They were well aware of their lack of agricultural and business knowledge, and unfortunately, they had little time to learn once they had arrived on the land. A huge debt was incurred for the farm they had bought, and it was agreed that, aside from basic production for community sustainability, profits would be necessary to begin to pay off the land. At this time the associates began to contact agencies from around the world in search of collaborators, to seek expertise, and to request economic assistance. If these people were to see their ambition and lust for change manifested, it would take both instructional and financial support.

They would eventually come into contact with organizations from Spain, Italy, and Canada. Once hearing the story, the circumstances, and the vision, these organizations became involved both monetarily and in the form of visiting volunteers who would help train the citizens and develop projects that were agreed upon through this process of collaboration. The projects themselves had to fill very special criteria: long term profitability, environmentally sustainable methods, and the ability of the community to maintain and improve the project to ensure its initial and prolonged success.

Some early projects floundered and left many associates disenchanted but found even more individuals devoted to finding solutions that would work in these unique circumstances. Cultivation of Rosa Jamaica, a flower used for a type of soft drink, and the raising of frogs for their meat were two of the unsuccessful ideas that were developed in coordination with the international agencies. Nuevo Horizonte wanted to find a niche to fill in the region, providing consumers with products that would be difficult or expensive to find elsewhere. From these collaborations—both internal, and with the help of international cooperators—the development of integral projects flowered into four uniquely executed systems, each serving the dual role of benefiting the community on the basic level of providing jobs, services, or alimentation, and containing the potential for the profitability necessary to bring about complete autonomy.

GANADO

From the first meeting of the associates it was agreed that the raising of cattle would be a fundamental part of investment and income. Initially the community could scarcely afford beans and rice, much less a cow costing hundreds of dollars. The associates decided to employ a practice that would later be used by many of the semi-collective projects. This entails the utilization of pre-existent commodities to earn money and make the connections necessary to undertake their plan. In this case, neighboring farms were contacted and encouraged to use the *zacate* rich pastures of the Nuevo Horizonte savannah for their cattle grazing. Farmers would either bring their animals to the pastures or have the *zacate* delivered, and in under a year enough money was made to purchase three cows.

Not to be forgotten is the complete lack of experience and practical knowledge that these men and women had in the art of raising cattle. Exhaustive research was carried out as each decision could mean success or tragedy in an economic situation like theirs. These first cows were raised, fattened, and sold; and the process was then repeated. As in the forests during the war, that which you've learned is that which you teach, and so over the years the workforce in the corral and the population of cows has grown exponentially. Cattle have been the most lucrative project for the community, generating more than 400,000 quetzals (\$57,000) annually.

Today, the cooperative is home to nearly 400 cows. About 350 of these are owned communally, the rest belonging to members of the community—mostly the cowboys themselves, who have purchased these with their own money to try and profit from them. These types of side projects are encouraged as they promote growth within the community. At present Nuevo Horizonte does not have enough work to employ every working age citizen 30 days a month, so it is proactive if people are able to pursue their own economic interests without having to travel to a metropolitan area or another farm.

The man in charge of the cattle ranch is named Manolito, and during my seven week stay I spent a fair amount of time with him. He would make rounds throughout the neighborhoods of the community stopping long enough to pick on just about everyone and play practical joke on the toddlers running around the house. He is tallest man in the community and dons a straight-billed mesh cap along with a straight legged limp he acquired during the war. He was injured in battle more than 30 times, miraculously nearly all sustained only to the legs and feet.

Two years ago Manolito had had no experience with cattle. When he was approached to take over the project after the resignation of another member, he began studying fervently and meeting everyday with the cowboys that remained. Under his guidance the project flourished and is now headed in new and exciting directions. During my stay, he and his workers were in the process of shopping for bulls from Europe and Australia where the genetics are often stronger than in Central America. These new bulls would help create a much healthier, more marketable herd.

PISCICULTURA

A lagoon on the edge of the land was seen initially as an opportunity for production, but its best usage remained undetermined. Within a couple years, the idea of fish farming was researched and found to be a good fit for the community. Shortly thereafter the lagoon was filled with tilapia, a mild white fish whose marketability is very strong. With this project the associates feel they have developed a food source unique to the area, and neighboring towns have begun to take notice and purchase the fish in large quantities. The lagoon began as a means to diversify the diet of the people of the community, but with an eye to the future, the associates are confident that surrounding towns will take further notice and adopt this new food source as well.

My host-father, along with a *compa* named Miguel, was the head of this branch of the cooperative and I spent my first full day in Guatemala at the lagoon cutting the grass. Means of grass cutting are not yet to the level of 0 degree turning radius and mulching attachments. Our mower was a machete, and our breaks came when the blade became too dull to cut and had to be re-sharpened. Pavel was the *nom de guerre* of my host-father. He was the explosives expert during the war, and as a result of that, his hearing was poor and his speech was loud. It was an eye-opening first day, swinging a dull machete amidst a haze of jungle mosquitoes, being yelled at by a man who

couldn't hear or understand a word I said. The first day was definitely trying, but I would soon reach a balance and comfort here like I never thought possible.

