

Rancho Mastatal Updates

July 2008

Welcome to yet another behind schedule newsletter. With everything going on these days and the lack of Sparky's skill and supervision, it's just been plain hard to keep this publication up and running at times. Nevertheless, we recognize it's value, even if just to document the history of the Ranch and the community of Mastatal. It can be pure entertainment at times to go back and read through past editions. With that said, that last few years of our newsletter are indeed archived on our website. Check out some of the oldies if you'd like. There's been some Pulitzer quality writing from time to time.

And even when not, the updates have always provided loads of entertainment for its readers.

Our upcoming cookbook may someday be followed by the Ranch's story as told through our monthly newsletters. With new babies and a few weddings the past few weeks have been happy ones for many families in and around Mastatal, but unfortunately we have some sad news to share with all of our readers too this month. The Tropics, especially in rural areas like that where we live, can be extremely trying for domesticated canines and felines. Not only are there a host of illnesses that can befall our furry friends, but speeding cars and vindictive neighbors can shorten the lives of our pets. Chingo, a mainstay at the Ranch, Kattia's house, and our neighborhood for more than four years, met his maker after a battle with a mysterious illness that took him down in a matter of days. He died late one night on the porch of the Ranch. We had a beautiful ceremony for him in the Ranch's pet cemetery, now home to three dogs and a cat. Chingo brought happiness to countless individuals at the Ranch. His prance, undying love for people and beautiful eyes will be sadly missed around here. May he rest in peace.

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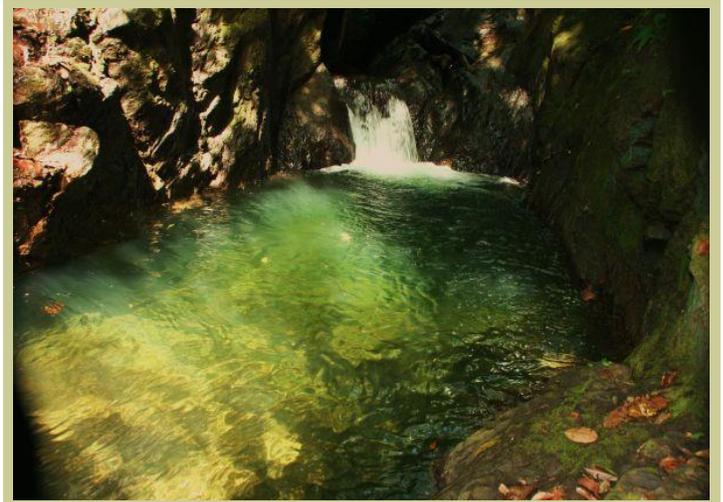
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The sweet little swimming hole just a short hike down the path from ranch house

photo by Mark

RM Program News: The Legend of Ole Bones: Lessons from a Mastatal Murder

Preface: This story is based on a real chicken that currently lives on the outskirts of Mastatal. We do not know where he is originally from. All we know is that this story is an oral tradition, passed down through several generations. We were lucky enough to hear it and thought that the only appropriate thing to do was transcribe it and submit it to the Rancho Mastatal Newsletter.

Once upon a time, in the lovely animal community of Mastatal, there was nobody more respected than the mayor – Mayor McFeathers, the greatest chicken of them all. He and his affectionate chicken wife Delilah had a young, budding marriage. They lived on a local farm just west of the center of Mastatal. Every morning McFeathers would rise at the reasonably early hour of 6 and do his mayoral duty to the wake the community for a good day of labor, life, and beautiful, pure, sweet, unadulterated love. McFeathers and Delilah would pass the days pecking about and whispering sweet nothings in each other's chicken ears, not a care or worry in the world. They were happy in their farm community and were respected by the many pigs, horses, and cows amongst which they lived. Everything was just swell – until one fateful morning that would go down in history as one of the most momentous days that Mastatal has ever had. McFeathers awoke at the crack of dawn and skipped gleefully out to the farmyard to wake his farmer friends. After calling his gentle and majestic call, he went about pecking the yard for good seeds to bring home to his wife just like he did everyday. He was pecking his way past the kitchen window of his owner's house when he overheard a conversation going on between the farmer and his wife.

