

Safe Passage Holiday Newsletter

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A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

What a pleasure to greet all of you around the world from Guatemala, where it has finally stopped raining! You can imagine what a relief this is for our families working at the garbage dump and living in houses that are not waterproof. The economic crisis is felt as well in Guatemala: prices for food have increased almost by 20%, and income for our families at the dump is low these months. Some of the moms mention that there are days when they only make a dollar.

From the bottom of my heart I want to thank you, our many friends and donors, for your generous support that enables us to continue our life-changing work. At Safe Passage, we are not only providing education but also offering a safe place, health care, nutritious meals and a nurturing environment to almost 500 children, 50 moms and their families.

Last week, our Student Council invited me to their meeting. We are in the midst of preparing our 2009 budget, and I wanted to meet with the group in order to hear and include their suggestions. Since January, they have shown to be responsible, passionate and caring young people. In just a year they have organized events, accomplished quite a few goals and voiced opinions that are taken very seriously. When I asked them to identify the items on their wish list for the coming year, I was moved listening to their answers:

- * Establish an emergency food basket for students who are hungry at times



when there is not enough food in the house to feed everyone. Council members would be willing to coordinate handing out a bag of rice or beans to students in need;

- * Include more soap and shampoo in our monthly food bags, to smell nice and feel good;
- * Provide an extra toothbrush to bring home, to be able to brush their teeth over the weekends when they are not in the project;
- * Make available an emergency box of simple medicine, in case a student has a headache over the weekend when our clinic is closed;
- * Distribute an extra pair of shoes and sneakers during the year, since our students receive shoes at the start of the school year that are often their only pair;
- * Although they were grateful for the variety in the snacks at the program, they preferred a simple cup of oatmeal; it's warm and fills your stomach longer.

I cannot tell you how touched I was to be sitting among the Student Council members, seeing their serious faces and listening to their wishes. They are teenagers, young people with dreams and feelings, similar to young boys and girls anywhere in the world. I was very clear in my statement, "Just ask me for anything you would want!" and this was the list they gave, full of basic, simple things.

Sometimes we think it takes the world to change a life, and we forget how simple it can be. Changing a life is about opening your heart to someone; encouraging children to aim high and to believe in themselves; giving mothers, who have never had a moment in their lives to care about themselves, the chance to study, become nurses and feel proud!

I am so grateful to be surrounded by an amazing team of capable, passionate, dedicated people from Guatemala and beyond, who are working with our children and families, transforming lives with their energy, care and love.

We see miracles happening at Safe Passage every day, and we thank you for being such an important part of creating these miracles. Happy Holidays!!!!

Con mucho cariño,

Barbara Nihjuis



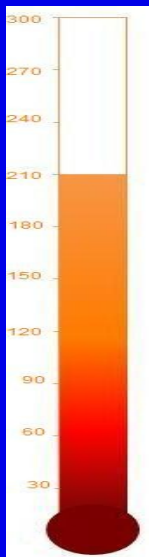
This photograph, taken by Catharine Killien of Seattle, Washington, won Best In Show at the Second Annual Safe Passage Photo Contest. It will be featured in the 2009 Safe Passage Calendar.

Our Mission

Safe Passage empowers the poorest, at-risk children of the Guatemala City garbage dump by creating opportunities and fostering dignity through the power of education. Within a safe and caring environment, every child participates in an integrated program that fosters optimism, good health, educational achievement, self-esteem and confidence. Children and parents discover that, through their own efforts, they can move beyond poverty.



Safe Passage athletes have shown tremendous potential after just five months of weekly swimming instruction. Six children have been invited to train with the Federación Guatemalteca de Natación's prestigious water polo team, an honor that marks the ability to transcend socioeconomic boundaries through sports. Guatemala City United Way will continue to fund our swimming lessons in 2009.



We are this close to reaching our 2008 goal of 300 new child sponsors!

Status of Education in Guatemala, The Facts:

Among the countries in Central America, Guatemala has the lowest level of literacy among young people (15-24 years) and the lowest percentage of students starting first grade who continue to fifth grade.

Safe Passage is providing tuition payments, school uniforms, books and educational support to over 500 children who live in the vicinity of the dump and are pursuing their education.