It is important to recognize that the diets of many indigenous and poor in Guatemala do not come close to the diversity enjoyed in many other places of the world. Although cattle grazing in the region is largely successful, the Guatemalan diet often lacks the meat component due to the poverty of the people, and expense of that commodity. In many cases, even farms that raise cattle and chickens do not consume the food themselves but rather use them for income, as they are often worth more in trade than to the mouths of the people. This is especially true of cattle, and Nuevo Horizonte is an example of this phenomenon. With the tilapia lagoon and the cattle ranching two very important goals are met: the first being an addition of two otherwise very expensive food sources, and second, a unique product to bring to the marketplace drawing attention to and generating profit for the community as a whole. The other two of the collective projects also serve the common purpose of the cooperative, but are unique as non-traditional manners of production.

BOSQUE DE PINO

About two years after moving to the farm, the associates began thinking of new ways to utilize the vast savannah that surrounded them. Research began to search for a species of tree that would grow well in the acidic soil that existed in a large expanse of their land. Due to the condition of the soil, this particular land would be unable to support any agriculture or grazing. After studying the potential for the land, a species of Caribbean pine tree was found whose characteristics would be perfect for that particular pH of soil. A loan was applied for and received to fund this project. The debt still remains, while the profitability of this endeavor lies in waiting.

Soon there were 145 hectares planted, with 1,010 trees per hectare. Of the over 1,000 trees in each mapped hectare, only 30 will be able to grow to their full potential due to the space requirements for full root expansion. The result of this is a three phase plan of harvest, ensuring that in about a quarter century there will be a thick forest of healthy, mature trees to utilize. The first two of these cutting phases will take place in the next five years, and provide wood to serve a myriad of projects, including the construction of a restaurant and lumber for furniture. The purpose of this forest is a beautiful representation of the cooperative's purpose as a whole. This forest will mature in about 25 years, providing the future generation with a wonderfully lucrative and workable resource. One of the unused homes in the community, of which there are a handful, has been transformed into a fully functional wood shop, home to a pair of electric saws, drills, and a small lathe. In this humble shop works don Guillermo who splits time among many projects, namely the seed bank and garden he operates in his yard, along with his mentorship of an assemblage of teenage boys learning the skills of furniture making and craftsmanship. Although the forest is more than two decades away from its pinnacle for furniture use, these students have the patience, foresight, and passion for this work in particular and the cooperative's cause in general to spend time in preparation and anticipation.

In charge of reforestation is Luis, one of the four ex-guerrillas who attend the University in Flores to learn more about his or her science. They bring this knowledge into the community, sharing it with those who will apprentice and eventually succeed them. In two years Luis will have his degree in forestry and environmental science, and, as in the war, he will be responsible for imparting that knowledge to anyone who wishes to learn.

The purposes of these projects are clearly varied but all share one principal goal, that of working to pay off the debt of the land. The debt, along with the profits of each of these four projects are shared by 107 associates, all bound to this land, its cost and its crop. All are at different stages of development; however they all are working on their infrastructure. As long as there are generations to carry the torch and transform the means to suit their time and place, then Nuevo Horizonte will be an ever-present force in the makeup of a new Guatemala, one in which the hard work and creativity of its citizens can be celebrated and can provide an opportunity for groups like this to live how they choose.

ECO-TURISMO

Tourism in Nuevo Horizonte at first may seem ideologically at odds with rebellion and disdain for the worldwide economic disparity that enables tourism in the first place. Indeed the community will probably not draw the typical tourist attempting to cram as many sights as possible into a week-long photo taking splurge. Tourists to the community will experience a living, breathing history lesson, and a glimpse into the lives of revolutionaries, and a revolutionary way of life.

This project serves the community in a number of unique ways. One important point to realize is that Nuevo Horizonte has become a tourist attraction despite itself, without publicity or any active campaign to draw visitors. Through word of mouth of socially and environmentally conscious travelers, this farm along the Guatemalan

highway has become a stopping point, and in many cases, a staying point for European and North American backpackers. At any given time during my two month stay, there would be seven to twenty visitors to the community taking part in a plethora of activities. Some were participants and cooperators from organizations with which Nuevo Horizonte has communications. Others had heard from friends or strangers about this farm owned by guerrillas who offer lodging, stories, and a vivid representation of an alternative form of Guatemalan life *en el campo*.

While I was staying in the community, I shared the title of foreigner with other students and travelers from Spain, Italy, Canada, Costa Rica, and Alaska. These people all had unique agendas and were accommodated accordingly with welcomed excitement from the locals. Each had their own purposes for visiting and had areas of special interest to explore. On any given day, so much is happening on the farm and in the office that visitors enjoy freedom of activity and interaction with virtually all of the varied efforts of the community.

As the flow of visitors rose each year, the idea of organizing more accommodations for them began to take shape. At present the community is undertaking a number of projects aimed at providing a more comfortable atmosphere for their guests. People that come usually stay with any one of the families or in a house named *Frijol Rebelde* after a group from Barcelona who have come frequently and shared the home with one of the men in town. Two hotels were recently completed, a two-bedroom and a four-bedroom, complete with flush toilets and heated showers. Guests can also choose to stay with a family and use the latrine, and *la pila* for bathing, for a more authentic experience. Like the other houses, the hotels have gardens in the backyard with fruit trees and tropical flowers.

Meals are cooked in the homes of a different family each day, or according to any preference that one may have. Ideally this gives the guests time to get to know and befriend as many families in the community as possible. Some of my favorite memories are of spending the break of day or the calm of an evening in a home with a family talking about anything from soccer, to saving the world, to how to best eat that certain pepper, just to be sure your tongue doesn't melt off. It was here, too, that one gets the clearest sense of how the families work and interact with each other.