"Well, I know those chickens have been nothing but nice to us. In fact, they are probably the greatest chickens since the dawn of mankind, but we've got to eat something. We have guests coming over and we'll need a nice dinner to impress them." Mrs. Farmer explained.

"Alright, alright," Mr. Farmer conceded. "Which one are we gonna kill?"

"Well," Mrs. Farmer continued, "all of the hens produce eggs just the same, so just kill the plumpest one." McFeathers froze, his heart beating in his chest. He knew that all the seeds he collected for his wife had made her the plumpest of the bunch and it was her life that the farmers were soon to be taking. McFeathers thought back to one of the many lessons his father had taught him as a young rooster about not overfeeding the woman that you love. He could recall his father's words with perfect clarity: "And that's why you don't overfeed your wife!" The lesson was all too clear now.

McFeathers was jolted from his thoughts as the farmer immediately exclaimed, "I know just the chicken you want honey! Have you ever met Delilah?"

"No, not her," said the farmer's wife in despair. "She is by far the most affectionate chicken this side of the Rio Negro." Eager to spare the very loving Delilah but hungry nonetheless the farmer racked his brain for alternative solutions.

"Wait!" Mr. Farmer bellowed. "Why don't we just kill McFeathers? He doesn't produce any eggs and we can find a new rooster at the drop of a feather." Unable to tear himself from hiding below the window, McFeathers listened on.

"No, no", His wife mumbled, "McFeathers wakes us up every morning, and I haven't got the money for an alarm clock, he is more timely than any rooster I've ever owned, and he understands Spanish as well".

"Touché, my dear wife," Mr. Farmer answered, "As much as I hate to do it, I shall butcher Delilah and the matter will be solved." As Mr. Farmer arose from the table and sauntered toward the shed to get his axe, McFeathers, now terrified, bolted into action in an attempt to save his dear wife. He ran to their home beside the barn, splitting through a group of piglets that he could hear snickering and laughing in the diminutive way that pigs are so known for. It was the same group of piglets that, just months earlier, he had taught Spanish in an effort to mend the ancient rivalry between chickens and piglets (which we do not have time to explain at this juncture, which is neither here nor there). He reached their humble abode beside the barn, gasping for breath as he arrived. He immediately explained the situation to his wife, who was busy pecking seeds out of McFeathers' hobo bindle which was awarded to him by the community for his outstanding public servitude. Through desperate breaths he recounted what he had heard and they ran to hide in the old horse trough in the barn in hopes that Mr. Farmer would eventually give up his search and kill the second fattest chicken, Mrs. Butterworth, their dear friend and neighbor. It wasn't much of a plan, but it was the only hope the young couple had. Delilah was utterly terrified, so much so that she was almost unable to function.

McFeathers frantically exclaimed "You must be brave, my darling chicken....this is no time to be a chicken!!!" Delilah was able to pull herself back together and become her normal affectionate but this time uncharacteristically brave self.

The farmer crossed the yard and approached their house just minutes later, with McFeathers and Delilah watching through a crack in the planks of the barn wall. When the farmer arrived he was surprised to find it empty except for McFeathers' half full hobo bindle, which he knew meant that both McFeathers and Delilah were on to him, and he made his way around the yard, axe in hand, looking for the chicken couple that was so desperately trying to avoid being torn apart. Grasping a wood plank for buoyancy in the icy cold waters of the horse trough, McFeathers whispered to his wife, "I am the king of the world!....oh, I mean ...I will never let go." After what felt like hours of sitting in the icy water watching the farmer from the dark barn McFeathers' core temperature began to plummet and he got what is commonly known as chicken bumps. The farmer seemed on the brink of surrender when he suddenly made his way toward the group of piglets that lived between his house and the barn.

"You see Delilah recently, boys?" the farmer asked his piglets. The piglets, always looking to gain a leg up on the hated chicken population, were eager to explain the situation to the farmer.

"Sure have Mr. Farmer, I know exactly where she is," the oldest piglet piped out, "and I'll tell you too, if you promise not to slaughter one of us come Christmas season." For everyone knows that Christmas is the traditional pig eating season and it loomed large in the minds of the small pigs. The farmer thought for a time, though most of his cognitive efforts were devoted to wondering how

the piglets had learned Spanish, and then he spoke again.