Safe Passage Plans for 2009

It has become increasingly clear that in order to best help the children in our program, Safe Passage must foster connections throughout the garbage dump community. In an effort to achieve this community-minded vision, the organization seeks to partner with other groups in the area and to implement programs that strengthen support networks and teach leadership skills.

Empowerment through Play and Game, a program developed to reflect the results of a study funded by Coca-Cola and led by Hanneke Velthuisen, will be launched at Safe Passage in January 2009. Promoting fitness, healthy bodies and healthy minds that are ready to learn and lead, this program will include soccer, basketball,

lacrosse, swimming, break dance, and martial arts for every child attending Safe Passage. Through special organized activities, Safe Passage expects to reach an additional group of families and participants. Ultimately, Empowerment through Play and Game will create opportunities for our children to gain confidence and leadership skills as they participate in community-wide activities.

The success of Safe Passage's lacrosse and break dance initiatives and Guatemala City United Way swimming classes has already shown how athletics can teach valuable skills, prevent gang membership and increase preparedness for learning. We are enthusiastically awaiting the

upcoming implementation of the larger-scale Empowerment through Play and Game!

Safe Passage is also excited about the potential for creating a community center in Guatemala City. Our children and their families would benefit from the creation of a space where they would be welcome to meet, play and learn outside of the program's regular operating hours.

Safe Passage is aware of plans that are underway to improve the economics and the environment of the garbage dump, with collection of methane gas, creation of a local energy supply and building of an industrial park and commercial center all scheduled for the immediate future.

Update on Child Sponsorship

As this newsletter goes to print, 210 new child sponsors have enrolled so far in 2008! Thank you to all who have made this important ongoing commitment to a child. Your contributions and correspondence mean so much to the children and their families.

This year, sponsorship has become an increasingly significant percentage of our operating budget, growing from 17% in 2007 to 25% in

2008. The support of our many child sponsors is certainly appreciated and necessary.

July and October proved especially exciting, with 28 and 30 new sponsorships, respectively. In July, when the Great Lakes Friends came together in Michigan for their annual Fiesta, the group recruited eight sponsors! A team composed of members from Rotary 7790 added an additional ten sponsorships

to October's monthly count. Thank you!

There are still many children in need of a sponsor, and we are within reach of our ambitious 2008 goal of 300 new sponsors. Please consider sponsoring a child today. For more information, contact sponsorship@safepassage.org.

Every child needs a Safe Passage.

Safe Passage Celebrates Twelve Graduates

With the end of another school year in Guatemala, Safe Passage is extremely proud to announce that four of our students are among the newest crop of high school graduates! This exciting accomplishment is just the beginning for Wendy Aguilar, Laidy Julissa, Edgar Monroy, and Hugo Ramirez, who are now enrolled in an employment training program called PODER. This program is run by Common Hope, a Minnesota-based NGO that shares Safe Passage's mission of eradicating poverty in Guatemala through education and opportunity. "PODER" is both an acronym for the Program for Employment Opportunities and Achievement and the Spanish word for "empowerment." As participants

in PODER, Safe Passage's graduates attend workshops that offer resume help, interview preparation and skills development for pursuing a career or higher education. Safe Passage is pleased to have this promising opportunity to partner with Common Hope, and we are confident that by collaborating with other organizations in Guatemala, we can most effectively support the community in and around the Guatemala City garbage dump. Thank you, Common Hope and Country Director Tamalyn Gutierrez, for all your support and for including our graduates in your wonderful program!

In addition to celebrating our four high school graduates, Safe Passage applauds eight mothers who have

received their sixth grade diploma through their participation in the Adult Literacy Program. This year, the program grew to include fifty students between the ages of 18 and 84 years old. This year's eight graduates have learned to read and write at a sixth grade level, as well as developed computer skills and business savvy through a jewelry-making program. The women's education will not end here, as all eight women will attend an Accelerated Adult Education Program enabling them to complete three years of schooling in just two years' time. Two of the women, Flor and Carolina, will further their education through nursing school, thanks to a scholarship provided by the Texas-based group Shared Beat.

Seven New Members Join the Board of Directors

Safe Passage's Board of Directors welcomed three new members at its quarterly meeting held in late September, as well as another four individuals who joined the December phone conference. We look forward to benefiting from the expertise and passion that each brings to Safe Passage.