The activities of the days and nights are to be chosen by the guest and *la junta*. Sometime soon after arriving, *la junta* meets to discuss with the guests what they would like out of their stay. The overwhelming number of options is difficult to quantify. Within the day-to-day endeavors of the cooperative are nearly thirty projects such as tending beehives and corralling bulls; baking bread and weaving purses; hiking the jungle and learning about the fantastic diversity of the brilliant and vivid plant and animal life that call this plot home.

Helping with the Eco-Tourism project is a Canadian man named Ulysses, who specializes in forestry, but offers a wide-ranging expertise in computers and photography as well. He was nearing the end of a two-year stay in the community, during which he also taught classes for the *Escuela Alternativa*. Part of his role was the scientific identification of the various plant life in the jungle contained on the land. Part of the tourism experience is a journey through this forest to learn of the plants that made life possible for the guerrillas during the war. Medicinal and edible plants can be identified and sampled by folks who will be introduced to the coexistence with nature that has made the entire resistance movement possible. In turn they will learn of the strongly symbolic role that the forest plays for those whose livelihoods were born of it. Although some of the specifics still require further planning, one option that visitors will have is a camping trip in the forest simulating how it was for the guerrillas during the conflict.

People can also choose to travel to the ruins of Tikal in about an hour. Tikal is the most expansive of all Mayan ruins. Its central temples are some of the largest and most beautifully arranged of all human architecture, and provide an opportunity to walk within a hauntingly abandoned metropolis in the middle of endless rainforest. From the tops of the pyramids, across 360 degrees of lush green treetops, one witnesses the giant stone heads of the structures, appearing as if they had no base, sitting atop the green canopy alongside the tropical birds and howling monkeys that look down from above at the teeming strata of life below.

Another delight for the senses is a watery cascade that roars over falls into a warm pool below, about an hour's drive from the farm. The jump is about 50 feet and lasts all of three exhilarating seconds. We shared *las cataratas* with a large family of strangers enjoying a picnic and a day in the sun. They shared with us huge bowls of a delicious seafood vegetable soup they had brought, along with as many tortillas as we cared to eat. This sort of carefree generosity and pleasure for sharing a meal and a conversation was fresh and rejuvenating, like the oxygen rich air of the forests we tread.

GRUPOS DE INTERÉS

Operating on a different level from the collective projects, and accordingly, serving a unique purpose for the community, are special interest groups. Whereas profits from the four large projects serve to pay off the debt of the land, semi-collective projects are undertaken to improve the quality of life and diversify the diet of the citizens.

Twenty-four projects fit this classification and are as diverse as bag weaving, a seed bank, and egg production. The formation of these types of projects is simple enough, starting with an idea and a small group of individuals to set-up, organize and fulfill the intentions of their endeavor.

An example of this process is *la caseta*. This little stand serves fresh fruit *liquados*, *empanadas*, *choco-bananas*, and other snacks for people to enjoy under umbrella shade in the center of town. Proposed by a group of seven women to the directive junta, the project was readily approved and funded for conception. The cooperative itself has only so much disposable money to allocate to such projects, so creativity on the part of the planners is often necessary. These women bought a pair of cows with the money they received. After raising and selling the cows to make the amount desired for all the goods and building materials needed to operate *la caseta*, the women began in earnest utilizing the money for its original purpose. Profits from sales are divided into eight equal parts—seven split among the women and one equal share going to the cooperative as a whole in payback for its initial funding.

The list of projects currently operating in the community is as follows:

PROYECTOS PRODUCTIVOS

Cattle Ranching
Fish Farming
Eco-Tourism
Reforestation

GRUPOS DE INTERÉS

Chicken coup
Pineapple (2)
Metals shop
Citrus (2)
Bread baking
Honey/Beekeeping
General stores
Pharmacy
Clinic
Carpentry
Bag weaving
Motor for making corn masa for tortillas
Day care
La Caseta
Fruit and Vegetable farming (7)
Seed bank

Each of these serves a vital purpose for the community, be it eggs to eat, antibiotics for infirmities, fabrication of rain gutters, or a cold strawberry *liquado* after a morning of *chopeando* with the machete.

I was able to spend some days in the *granja de gallinas* where the eggs are collected. I spent these days with Lucero, an associate, and current member of the directive junta. She explained to me how the project began with 200 hens that would produce about 160 eggs per day. For years these eggs were eaten only by the men and women of the community, and profits never allowed the women who toiled to enjoy any of the fruits of their labor. Only recently are some earnings being made to split among the women. Today over 1,000 hens are producing nearly 800 eggs per day. This prolific production allows many eggs to be brought to markets outside the community, and create more work for more individuals.

Part Two

ORGANIZATION OF WOMEN

One of the first organizations created within the framework of the cooperative was the organization of women. It is perhaps not unheard of in other communities in Guatemala, but certainly its scope and influence is much stronger than most women possess in the country. This coming together of the female population was one of the foremost endeavors of the young cooperative, ensuring the solidarity and unity of a feminine voice, so often overlooked in rural Latin America.

Apparent to the community was a sense that an organization of women could provide a well-informed, well-intentioned, and well-represented voice, integral to the equality and cohesiveness that was paramount to the success

of the community. A harmony of women brings about a rhythm to the working infrastructures of the multitude of projects in which the citizens participate.