"Alright piglets, you tell me where Delilah is, and I'll give y'all a free pass come Christmastime." He knew full well that no such deal could be struck between self-respecting farmers and piglets, but he let them operate under the assumption for the time being.

"She's a hid'n in the back of the barn!" yelled the runt of the litter, "I saw her run in there with McFeathers just minutes ago."

"That'll do pig, that'll do," said the farmer in an English accent, as Tico farmers have for generations.

McFeathers, outraged, recalled a lesson passed on to him from the previous chicken mayor: "And that's why you don't teach Spanish to piglets!" It was all too clear now. The farmer, perplexed and hungry for dinner, strode into the barn as McFeathers and Delilah broke out in a sweat even in the icy waters of the trough. Before he could even react, McFeathers watched as the farmer reached into their hiding spot in the Artic-like waters, ripped his wife away from him, and with a swift motion of his axe, took her head clean off. McFeathers watched in absolute horror as she ran about the barn, headless, until at last he fainted from the shock of it. Many speculate that his shock was partially attributable to the frigid conditions he had been subjected to over the previous 10 minutes.

McFeathers awoke several hours later to find himself alone, horrified, warmer, and thirsty. Thirsty for the blood of those who had betrayed him. In the time that had passed since his wife's murder his heart had filled with hate and he began to despise everything. He hated the piglets for betraying him, he hated Mrs. Farmer for suggesting that Delilah be murdered, he hated himself for getting her plump off of seeds from the yard, he hated the farmer for butchering his wife in cold blood, and most of all, he hated the fact that the farmer's wife insisted that the horses be treated to ice in the trough water.

On that fateful evening, as he watched the guests gather and feast on his wife at the farmer's table, he overheard one of the guests complaining "I don't even like chicken that much." This stung like a dagger in the heart of McFeathers, but it hurt the farmer as well. The farmer remembered a lesson that his neighbor had taught him years ago about entertaining guests. He could just hear him say, "And that's why you don't invite friends over for a casual dinner!" It was all too clear now.

In his tormented state McFeathers decided once and for all that he would get revenge on the farmer, and all the local people who ate chickens for fun, even though they didn't particularly like chicken that much.

By nightfall his anger had become rage, a rage so powerful that his feathers stood on end, almost as if they were trying to escape his body. So much had changed in him that he was a new chicken altogether, and all he could think of was revenge. After nightfall he lay awake, as his anger slowly boiled over in a hysterical rage. He slipped from

his bed in the wee hours of the morning, and as the rage pulsed through his veins, he marched toward the farmer's house. As he marched across the yard, his desperate grief possessing him, he stumbled across the very piglets that had betrayed him sleeping in their pen, and before he knew what he was doing he grabbed the runt of the litter, dragged him out into the yard and murdered him there, brutally. When his adrenaline subsided he found himself covered in the blood of the butchered runt and he slowly turned his attention to the farmer once more. As he arrived at the house he found all the doors closed, and to his dismay, all of them were locked as well. This made him all the more determined to reach the farmer and make him pay. He searched the yard for something to pick the lock with, and then he thought of something: the bones of the young pig. He returned the corpse of the piglet and, using his chicken skills, he pecked through the remains until he found the perfect bone. He plucked out some of his own wing feathers so as to make room for the perfectly shaped bone. He momentarily considered the fact that his beautiful feathers were his namesake and the people of Mastatal respected and admired any chicken with such beautiful plumage. But he was a new chicken now, without a wife to impress and now, after the murder of the pig, surely without the title of mayor. He tucked the bone conveniently into the new space in his wing and moved back towards the house. He approached the front door and quietly picked the lock, slowly swinging it open and entering the dark house. As he navigated the interior of the dark farmhouse his blood began to boil with rage. He realized that the farmer's wife was even more plump than his dearly departed Delilah and asked himself, "Why not a bone for a bone?" In his infuriated and rather hungry state he decided that the perfect revenge would be to kill the farmer's wife and eat her. With great care not to wake the farmer, McFeathers suffocated the farmer's wife with the seeds meant for Delilah. When she had breathed her last, he pecked her bones clean of flesh and was strangely satisfied. Then, purely for the ironic value, he emptied the farmer's freezer of all of its ice and brought it to the farmer's bedroom. In his satisfaction McFeathers let out a haunting, victory, "Cocka Doodle Doo," dumping the ice onto the sleeping farmer and waking him from his slumber to a truly gruesome scene. The only thing the farmer could see in the dimly lit room was McFeathers' wild eyes and bloody beak as McFeathers harvested a trophy bone from his wife, and most terrifying of all, a room full of ice – ice that was meant for the horses. Dizzy with fear, the farmer fainted and fell back into his bed, though many speculate that the shock may have been partially attributable to the wasted ice. As he slipped into unconsciousness, he could almost hear his own father whispering a childhood lesson in his ear. "And that's why you don't give ice water to horses!" It was all too clear now. McFeathers, still engulfed with adrenaline, filled his mayoral hobo bindle with seeds and hit the road, never to return to this farm again.