Jordan Denning, one of three brothers of late founder Hanley Denning, joins the Board with a special connection to the future of Safe Passage's children and the preservation of Hanley's vision for the Project. Jordan lives in Yarmouth, Maine, and is General Counsel at Shipyard Brewing Company, LLC.

Sandra Gonzalez, born in Guatemala, has been an instrumental force behind the planning and realization of the Early Childhood Center's kitchen. She is especially proud to report that there are now no cases of malnutrition in the Guardarí. She lives in Guatemala City with her husband and their children.



Jordan visits with Emily, his sponsor child, and her siblings.

Juan Mini is a native of Guatemala and works in real estate development. He was introduced to Safe Passage through his father, who was a friend of Hanley. Juan is a landowner in Guatemala City's Zone 3, and his knowledge of development plans for the garbage dump area is proving especially helpful for Safe Passage.

Jacob Carter, a current leader of the Boston Friends Group, adds an important perspective to the Board, as he is a former long-term Safe Passage volunteer. In

Guatemala, his positions included Volunteer Coordinator, English and guitar teacher, and Library Coordinator.

Drew Casertano has visited Safe Passage several times, most recently with American lacrosse coaches and athletes for the Maya Lacrosse Festival in August. He resides in New York, where he is the Headmaster of Millbrook School.

Rich Howe has been an active member of our Finance Committee and has provided expertise and sound advice during this economically challenging time. He has visited Safe Passage numerous times with his wife and two grown children. He resides in Milton, Massachusetts, with his wife.

Leslie Iwerks was introduced to Safe Passage through her work on the Oscar®-nominated documentary *Recycled Life*, which she created and co-produced in 2006. The powerful film continues to inspire and educate people around the world. Leslie lives in California, where she continues to create award-winning documentary films.

"As Board members, we are stewards not only of the operational side of things, but also of preserving Hanley's vision and spirit."
-Jordan Denning, Safe Passage Board Member

Program Updates in 2008

- * The **English Program** has expanded, ensuring that every child at the Educational Reinforcement Center receives 30 minutes of language instruction daily.
- * A year has passed since the Social Development Department first implemented the **Peace Program**. In the coming year, the monthly values taught each day will be incorporated into the philosophy of Safe Passage's entire educational program.
- * In 2008, Safe Passage was fortunate to welcome 124 short and long term **volunteers**, who hailed from 14 countries, including 22 US states.
- * Thanks to the group Shared Beat, all children at Safe Passage now have medical records. These files show that our **Nutrition Program** is working: every child has achieved a healthy height-to-weight ratio.

Based on our successes this year, Safe Passage will open its doors to an additional 100 children in 2009.

Friends Groups Thrive

Volunteers from around the world have continued to support Safe Passage and foster their local Safe Passage community by participating in Friends Groups. 2008 saw the continued success of groups in the United States and Europe, as well as promising beginnings in Boston (MA), Atlanta (GA), and the Casco Bay area (ME). 2009 approaches with new Groups emerging in Colorado, Canada, Washington, DC, California, and other parts of Maine and Michigan.

If you are interested in joining or creating a Friends Group in your area, please contact outreach@safepassage.org.

Spotlight on Our Children

Oscar Huit, pictured at right with his winning design, is not only the artist responsible for creating the Safe Passage Summer Camp t-shirt but also an outstanding student with a scholarship to Kinal, a prestigious technical training center in Guatemala City. Twelve-year-old Oscar has recently completed the sixth grade, as have all the students in his Safe Passage classroom that is taught by

Miriam Orozco. Oscar conceived of his t-shirt design during classroom time, incorporating his love of nature into his illustration. The theme for this year's Summer Camp is "Planet Earth," so Oscar has drawn a pair of mountains with a lake at their base and the sun's rays visible between their peaks. He would like one day to work as a veterinarian, a teacher, or a profession that relates to nature. We

know that Oscar, who is described by his teacher Miriam as "supportive of his classmates, very creative, smart and kind," will wear this special t-shirt with pride!

Oscar Huit, 12, holds his contest-winning t-shirt design, Planeta Tierra ("Planet Earth").





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Hope, Education, Opportunity

"It takes very little from us to make a big difference to Safe Passage's children, families and staff. I've learned that from being involved with this program, you get back so much more than you give; that making personal connections makes giving meaningful; and that making a lasting difference for good is not only the right thing to do, it feels good too."