Projects like egg production, *la caseta*, bread making, and all of the general stores are organized and operated by women. In addition to working in these time and energy consuming aspects of the cooperative, women remain responsible for their traditional gender roles of cooking, cleaning, sewing, and child care; however, expectations are undergoing a transformation. Each generation moves a little farther forward than their parents' and, in spending time with some of the adolescent girls, I observed their strong desire and sense of entitlement to an education and an autonomy that few of their mothers, and certainly their grandmothers ever possessed, or at least were unable to act upon. The young women of Nuevo Horizonte are seeing the women of the community playing an active, participatory, and influential role in the development and advancement of their community. They are witnessing among their mothers' generation, a shift in gender roles and an inclusion and respect for women nearly unprecedented in the region. This has been seen in the 15 women who comprise a small but influential portion of the 107 cooperative associates.

In keeping with the custom of branching out into neighboring communities, the women have spent time visiting with females from the less developed towns in the vicinity. Fifteen miles away is a village whose women live in a way very different from those in Nuevo Horizonte. These women are not allowed personal property and to sell even a single chicken is prohibited. Cases of domestic abuse in communities such as these, with some of the most extreme poverty in the country, are troublingly high. In such remote and insular areas, archaic social structures are able to perpetuate despite advances in women's rights in much of the developed world. Groups of women from Nuevo Horizonte visit places like this and let them know that there is a better life for them, and not just in the United States, or Europe, or even Guatemala City, but here in their own homes. They need only to organize, and to demand the respect and voice that they deserve. Women in these communities often laugh with embarrassment at the proposition of learning to read or tending to any vocation outside the traditional daily chores, but it is not to be dismissed so simply, and the envoys from Nuevo Horizonte are not speaking of anything impossible. Their circumstances as women-guerrillas afford them this clarity of perspective, with which comes also an obligation to share their knowledge and motivation.

I learned much about these aspects of the community from Mariella who works as the accountant in *La Casa del Pueblo*. She is another of the individuals attending the university, where she studies accounting and business. Her pride and passion for her work commanded immediate respect and I soon realized that for a woman this strong and this dedicated to her female *compas*, to be anything less than serious is to sell them all short.

The cause of the progressive view of women in Nuevo Horizonte is, in large part, unique to this community in particular. In the agricultural and impoverished history of Guatemala, examples of social progression are scarce. It took a guerrilla war to spur the realization that women are equal in the skills that they can provide. In many cases these women had to endure incredible hardships to join the movement. Doña Beatriz is an inspiring example of this. She left for the guerrilla with three children and was pregnant with her fourth. Her husband was killed by the army, and without an education or a job, she explained to me, with a bittersweet smile, that she had no other option. From 1981 until 1998 Doña Bea spent her life in the jungle with the rest of the guerrillas who would later found Nuevo Horizonte. During this time she saw her children twice. As I shook my head with awestruck admiration, she said, with the most heartfelt smile I have in my memory, "*Aquí estamos, con la vida.*" Here we are, with life. Doña Bea is the mayor of the community and represents it in the regional municipality. She is also the arbitrator who helps resolve any disagreements that occur between residents.

Circumstances in Nuevo Horizonte are quite unique in the forging of a new outlook on gender roles. Traditional roles of women and men broke down during the war. There was no space for machismo in the jungle. Consistent with so many other views of these people is a distinct perspective reached through the psychologically strenuous and enlightening undertaking of a guerrilla war.

Part Three

CONOCER LOS ENEMIGOS

What I learned from speaking with those who had fought was the way that the guerrillas have been able to avoid the mental illness and posthumous trauma that so often accompany years spent in such a struggle. It is important to remember that the women and men who chose to challenge the militaries and governments of Guatemala and the United States were not mercenaries, were not trained soldiers, and were not familiar with any type of organized warfare, save an uncanny skill with a machete. These guerrillas were humble people; laborers, farmers, students, children. They were faced with death. At the time they knew not why, they knew only of two choices, to fight, or to run.

Roni explained to me how he saw the decision as a 14 year old boy: *When you look up, and from nothing there appears a charging bull—what will you do? You see death, you smell it, and you have to choose. Will I run? No, it will surely catch me; and even if I escape, where will I go? Or will I stay, and take up a rock to throw—to defend myself, my people?*

Only two options existed for the Mayan people in the early 1980s, during the regimes of Romeo Lucas Garcia, of Efraín Ríos-Montt, and of Ronald Reagan. There was no justice for the people to turn to; no courts, no voice. All the powers of Guatemala were under the control of this vicious campaign, all were subject to its influence through fear and threat, and all obedient to its purpose—the purpose of genocide.

Of foremost importance for the guerrilla movement was to clearly identify its enemies. By doing this the movement never lost its human conscience by using violence when it was not absolutely necessary, or in ways that were torturous. Maintaining this code of ethics kept the minds of the guerrillas focused on their purpose, and kept them from using the inhumane viciousness practiced by their adversaries.

On the top of this list of enemies, as defined by the rebel forces, was North American imperialism. The economic system of the United States draws heavily on the cheap labor and resources of selectively developed nations like Guatemala. I use the term selectively developed because like many other resource rich “third world” countries, their infrastructure and public services are expertly developed by some of the most competent international contractors, but only inasmuch as the financial beneficiaries of the resources require. The railroads and ports of Guatemala for example, (owned by United Fruit and its subsidiaries at this time) were fabulously efficient at the exportation of the bananas and coffee meticulously extracted from the coastal and inland farms of the region. Energy and telecommunications systems were also wonderfully developed; technology that never reached the people whose sweat gave the systems life.