The chicken got his revenge that night, but the hate stayed in his heart and he vowed to make all small pigs and meat eating farmers pay for what they had done to him. It was on that night that he renamed himself Ole Bones, and every night since then he has moved from one house to the next, murdering small pigs in the night and calling his blood curdling call as early as 4, 3, or even 1 in the morning, just to piss people off. He vowed to never wait until dawn to wake his human enemies, for it was his perfect timely calls that kept him alive while his wife was slaughtered. He shows the piglets no mercy, his fury knowing no end, and from every piglet he kills he keeps one bone, tucked into his wing and only slightly revealed to the world. And with these bones he picks the

locks of local meat eating people, stealing ice cubes and melting them for fun, until one day when he will finally get the courage to murder again. Maybe one day you will run out of ice and hear a haunting and deep voice in your head exclaim "And that's why there's never enough ice in your ice tray! It may be all too clear then. Even now in the night, if you listen closely, you will hear the desperate calls of piglets as they are murdered by Ole Bones, and people are often woken up in the middle of the night by the obnoxious and repetitive call of the evil creature until it bothers them to the point of frustrated vomiting.

Sometimes he can be spotted, his feathers tattered and falling out from a combination of violent crimes and the evil in his heart, and you can see his trophy bones sticking out of his rickety old wings. Sometimes he can be heard outside of local homes, his rickety wings clanking and rattling with his trophy bones, and his mayoral bindle rattling behind him, full of his delicious murder weapon; seeds. The people who hear him remember the last mayors disgust at giving chickens a symbolic bindle and can almost hear the closing line of the speech he gave on his last day of office, "And that's why you don't give chickens a mayoral bindle to fill with seeds!" It is all to clear now.

Maybe one day you will hear the squeal of piglet's and a haggard rooster call pierce the night at 1:43 in the morning. Terrified, you will look out the window of your cozy bedroom and see the moonlight shadow of an old wing with protruding bones. You will recall the "Legend of Old Bones" that your dear father read to you when you were young and you will be able to hear him state the obvious moral of the story, "And maybe that's why you shouldn't eat chickens for fun!" And you would think "It is becoming all to clear now."



Volunteers queue up at (what not so long ago, used to be) the closest telephone in the area, a short one-hour walk to San Miguel

Conservation Update: Internet & Phones in Mastatal

Even out here in the rural mountains, sometimes things happen really fast. Within the span of a few weeks, Mastatal went from a pueblo with one payphone, which only less than a year ago, as the only means of immediate outside communication, to a town with the availability of a phone in every household, and, get this, high-speed wireless Internet service available to all for a price.

For two weeks in mid-June the center of town (outside the Ranch gates) was abuzz with ICE (the phone company) trucks, cars and employees. They installed phone polls, and ran phone lines up and down the main road in

Mastatal. Opposite the Ranch gates, partially blocking the beautiful valley vista beyond, now sits a large metal cage containing the central power to Mastatal's new phone service. This influx of labor culminated a few Sundays past in the Salon Communal with an all-day celebration and introduction of the local phone service, presented by ICE. They even flew the president of the company in by

helicopter. The community center was packed with excited local residents from Mastatal and surrounding towns that also had phone service brought to them.