- Jake Gallagher, age 17, 2008 Recipient of the Outstanding Youth in Philanthropy Award, from the Association of Fundraising Professionals of Northern New England

Safe Passage relies on the generosity of donors like you to support the children of the Guatemala City garbage dump community. Life is difficult for our children and their families, and they can use your help more now than ever. Without your help, this organization would cease to exist. It is critical we end 2008 and begin 2009 on a sound fiscal basis. This year, thanks to hard work of the Board, staff, and our many volunteers, we have both expanded our efforts and at the same time cut costs by 15%. THANK YOU for all you have done and continue to do for Safe Passage.

If you wish to make a year-end gift, please visit the Safe Passage website at www.safepassage.org. You are also invited to make a donation by using the enclosed form and return envelope.

**Gifts can be sent to:
Safe Passage
c/o Key Bank Gift Processing
PO Box 712849
Cincinnati, OH 45271-2849**

2008 Highlights from Around the World

The year 2008 has been filled with countless celebrations, fundraisers, concerts, and presentations, thanks to Safe Passage supporters like you. We appreciate the endless generosity, creativity, and passion you demonstrate on a daily basis and recognize your efforts, including:



On **January 18**, the one-year anniversary of founder Hanley Denning's tragic death, Safe Passage friends around the world participated in Honoring Hanley. Events included a mass in Guatemala, a gathering and reception in Maine, and a benefit art opening in North Carolina.

The 4th Annual 5K took place on **April 26** in Cumberland, ME. Runners and walkers alike enjoyed the spring weather and the chance to come together on behalf of Safe Passage.

On **May 22**, children at NYC's Public School 3 participated in a dance-a-thon to benefit Safe Passage. Sixteen enthusiastic elementary school students danced for sixty songs!

Las Sillas de Esperanza ("Chairs of Hope"), designed and painted by children at Safe Passage, made their debut on **May 8** at the Marroquin Museum in Guatemala City when over 400 people came to see the artwork and support Safe Passage. On **July 4**, the chairs were the focus of an event at Antigua's Sevilla School, where over 50 were sold. Today, the Sillas have traveled to homes and offices in California, Canada, Maine, Michigan, New York, North

Carolina and Texas!

On **July 16**, the Great Lakes Friends hosted the 3rd Annual Fiesta in Traverse City, MI. This year's event, entitled "A World United," featured an art exhibit organized in collaboration with a number of local artists, as well as a recreation of Antigua's Mercado.

Turning 15 was an especially joyous occasion for 13 Safe Passage teenagers and their families when, on **July 19**, a Support Team from Maine organized a Quinceañera ("Sweet 15"), complete with dresses, dancing, a buffet, and special speeches!



For the two days of **August 20 & 21**, Safe Passage's lacrosse team hosted three other teams for the Maya Lacrosse Festival. Athletes attended clinics led by coaches and players from New York and Maine, marking the rising popularity of the sport in Guatemala.

On **September 16**, the Casco Bay Friends hosted the First Annual Golf Tournament in Poland Spring, ME. Nearly 100 golfers participated and were joined for dinner by a group traveling to the golf course via Chicken Bus!

On **October 8**, Las Manos de Christine held a reception, dinner and art auction at

Antigua's Meson Panza Verde to raise money for Safe Passage's English Program. During the event, student Daniel Pineda brought guests to tears as he read his award-winning English essay, "My Idea of a Bright Future."

In Carrboro, NC, the North Carolina Friends held their 5th Annual Benefit Concert on **October 18**, which included a performance by magician and Safe Passage supporter Josh Lozoff.

On **October 20 & 22**, Reed Smith LLP hosted three presentations in San Francisco and Oakland, CA. Executive Director Barbara Nihhuis, visiting for the occasion, connected with supporters at each event.

In Germany on **October 24**, the Latin-Jazz Bossa Nova Charity Concert was hosted by AMLA (Asociacion de Mujeres Latino Americanas) to support the nutrition program at Safe Passage.

The launch celebration for *Our Daily Tread* was held at Maine's Portland Museum of Art on **December 4**. This beautiful book of quotes, personal essays, documentary photography, and children's artwork is now available for purchase. Please visit www.dailytread.com for more information.