Where companies like United Fruit (now operating as *Chiquita*) cease their development is in the human capital forming the core of their labor force. The subjugation and exploitation of this workforce created a climate of hopelessness and fear. When this situation was stimulated by a catalyst as strong as the attempted genocide of the Mayan people of Guatemala, the mobilization of a dormant force was inescapable.

More than fruit companies and venture capitalists, the United States as a whole, under the leadership of Ronald Reagan, justified or ignored these massacres of peasants under the banner of fighting communism. (Americas Watch 1985, 7-8) Reagan’s doctrine of using global military force to outspend and outgun the Soviets set poisonous roots in Central America where similar wars were fought in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama. In no place, though, did the violence reach a level like that of Guatemala.

On December 4, 1982, Reagan visited Guatemala City and met with President Efraín Ríos-Montt. He had this to say about the most violent and torturous leader in Latin American history: “President Ríos-Montt is a man of great personal integrity and commitment...I know he wants to improve the quality of life for all Guatemalans and to promote social justice.” adding that he thought the government under Ríos-Montt was “getting a bum rap.” (Schirmer 1998: 33).

This statement came in the midst of the most violent period in the country’s modern history, where the bulk of the 626 documented massacres of entire villages occurred throughout the highlands and rainforests of Guatemala. On the very day of one of these massacres—one that found 268 dead, mostly women and children in Plan de Sánchez—President Ríos-Montt was quoted by the New York Times as saying in an address to a group of indigenous citizens: “If you’re with us, we’ll feed you; if not, we’ll kill you” (Bonner, p. 3).

Ríos-Montt enjoyed the support of many prominent Americans, most of whom were involved in Evangelical Churches. He considered himself personal friends with both Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, and was himself an ordained minister of the California based evangelical Church of the Word. His contacts in the United States were not limited to religious organizations, as he was also a graduate of the School of the Americas, in Fort Benning, Georgia, where he was trained in counter-insurgency techniques by the best teachers and resources the United States and its taxpayers had to offer.

Ríos-Montt was one of a group of individuals who were classified by the guerrillas as enemy combatants. The Guatemalan oligarchy was then and remains today an elite social stratus genetically and philosophically predisposed to the exploitation of the poor of the country. This handful of families and investment partners had controlled the economic situation for generations, and threats to that dominance are responsible for both the 1954 CIA orchestrated coup of Jacobo Arbenz, and the genocide devised by the governments and militaries of Guatemala and the United States.

The final enemy defined by the guerrillas was the Guatemalan soldier, the countryman whose life was no longer his own, but had become a perversion of nationalism. Rape, torture, infanticide, and indiscriminate hatred and racism were the common fare of this force. How the mind of a soldier becomes callous enough to take part in, and enjoy, such actions is not the purpose of this work, but indeed its role in the narrative cannot be overstated.

Once clearly defined, these forces were studied tirelessly by the resistance, to learn the weaknesses and points of attack most effective by such a small army, against such a large one. At any given time from the war's beginnings in the early 1960's to its close in 1996, the guerrilla force numbered no more than 3,000 throughout the whole of the country. Its assistance came from the villages from which the guerrillas fled and a cast of activists and sympathizers both native and foreign. The Guatemalan army had more than 60,000 active soldiers to combat the subversives. These soldiers received training, arms, and helicopters from the greatest military ever assembled. The capabilities of the United States military at this time in history was legendary; its reaches without bounds, its technology space aged, and its commander in chief wholly committed to bringing the cold war to a close by outspending and out-maneuvering the Soviets. The means by which Reagan achieved this end included undermining international law of conduct in his siphoning of munitions and equipment to remote corners of Latin America to exterminate indigenous populations (Americas Watch 1985b: 7-8).

Part Four

LA CLINICA

In the center of Nuevo Horizonte sits a white building with a stenciled title: *Clinica Dr. Ernesto "Che" Guevara*. . El Che is a constant presence in the community, his face and words decorating homes and murals throughout. His impassioned patriotism for all of Latin America is a reminder that the struggle endured by the people of Guatemala is not in vain, nor in solitude. The clinic is modest, and offers some basic medications, and a resident nurse with an impressive resume, but little formal training

Medical facilities in the community provide basic care through a clinic, dentist office and pharmacy. The dentist and nurse are Rosa and Napo, a wife and husband who were medics throughout the war and naturally assumed the positions in community. The nearest hospital is in Santa Elena, a city 35 minutes away by highway. Members of rural communities like Nuevo Horizonte and its neighbors virtually never have health insurance, and hospital visits are often far too expensive unless the situation is dire.

As a result of the near impossibility of treatment in the official hospital, this pair of practitioners offers their services to eleven neighboring communities. Treatment is pro-bono, as are all medicines and bandages that have been donated. Some things that must be bought, such as insulin and lancets, are sold at cost for those who require them. There are ten diabetics in the community who are the most consistent and demanding concern. During my stay there was a fear that funding for the clinic would be lost, putting many citizens in serious danger of not receiving the medicines they need. Difficulties like these are always faced with optimism and bravery, so goes the collective spirit of these people.