We at the Ranch had heard for weeks that once the phones were in, Internet service would also be available at the *telesecundaria*. But we thought it would be dial up Internet resulting from the availability of phone service. Some of us felt that this wouldn't change the daily routine so much because a frequent Internet user would choose not to use a slow dial up line if they had a lot of work to do on a computer. So we were all surprised when Timo came back from the ICE celebration and told us there was now a wireless antenna on top of the *telesecundaria* (this has been removed since the writing of this piece). Inside there are four computers for secondary school students to use during school hours. After school the *Asociación* now turns into an Internet "café" with a price of 700 colones an hour set by the local government.

The local residents seem to be unanimously excited and feeling positive about the latest rapid technological advances. I didn't speak to one tico who thought the phones and Internet could potentially be detrimental to life in Mastatal. On the other hand, I think there is a unanimous consensus by us privileged gringos at the Ranch, that these latest advances removes a layer of distance between us and our hyper-technologized worlds in the U.S. and Europe. We want less of what we already have too much of. And the ticos are excited about having access to technologies and the ability to communicate with the world outside of Mastatal in ways that they have never experienced before.

Several years ago I arrived in Monteverde, Costa Rica on an afternoon bus. The town was loaded with tourists like myself moving in every direction, all there to experience the natural beauty of that unique rainforest region. Hip restaurants appealing to the palates of gringos spattered the town. Small quaint hotels spotted the hilly streets. Internet cafes were filled with young, white faces. Buses came and went throughout the day. That evening I had a conversation with a pleasant, dreadlocked fifty-something woman, who said that she had moved to Monteverde ten years prior, to live a sustainable and artistic lifestyle in the most beautiful place that she had ever seen. At that time she said it was predominantly tico families with a small community of sustainable Shakers and a few gringos here and there. She told me that I would not be able to imagine how different it was back then.

Mastatal is not Monteverde. But seeing a high-speed Internet café in town, sent my privileged gringo imagination, irrationally, I hope, back to that conversation some years back.

Sucia

Building Report: Torre Shower

Residents of the Hankey and Hooch will soon have a new shower to call their own. The current intern crew has been working tirelessly to get the Ranch's newest structure operational. Along with the construction of a new chicken coup, this project has been employing a large number of the Ranch's volunteers and interns on a daily basis. The beautiful building will be home to two stalls, two changing rooms and a sink and is situated immediately before the composting toilet that we refer to as the *torre*. The timberframe structure designed and framed by the 2008 Yestermorrow Design/Build class boasts walls of wattle and daub and cob floors in the changing rooms. The interns are currently working on some mosaics to beautify the exposed foundation and sink. Once the walls thoroughly dry, we'll be applying a manure schmear, two coats of lime plaster and numerous coats of lime wash to both protect and smarten the interior and exterior. Our current crew is hoping to take their first showers before they depart in early-September.



The outdoor bathroom newly constructed next to La Choza is more than green architecture - it is an inspirational work of art.

photo by David Katz

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: *And I Saw You - A Song*

"And I Saw You" is a song written and performed at the ranch by Julia and Sucia and needs to be played as a duet, with the pair switching vocals on the 1st two lines of each verse, then sharing the rest of verse. Each F chord starts with a baseline scale of F F# G notes

F C

G C

And I saw you then you saw me. Built a little sailboat and headed out to the sea.

F C

G C

Driftin' along on a sea of wine. Came to a drawbridge in the middle of time.

(chorus)

F C



A photograph of Alan deep in concentration

photo by Aaron Drury

G C

On the river of life to the ocean of love, A comet flew in the sky above.

F C

G C

Then I saw you and you saw me. Built a little sailboat and headed out to the sea.

(Bridge) (play choppy chords)

DM C DM

C G

Woke in a city after the flood. The storm was gone but not the blood. A machete fell from a sky

C G C

of blue. Cut the dingy in half. Separated they flew. (Instrumental FCGC)

(chorus) then instrumental FCGC then play next verse choppy chords

F C

On a dark lonely planet, he built a house of rocks.