LA DENTISTA

Dentistry in Nuevo Horizonte is still quite a new endeavor. Often times dental care is not a high priority in poor areas. Dental hygiene in the country is dismal, and in many ways, is seen as a luxury. In 2004, a visit was paid to the community by an envoy of four dentists from Canada who had heard of this unique group of revolutionary citizens in the Petén. The dentists treated hundreds of patients in the short time they stayed—both citizens of Nuevo Horizonte, and of neighboring communities. All the examinations and procedures were done without charge. With the help of the friends and businesses that sponsored them, the dentists were able to leave behind toothbrushes and toothpaste for all, a mechanical dentist chair, and scores of utensils and treatment methods. Napo and others also received some basic training in dentistry and were given methods by which to continue their education.

Part Five

EDUCACIÓN EN LA GUERRILLA

For many in Nuevo Horizonte the life of armed resistance began early. Some joined the movement as early as eight years old. Here they chose a life fraught with danger and unspeakable horror, but more importantly an opportunity, however improbable, of preserving the livelihood of their people. They were literally fighting for the future of the Maya.

In the most remote parts of Guatemala that the guerrillas called home for all the years of this war was a way of life that was chosen, like that of Nuevo Horizonte, not born into. The boys and girls who became the men and women of the Guatemalan resistance were *campesinos*, peasants, and they knew little else but of their relationships within their communities and with the land on which they lived. None knew how to make war when they began, and few knew even how to read, write, or multiply. What the guerrilla provided—aside from an active role in the preservation of life and culture of the Mayan people—was an opportunity and a necessity to be educated.

The teacher-pupil relationship in a guerrilla war does not resemble that within a traditional school. All were students, all were teachers. Knowledge of a craft, some fractions, or how to read and write, were cherished, shared, and cultivated to bring all to a level of understanding about the tragically confusing situation in which they found themselves.

Those who possessed such knowledge had an obligation to share it, and those without, an obligation to learn. Fighting units in this type of war are not hierarchically stratified as they may be in traditional militaries. Although there were captains and specialists, there was not an absolute authority or executive in every matter—education especially. The group as a whole decided important matters, including punishments for misconduct.

Most common of punishments involved the learning of and teaching of a skill. The example given to me by Roni, who was the commander of many of those living in Nuevo Horizonte, was this: if someone committed an infraction, disrespected another or the workings of the group, he or she would have to learn the multiplication tables. It was his or her responsibility to find another person who knew them, and to request their instruction. Upon learning these skills, the person being punished would then be obligated to teach the rest of the unit what he or she had learned. This process was repeated for all kinds of skills, be it learning vowels, understanding capitalism, or how to use dynamite. Through this method, and others like it, the *guerrillas* were able to transform punishment into enlightenment.

EDUCACIÓN ALTERNATIVA

Of foremost importance is the education of the children. Schools were the first buildings erected after the homes were finished, and that more than anything is a testament to the dedication to knowledge and personal and community growth that is ever present in the *calles* of the town.

The Escuela Alternativa (Alternative High School) is in its second year of classes, offering the youth of the community and that of neighboring villages an authentic education without the pitfalls of the private system in the rest of the country. Public schooling stops in Guatemala after the fifth grade, forcing families to make a very important decision. They can either pay the 5,500 *quetzals* per year to send their child to a private academy, or end their schooling before they are even teenagers. To put that cost in perspective, an associate told me that he earned 18,000 *quetzals* each year. When one considers the cost of food, clothing, and other expenses that go along with supporting a family of seven, dedicating a third of one's yearly earnings to private schooling can be nearly impossible.

Although the price of tuition is the most apparent of the drawbacks of the private system, other sacrifices must be made both economically and pedagogically. In addition to the cost of tuition, schools mandate a strict dress code that is quite costly. Paramount for many in the community who send their children to the *Escuela Alternativa* is the curriculum that will be taught. These people do not see themselves as typical, and in kind, do not wish their children to receive a typical education. I was given a copy of the program for the *Escuela Alternativa*, and in reading the concepts and individuals on which the instruction is based, it is clear that these students will be learning from angles that promote social justice and the equality of the poor. The goal is to create professionals with a social conscience. From the ranks of the youth of Nuevo Horizonte there will hopefully some day be lawyers, doctors, and economists, who will never forget the struggles that occurred for them to reach those places.

Most of the teachers have experience in teaching dating back to the time of the conflict. Yolanda teaches at the *Escuela Alternativa* and has since its conception. She began teaching classes as an 11 year old during the war. At that time she knew how to read, which was a skill that few possessed. By virtue of this knowledge she was responsible for teaching both young and old, all that she knew. This encouraged her to continue her quest for knowledge on a personal level so that she might always be able to educate those around her.

Teachers explained the alternative school to me as educating with *un sentido humano*—human feeling. The histories being taught are not only those of the winners. They are learning the stories of the oppressed, of the exploited; and learning how to break that cycle for themselves and for the world. Daughters and sons of Nuevo Horizonte have a worldview fully unique to their time and place. Their parents are heroes, freedom fighters, in the truest sense. Truly all the children of Guatemala have been born fortunate for the time of their births. Truly they have entered as the seed that falls after the most violent and treacherous storm has ravaged, and left the ground soft and ready for growth anew. *El espíritu de rebelde* is alive in the youth. Their spirits are rebellious, but their part is not that of their mothers and fathers. Theirs is a struggle on the next level.

The war for survival in Guatemala is over; those who fought and who supported the revolution won their right to survive as a people. Now the fight has transformed strategically, but the goal is unchanged. The new struggle is in the courtrooms, doctors rooms, classrooms, and conference rooms. This phase of the revolution requires no violence as the first phase did. The new Guatemala has a past to remember and learn from but a future to fight for.

Indeed the community places one foot ahead of the other, one firmly launching the body out from past, the other striding diligently forward, forging a path to new destinations, ones whose potential have profound implications on the society of Guatemala.

LOS PATOJOS

Of the 411 residents in Nuevo Horizonte, 190 are under the age of 16. This baby boom that occurred after the war has many effects on the community, and, on a personal level, made my time there more enjoyable than I could have ever imagined. Every day the streets and playgrounds are alive with the squeals and songs of children. Their excitement and energy are infectious, and resonate throughout every corner of the town. I was blessed to share a home with two host brothers, Alex and Cristian, and their mother Irma. They, along with Pavel, offered me every generosity imaginable, and welcomed me into their home and cared for me as one of their own.

Each child is truly a blessing to those who, at one time, could hardly imagine such a fulfilling family life together with the other *compas*. There is a warm shine in the eyes of the parents as they watch their children play, and think of the future that awaits them—a future made possible by their own selflessness and courage.

Part Six

LA JUNTA DIRECTIVA

Setting up the governmental branches of the community was a serious undertaking, and approached with the mindset of a cohesive group of individuals, each understanding and cherishing his or her strengths and abilities. It is not coincidence that these men and women have both brought peace to their country, and in the 10 years hence have created a way of life where they are able to continue that struggle with the new weapon of subversion; challenging the way that society and commerce works in el Petén.

The directive junta is the central governing body, consisting of five members. Replacement occurs on a two year cycle, with three new members one term, and two the next. Presidential and Vice Presidential transfers occur simultaneously during one transition, and Treasurer, Secretary, and Speaker the next. This staggering of officials maintains a continuity within the group so that new additions are not overwhelmed as they begin by working alongside experienced individuals.

Roles of the five members are varied, and encompass aspects of each initiative of the community. They are responsible for the organization of new projects, now consisting of different semi-collective proposals that are made, and the funding and support thereof. These men and women spend their days in *La Casa del Pueblo*, a city hall of sorts, in which decisions, contacts, and compromises are made.

As visitors come to the community with varying plans and interests concerning their stay, they have meetings with the junta to decide how to go about making the most of their time. A morning soon after the arrival of a group or individual would involve a gathering of each of the five and those that have come. I met with the junta on a few occasions, each time arranging meeting times with various community members and discussing some broader and finer points of my research and their willingness to accommodate.

ASEMLEA GENERAL

The General Assembly is the convening of all of the 107 associate members of the cooperative, addressing the direction of the community on every level. Every three months the assembly takes place, featuring presentation updates on education, health, production, virtually every undertaking of the citizens. The assembly is parted into three commissions: The Commission of Vigilance, The Administrative Council, and The Educational Council.

Each of these groups is responsible for the direction of broad areas of the organization, activation, and development of their respective fields. The Commission of Vigilance assures the direction of the cooperative has a proper path. It is the job of these individuals to question the reports and methods of the others, if not by virtue of ones own contention, than for the clarity and necessity of a diverging viewpoint to further refine a motive. Like any house of congress, parliament, or tribunal, the General Assembly is not a forgiving atmosphere. Passions run very high; there is a thick calm throughout the streets because of everyone's forgoing of the days traditional work to come together and agree on direction for the lives of individuals and of the collective.

The Commission of Administration has as its role the oversight of managerial constructs, assuring the smooth progressions and transitions of operational systems. Interpretation of the constitution and uniformity in procedure are main goals of this unit. Also at stake is the oversight of implementation on a concrete level of the many ideas and proposals agreed upon in the assembly.

The Commission of Education focuses on the workings of the three schools in the community. It works with instructors to organize curriculum, allocate funds, and define the purpose of the school in developing its students to succeed in their continuation of the struggle for equality in Guatemala.

Another branch of this assembly consists of the *Jerente General*, an individual who is to assure the correct movement of money throughout the many avenues it travels within the political and economic systems of the community.

Each division of the people that undertakes the varying enterprises, unites during the assembly, each person holding profound vested interest in every topic. To communicate is to perpetuate that wartime ideal of knowing, personally and intricately, each moving part of the machine. War demands complete poise and preparation for any possible situation; in this respect, it mirrors the governance of a community. Specialists work in each field of the cooperative but they are by no means exclusively partitioned in their own fields. Rather they share ideas and training with each other as it may become necessary knowledge for them down the road.

Part Seven

BOSQUE DE LA VIDA

Comprising 110 hectares of the 900 hectares that make-up the farm is a natural forest that has been allowed to grow freely for the nine years since the land was settled. When the group arrived in 1998 the entirety of the land was savannah, annually burned by its owner to maintain its fertility. This expansive section has been left un-tampered so that it may grow of its own volition, and draw plant and wild-life. The *Bosque de la Vida* is so-named due to its likeness of the forests that concealed and supported the lives of the guerrillas during the conflict. Many years were spent with few resources to rely on, save those provided by the benevolent forest.

I had many opportunities to walk throughout the *Bosque de la Vida* with Tono, the man responsible for much of the eco-tourism project, and for the knowledge of the forest. We would walk through the balmy trails, machetes in hand, ambling through the labyrinth of giant ferns, colossal trees, and brilliantly colored jungle flowers. Amidst the wealth of life encompassing us on all sides I was struck with a profound appreciation for the guerrillas who called it home for the majorities of their lives. Tono shared with me stories of the war—of out-maneuvering thousands of Guatemalan soldiers equipped with helicopters and rockets—in which they used only the knowledge of the forest. He told me also of the life-sustaining gifts that the plants offered up so selflessly.

It is believed by many in the community that within the forest lie remedies to any ailment, respite from any thirst, and shelter from any storm. Tono showed me the plants that are used medicinally both now, and during the war. I tasted the leaf, that when made into a bitter tea, can treat malaria in much the same way as the bitter quinine pills I was taking weekly throughout my stay. I was shown the vine, that when cut in just the right spot, gushes water, even in the parched months of the dry season. I was able to see first hand how this forest gave life. With each new species that migrates to the *Bosque de la Vida*, the inhabitants of Nuevo Horizonte feel the scales balancing once again; as the forest they have nurtured offers itself to life, as the lives of the guerrillas had theirs offered to them.

CAPITANA MARIA

Although the vast majority of guerrillas came from the lowest class, or the universities and activist middle class, a few were unlikely revolutionaries, whose respect was to be earned in unique way from the rest of the status equal guerrillas. One such soldier was Capitana Maria. She was the captain of a great many of the women and men of Nuevo Horizonte, earning their love, admiration, and trust for her inspirational bravery.

Capitana Maria's parents were some of the wealthiest coffee farmers in the country. She lived a life complete with every luxury, every opportunity, and every reason to follow in their footsteps at the top of a regal type of aristocracy that wielded the fate of Guatemala at its whim. This path was not hers however, and she chose to sacrifice the life of a princess for that of a peasant. Nearly two decades of war without comfort brought this woman a respect from her comrades that cannot be measured.

Once the peace was reached, Maria returned to Guatemala City with her husband, and soon contracted terminal brain cancer. Her dying request to her comrades in Nuevo Horizonte was to spread her ashes over the planted seeds of a *ceiba* in the central park of the community. *Ceibas* are the sacred tree of the Maya, thought to be the lord of trees; one of the most representative and symbolic plants of the country and its people. Maria's waking life ended 1 January, 2000. The morning of the 2nd, the men and women of the community began building a short wall in the shape of a giant heart surrounding the trees seeds, now buried under the sprinkled ashes of a hero.

DESARROLLO INTEGRAL

The outline set forth in those first days on the land was of an integral community, functioning on as many levels as suited the varying interests and ambitions of its citizens. The word integral is applied to many of the systems at work in the community because of the connotations it evokes: growth from part to whole, moving steadily and with great deliberation through the detailed steps; creating infrastructural scaffolding in education and production, providing the citizens and their cooperators not only vivid, carefully laid plans for the short-term, but a cohesive plan for continuing development; and the awareness of the community as a whole of the importance of its work, and the patience and vigilance necessary to see it through.

As my understanding of Nuevo Horizonte transformed from one of an outsider looking in, to that of an insider looking out, I felt an ever-stronger solidarity with their cause. This is no doubt a natural sentiment of anyone who spends a period of time as a temporary member of a community, but for guests of this place there is perhaps something more profound at work. The feeling is more substantial than a simple appreciation for the revolutionary attitudes and experiences of a community such as this. Awe, respect, humility, and inspiration were ever present in my mental atmosphere. The meanings of these words changed as I learned more, and shared more with these people.

LA LUCHA SIGUE

The struggle indeed continues. As I have attempted to convey throughout this work, the women and men of this community do not wish to continue this revolution in their remote corner of Latin America. This struggle is shared throughout the entire region by communities like theirs. The difference between them is the level of commitment and discipline that Nuevo Horizonte possesses. In less than ten years they have created a system and a cooperative that is unparalleled anywhere else in the country. It is their refusal to be satisfied with their success that has been an inspiration to their neighbors and to your humble narrator.

Their vision of unity and subversion is ambitious, but they have known little else. The creation of a cooperative of cooperatives is the ultimate goal. If their region could foster a development of like-minded farmers and business people, the collective could undermine the entire corrupt system of the country in which they live. They wish for the simplicity of providing goods directly from producer to consumer. As the system works now, the producers must sell their products to those who have the means of transportation and the proper licensing to distribute them. Naturally these business people in the middle are the ones who reap the largest profits and work to maintain the castes that have been in place in Guatemala since the conquest. This community represents more than economics. It represents a struggle for fairness begun on the battlefield, and carried on in the reality that so many of us take for granted.

The savvy and imagination that is possessed by this group was not born on the farm or in the office. These intangible qualities that enabled such success and ambition are made possible by the experiences they share. Organization is supreme in all their endeavors, a skill forged during a time when a miscalculation could mean death or worse. Nuevo Horizonte is a self-described *model community*. They are well aware of their potential and will pursue their strengths in this journey towards a just Guatemalan society. If the dream of Nuevo Horizonte is realized, if its people and their aspirations and creativity can continue to blossom, then the shape of Guatemalan society can begin to change. Perhaps the men and women who began this struggle will not be alive to see the day that their vision comes into full focus, but their bravery and diligence in the face of overwhelming obstacles will ensure their legacy as the authentic revolutionaries that they are.

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