F

C

From the bottom of the ocean, she's singin' in a plastic box

F

C G

On a "faithful night, they dream of a jungle town. Red birds, green snakes,

C

And water fallin' down.

F C

G C

And I saw you, then you saw me, built a little sail boat, and headed out to the sea.

CONTACT ALAN SMITH IF YOU'D LIKE A MORE READABLE COPY OF THIS. LET US KNOW IF YOU NEED HIS EMAIL ADDRESS.

Community Facts/Stories: She's Here

Mastatal's population continues to grow with the arrival of Soledad María O'Hara Nunes, or SMON for short, being one of four recent additions to the community of Mastatal. The name that we all called Solé for many months prior to her birth, The Nug, has been tough to shake. She weighed in at a slight 6 lbs. and now that she's a few weeks old, it seems as if she'll will have her Dad's blue eyes and her maternal grandmother's light skin. Pura macha as they say around these parts. Solé will soon be meeting the other Mastatal infants.

A mini-baby boom here in town. She's already had the opportunity to see just about everyone else in town as Robin's been busy receiving visitors almost constantly in the first weeks since we arrived back to Mastatal after our almost two-week San José adventure. We were not able to return as soon as we would have liked due to the horrendous road conditions leading to our home in the days following Tropical Storm Alma. Everything's been well since our return home and Solé seems

to be settling into her new surroundings. We've made it through the sometimes stressful first few weeks and are enjoying The Nug's first belly laughs and peanut butter poo. Just no getting away from the poo around here. Solé was able to meet her Aunt Jill and Grandmas Nunes and O'Hara and Grandpa Nunes on their recent visit to Costa Rica. They were a great help while here and are the best source of "recent" pictures of the baby as Robin and I are not much for picture taking. Folks keep asking to see photos but the reality is that we don't have any of Solé after the first few days of her birth. Nevertheless, we'll see if we can compile a few in the coming weeks for everyone's viewing enjoyment. Otherwise, you'll just have to come down and see for yourself what we've done.

Comida Corner: Chili Papaya Salsa

What do you do if you find yourself with a large stripy carrier bag (stripes optional) of the reddest, meanest, hottest chilies? Faced with the same situation last week, we created a chili papaya salsa. It's proved an unexpected success so we thought we'd share the recipe! This makes about 5 liters of salsa, enough to share with all your friends!

Ingredients:

Half a carrier bag of chilies, de-seeded
1 whole papaya
2 large onions
2 cups red wine vinegar
2 cups white wine vinegar
2 large handfuls of fresh cilantro
5-6 heaped teaspoons salt (to taste)

1. First, don a pair of rubber gloves to spare your hands when working with this much chili. De-seeding the chilies is optional, it depends how hot you like your salsa.
2. Blend the chilis and put in a large bowl.
3. Peel, deseed, and cut the papaya into small chunks and blend. Add the pulp to the chili and mix.
4. Finely chop the onion and add it to the mix.
5. Add the vinegar and the cilantro and stir it all together.
6. Add 3-4 teaspoons of salt and more to taste.
7. Decant your salsa into a plastic or glass container and put it in the fridge ready to use.

F?tbol Follies: On a Run

The Guarumal squad with whom JUNIOR, ALEX and TIMO are currently playing is on an 8-game win streak in the current campeonato after dropping their first game of the tournament. Guarumal finds themselves at the top of the table and well-positioned to win it's second major tournament in less than a year. Los Verdes have actually become Los Amarillos as the team donned it's new uniforms for the first time a few weeks ago in a win against La Gloria. The new kit, earned in the big tournament victory in September last year, has brought some good luck to the team as they've yet to lose or tie since first putting them on. We'll hope that it continues throughout the rest of the group stage that will bring us into September. More later.

Special: In Memory

*Of Chingo, my four-legged friend
Four weeks to know you, three days to end
That doggy duo, now Pico runs solo
No more fun walks, down by the rio
I miss you already, your leaning affection
Big mournful eyes and smelly canine perfection
Rest in peace now, where you wanted to be
Here always, with your adopted Rancho family*

Inspirational Impressions: Brian Andreas

"There are things you do because they feel right and they make no sense and they make no money and it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other and to eat each other's cooking and say it was good."

-- Brian Andreas

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew