

Rancho Mastatal Updates

August 2007

Rancho Mastatal UPDATE for the month of AUGUST 2007

...Here I sit, only a few weeks from our yearly stateside trip, with a "to-do" list the size of Costa Rica's trade debt, and my thoughts wander towards what's transpired since our return to Mastatal in December of last year. Thinking back through the bog of events, it all seemed to start with a helicopter dropping in on our abandoned soccer pitch, a first for this town, bringing to us a visitor from the *Casa Presidencial*, OSCAR ARIAS, and the inauguration of the Scarlet Macaw Biological Corridor. An unforgettable opportunity for BUCK's girls paved the way for a holiday extravaganza



the way these baskets were sitting together was pretty exciting to me. i saw a lot of movement.

photo by A.J. Calomay

highlighted by the Christmas Eve Lip Synch, gluttonous feasts, an exploding interest in Boxing Day, the return of MAXIMO PLAYO and NICO, and ringing in 2007 with music from DICKY and partying with KATHY, PAUL, GUY and other friends. Another wonderful visit from MISS EMILY. Dave and his beautiful family preceding yet another fabulous WFR followed closely by a stupendous workshop with IAN and his entourage. SPARKLES. Hands down the best volunteer/intern assemblage ever. CALEB and LIZ. Hoops, Ultimate, shoes, and "papangs". KEYO. Our first experience with [HaveHeart](#) when the "Lobsters Came to Play". NATE. "You don't know me!" BIGFOOT. PJ. JONO and SARAH. "Fucking Ants!" A SMITH. MAXINE The H factor. A kickass experience with GOLDY and the boys from the Randolph School. Bagel Sammy Sams. GRANDELÓN and K's magic hands in the kitchen and on the universe. RIMJOB. BIG TIME and the MINGLE single. SETH. Another wondrous stay with Villanova. KEVIN and AMANDA. Our first timberframe. RACHEL. Our superheroes, LIZABETH and SKIP, once again blessing Mastatal. THE LONGS. MIKEY and ERIN. "It sucks, fucking sucks". English reinforcements by the way of BIG NIC. SUSAN and her fabulous kids from UW. DELFINO and MICHELE. Bikers and Janitors. MARIA #1 and #2. Watch out, here comes the other BUCK. Doh. Watch out, there goes the other Buck, over the side. TY GUY. Wondrous guitar. ANDREA and KATELYN. Beautiful furniture. LEN and MIKAELA. BOB, ROB, ANNIE and the coolest group of youngsters ever from the Lakeside School. BRENDA, LEILA and the teams from Seattle University and the U. "No Girl Scout Cookies" yet still an unbelievable visit by the Girl Scouts of Western Washington. WILL and LAUREL. FRANCESA, we love you. Our faith has been restored in the youth, and the oldth. BEN and KARAH. The coolest sink and table ever, showcased in the Ranch's long-awaited new kitchen. The original BUCK, again. Sweet Ass of Fire. MARCUS and ZACH, JENNA and ARI. New designs to carry us through 2008. Center High School. SAMANTHA. A growing scene at Seco's Bar. A summer full of tweakers. Soccer in the community center. Theme parties that would make Sparky proud. THE TIBSTER, TIBURON and

TOM. MARGE and MOLLY. Beach balls and Croatian lip synchs. A lovely trip to the beach. "Fuck me if I'm wrong". Scrabble and Box of Spells. JULES and MELISSA. GREG our male protagonist. And still a few weeks to add more memories.

An enormous amount happens at the Ranch each year during our busiest 10-month span. It's a mystery at times, figuring out how it all gets done, especially when playing Scrabble or horseshoes at 4 p.m. or climbing into the car for a trip to the coast for poolside piña coladas. But you're never too far from being reminded as you unload sand from a dumptruck one shovel at a time at 7:30 p.m. or pound that final nail as the sun sets behind you, dreaming of that bagel sandwich or cold Imperial. We'll be seeing many of you in the coming weeks. Until then, be the ball. And a huge advance thanks to Greg, Nic, TOM, SINEAD and JOEY and the others that will be looking after the Ranch while we're gone.

This month's update includes:

[RM Program News](#): The Man Behind the Scenes

[Conservation Update](#): Tranquility

[Building Report](#): Natural Pains and Plasters

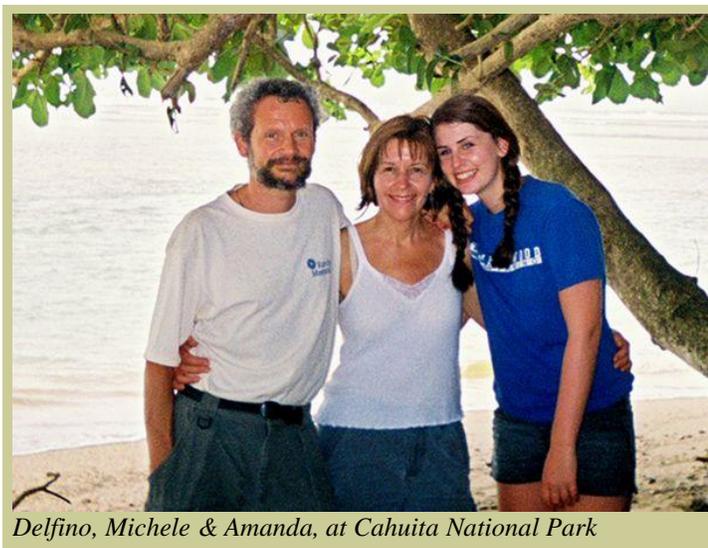
[Volunteer/Guest Gossip](#): The Big Move

[Community Facts/Stories](#): Take a Seat

[Comida Corner](#): Colon Blow

[Fútbol Follies](#): Onward March

[Inspirational Impressions](#): Alice Walker



Delfino, Michele & Amanda, at Cahuita National Park

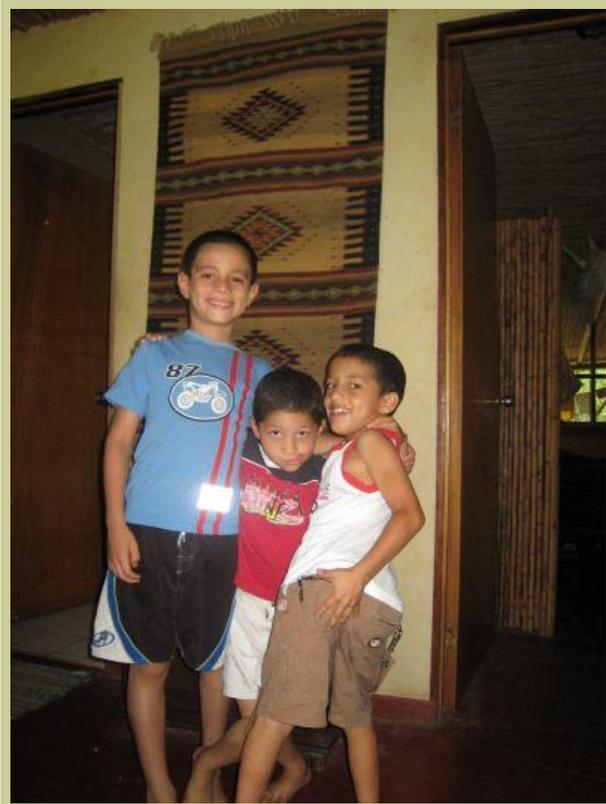
RM Program News: The Man Behind the Scenes

There are scores of people that make the Ranch what it is, some who work on the frontline, and others who work behind the scenes. One individual, who falls into the latter category, has surreptitiously and selflessly helped the Ranch in ways that are incomprehensible to those of us on the inside. His name is DELFINO CORNALI, and I'm sure that for many of you out there, this is the first time that you have uttered his oceanic Italian name.

Delfino, his lovely lady Michele, and her son Mateo and daughter Amanda have been a huge part of our endeavor since they came into our lives over the years. Delfino, with loads of experience on more fronts than I have space to write here, volunteered to take over the management of our website after the Ranch had barely left the womb following his short visit to Mastatal in 2002. He has been the mastermind behind its evolution since. Perhaps over the years you've noticed our website changing. The revamped photo gallery; new pictures on certain pages; a new background color; new features such as the newsletter archives, the ability to write and send customized postcards, and the online library; new pages

highlighting the changes taking place at the Ranch. DELFINO has been responsible for all of this in addition to the changes that the everyday reader doesn't see when he or she visits our website. Del has enabled us, HTML-ignoramuses, to easily make text and other changes to the website from the safety of our closest Jacó Internet café. This has all revolutionized our project and we want you all to know about Delfino's sacrifices, kindness and contribution. He is easily one of the most wonderful people that we have ever had the pleasure to meet.

So Del, without further ado, from us to you, here comes the grandest public Mastatal gracias possible.



The boys

photo by Amanda Caudill

Conservation Update: Tranquility

How do you conserve the tranquility of a beautiful small village as it goes grows into something different, bigger, busier, more complex? This is a question that crosses my mind daily as I watch Mastatal evolve from a sleepy town to a bustling community. It's a pretty sure bet that weekends will bring not only the dominant sound of the cicada's song but also a cacophony of drunken screams and loud music from the *pulpería*. It's an interesting and sometimes disturbing get-together of two diametrically opposed realities, but so far, I guess you could argue that it's working.

On my late-night trips home from Jacó, after turning off the main highway, the ride is almost entirely void of life as I bump along through mammoth potholes and past unlit houses. The few restaurants and bars along the way are usually closed. If one is open it's most likely playing host to a local body or two watching a soap opera or soccer match. After 90 minutes of this quietness something sometimes drastically changes as I arrive to one of the most

remote villages in the area and home to Seco's Bar. There are certainly still plenty of quiet nights in Mastatal, but they are diminishing. I've resisted the temptation to visit the Ministry of Health to learn more about the rights of rural people living close to bars. I've begged and pleaded with Seco to shut his doors earlier on weekdays so that nearby community members can rest in preparation for the coming day. The situation at times gets better, but inevitably returns to "normal" soon again. I've thought about sabotaging the electricity to the bar, an option still perhaps, and we've been doing our best to educate our visitors about the impact that they have on this community when they spend "too much" time at the bar.

What mostly gets me down is seeing the lives of local youths revolving around a party culture. The solution? I'm not entirely sure. I think it partly depends on the development of more recreational opportunities in our area. The reopening of the community center for use as an indoor soccer pitch

has been one enormous victory. On the Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays that we're allowed to play, the center is packed with kids running and sweating until well into the evening. These are now the quietest nights in town. Based on this success we must work even harder towards the construction of a local library. This would offer more chances for kids to healthily expend their creative energy. But I'm afraid a successful resolution might also depend on a trip to the local authorities to learn about our rights and if necessary ask them to intervene to force the bar to close earlier than it has been. This will have certain repercussions locally that won't be pretty, but at times, one's left with no other cards to play.

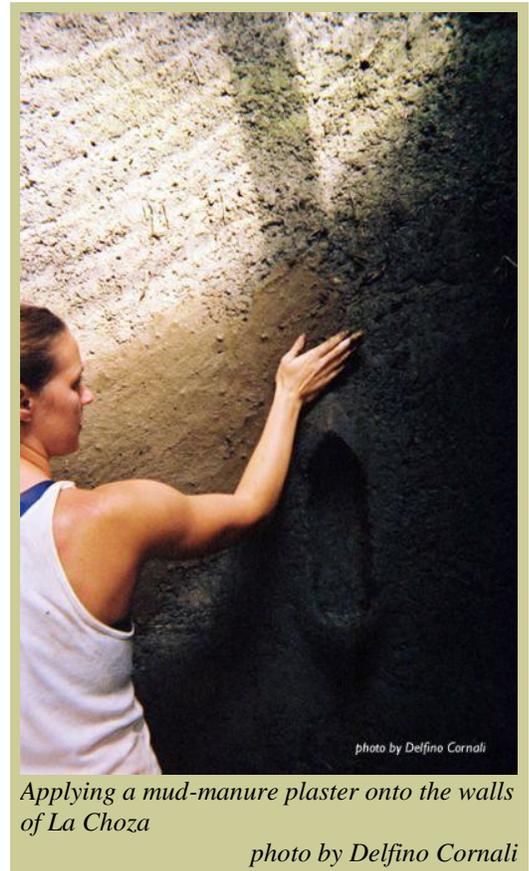
Building Report: Natural Plasters & Plasters

Natural paints and plasters has been a focus for us over the recent months as we play around with new materials to create beautiful finishes for our naturally built structures. In the past we have done manure schmears, lime plasters, limewashes, and recently we have been delving into into the world of alis (clay paints). HEATHER paved the way at the classroom with an ant and jungle motif that'll blow off your little rainbow flipflops. Since it turned out so nice and the alis was relatively easy to make, we decided to try a homemade natural paint for the plaster board and cement walls in the new library (old kitchen) instead of opting for the cement based plasters available in Costa Rica. We had to first apply an adhesion coat so that the natural alis would have something to stick to. The adhesion coat we chose to use over the drywall was ½ manure, ½ flour paste (see recipe below). As most of you know we love to use manure, but if you can't easily find it or if the thought of covering your walls with animal dung doesn't appeal to you, you can do the following:

- 10 parts wheat paste
- 1 part fine sand
- 1 part sifted clay (preferably kaolin or lighter colored)

We applied the adhesion coat with our hands and it went on quite easily. Since we are in the heart of the rainy season and everything seems to mold, we added boric acid to the mix to try and retard mold growth. After application we let the mix dry (it took 3 days or so; the dry season would be the best time to do this, but we needed to give the walls a face lift so we decided to go ahead with it anyway, but I recommend doing this when you know you will have nice dry weather). We did have a bit of mold in a few corners, but we just wiped them gently with a sponge dipped in bleach and that seemed to kill it in its tracks.

Once the adhesion coat was COMPLETELY dry we made the alis and used natural bristled bushes to apply it. For alis application you do NOT wet the walls first as that would cause streaking. We found that applying the alis in a circular motion worked best. It dried quite quickly (a day or so) despite the high humidity here. Since we used manure (very brown if you haven't seen it before) in



Applying a mud-manure plaster onto the walls of La Choza

photo by Delfino Cornali

our adhesion coat we needed to apply 3 coats of aliz to the wall. It is pigmented a nice light yellow which adds brightness to the space. ALEX and GILBERTH have been busy putting the molding around all the windows and doors and the new enlarged library is really shaping up. We also had a light revolution happen at the main house when we replaced many of the zinc roof panels with clear plastic and the result is fabulous! We left the caña brava up and the filtered light that comes through sends beautiful shadows over the natural plasters and floors. The kitchen is bright and vibrant, the back porch is a completely new space as light has transformed it from a dark corridor to a truly nice hangout and eating space. All the bedrooms now have natural light as well as the new library. We hardly turn the lights on until almost dark (even in the rainy season!) and we are excited to see a difference in our energy usage. The main house transformation is almost complete, you have to see it to believe it!

For a more extensive reading on natural plasters I highly recommend buying *The Natural Plaster Book: earth, lime and gypsum plasters for natural homes* by Cedar Rose Guelberth and Dan Chiras. Online there is a nice article on Natural Plasters and Aliz by Carol Crews which you should definitely read before jumping into a project. Happy Plastering!!

Aliz: This recipe is an adaptation of Carol Crews. We did the following:

To cook the flour paste, set a 2/3-full pot of water to boil on the stove. In a mixing bowl, whisk together equal parts cheap white flour and cold water. When the pot of water comes to a rolling boil, pour in the flour and water mixture and stir it well with your whisk. It should thicken immediately and become somewhat translucent. Don't keep cooking it or it will scorch. The proportion of all the water to the flour is approximately four to one.

To mix the Aliz, you will need a container at least as large as a 5-gallon bucket, and a big whisk or a paint-mixing attachment on the end of a drill. Start with 3 parts water to 1 part cooked flour paste in the bucket to approximately 3/5 full. Use a saucepan, coffee can (or whatever) for a scoop, and start adding the ingredients proportionally. We used three scoops of white Kaolin, and one scoop (more or less) of fine sand.

Sand is mainly for the first coat. Keep adding these ingredients until the mixture is the same thickness as heavy unwhipped cream. You may have to add a bit more water to achieve this.

Colored clays or pigments may be added to create different colors. We used ochres and oxides that we purchased from the Natural Home Center in Seattle (check online). We mixed them in warm water before adding to the aliz.

If mold might be a problem, add a little dissolved borax powder to the water of the flour paste.

Tuna: We have also been experimenting with prickly pear cactus "juice". It provides binding qualities to your plaster as well as water resistance. To extract do the following: 1. Chop prickly pear leaves. 2. Put in airtight container with water. 3. Let sit till mucilage forms. 4. Separate it from the remains of the leaves and mix into your plaster (about 1 cup per 5 gallon bucket)

THIS STUFF IS REALLY PUNGENT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Kaolin: Is a natural fine white clay.

I hope this helps give you a start on thinking about using natural paints and plasters on "normal" walls! Email me if you have any questions!!

Robin



the iridescent Blue Morpho

Volunteer/Guest Gossip: The Big Move

Following the gentle course of a blue morpho butterfly on its rainforest backdrop of tireless shades of green, it is hard to imagine that nature can be anything but placid in character. Yet every afternoon of late the sky has darkened as a faint grumble grows into a thunderous temper, unsettling the ground as it roars. Partnered by the customary bolts of lightning and a deluge of rain, nature pronounces; just as it can be mild it too can be unforgiving.

The lightning and thunder of Mastatal seem to have some serious clout, so it came as no surprise to hear that over the last couple of days four local cows have been struck by lightning and a hillside of trees have been charred in the vicinity. So in preparation, we here at Mastatal are wearing this season's must; a pair of rubber boots. We are also walking around with distinctive stoops, not just because it adds to our allure but also because, according to Timo, we should not be taller than anything in our surroundings for fear of being chosen as lightning's preferred conductor.

Our latest look, while being of great appeal, does not prove practical for getting on with Ranch business and so was temporarily ditched on Monday August 13th, a date set to become a landmark in the history of Rancho Mastatal - the day when Robin roused the troops and set us to work on the new kitchen.

I had seen something like this before, having taken a day off work due to sickness and therefore being obliged to watch daytime television. A rather dapper host and his pretty blond sidekick had gathered together the friends and neighbors of a hapless, unsuspecting couple who made the fatal mistake of going away for the weekend, the first holiday they had taken since their honeymoon in 1948. Within hours their perfectly respectable home had been torn apart, rooms splattered with streaks of Day-Glo orange and plywood boards frenziedly stapled together to form a post-modernistic eyesore described by the host as a centerpiece for the lounge.

Thankfully this is not daytime TV and under the expert supervision of Robin we were assured success. We set to work, firstly dismantling the old kitchen – a perilous undertaking. For over the years a motley bunch of jungle critters had moved in and made it their home. Some had fared better than others: It was hard to determine how long ago the young pair of toad lovers, clinging together had reached their demise; they were no more than skeletons. Another gigantic toad seemed to have

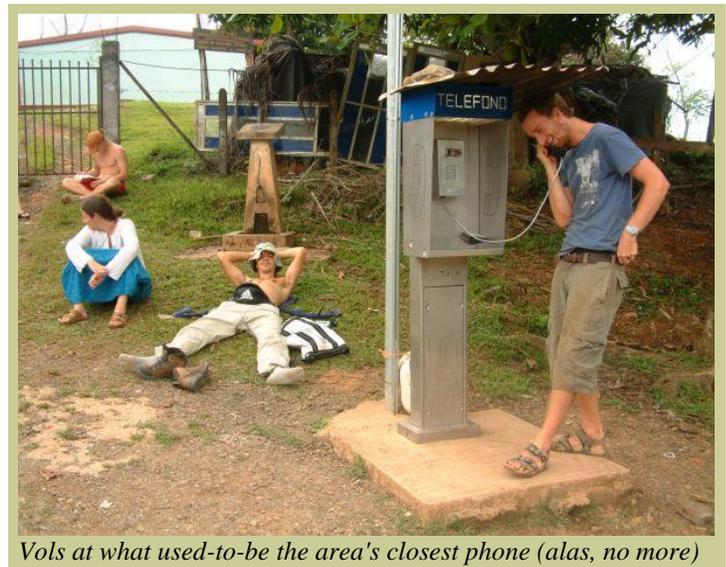
prospered on the residue of food he had obviously been scoffing in his dark corner of the kitchen. Armed with a hammer and shortly thereafter a bottle of poison Kattia waged war on the old serving bar disclosing a crowded, cockroach hotel. A scorpion seemed in good health before Kattia, now accomplished with the hammer, saw to that.

Having survived phase one, we then turned our attention to the new kitchen. Positioned in a large open area at the back of the house with views over the forest, the new area promised an end to the days of fighting for space. The sink area was already installed. Its ceramic tiling, courtesy of Heather, depicts the night sky on a clear night in Mastatal. The main table, created by Tyler, that lies at the heart of the kitchen was also already in place. So apart from moving in the required fridge and cooker it was up to us to us to beautify, decorate and generally bestow good energy upon the kitchen. It seemed to work because within a matter of hours we had created a very fine-looking kitchen fit for the professional chef, enhanced all the more by the recent addition of a bamboo-fronted, serving table made by Timo, Robin and Nic.

Community Facts/Stories: Take a Seat

We've had an ongoing "joke" at the Ranch over the years that went "the day they put a phone in Mastatal would be the day we pack our bags to find another place to live". Well, believe it or not, we just placed the Ranch on the market, our suitcases are splayed open on the bed, and in our hands are two tickets to Paris. Please let us know if you're acquainted with anyone interested in a fair chunk of protected rainforest and some interestingly built structures. After six years of rumors and promises and a century of playing home to our species, Mastatal has a public phone! No more 50-minute walks to San Miguel to find the

phone out of service, no more excuses about not being able to call mom and dad upon your arrival to the Ranch, and certainly no more boasting about living in the coolest community in the world without a telephone. Shit. The novelty of a phone in our town has not worn off yet as middle school kids compete to see who can make the most and longest phone calls. People have apparently dusted off their agendas in search of long-lost relatives with whom they have not spoken in years. We can certainly discuss the pros and cons of this most recent development in our town, but that might cause some stressful dialogue, so without further ado, here's the number: 410-6085. The verdict's still out as to whether one's able to make calls to our new phone from abroad, but we dare you to try.



Vols at what used-to-be the area's closest phone (alas, no more)

Comida Corner: Colon Blow

For when you eat too much Shmack `n Cheese.

Ingredients:

- Guts from 2 large aloe leaves
- ¼ cup water
- 1 whole banana
- 2 Tbs. honey
- Pinch of cayenne pepper



The first of Rancho Mastatal's composting toilets

Combine all in a blender or food processor and serve on ice.

Makes 2 servings and tastes great. Don't stray too far from the bathroom after drinking.

Buen Prove.....oop.

F?tbol Follies: Onward March

A few weekends back, *Los Galácticos* had the rare opportunity to play on a Saturday. The game took place in the bustling town of Naranjal, against a team all the way from Guapiles on the Caribbean Coast. They came with a talented squad made obvious by their pre-game warm-up drills, something that in these parts usually consists of a cigarette followed by a beer, or vice-versa. Minutes before the afternoon fixture started, the skies opened up for the now somewhat unenthusiastic Mastatal team. The precipitation would make differentiating teammates even worse as both teams suited up in their respective yellow jerseys. No shirts and skins on this rainy day event. Nevertheless, the show had to go on. The opposing squad took only a few minutes to demonstrate their supposed dominance when they scored off a foolish mistake by the Galáctico defense. Fortunately for us, the rains continued unabated, slowing somewhat the Guapiles team. JUNIOR equalized with a beautiful goal off a nice pass from the midfield pumping up our confidence though the tie was short-lived when the Caribbean side scored their second. But again, Mastatal tied the score at two on another beautiful shot by Junior. The half ended even with the rains getting stronger. Mastatal came out in the second looking solid and took their first lead of the day about ten minutes into the half. The rain, now forming small lakes in some parts of the field, including in front of our defending goal, became Mastatal's greatest ally. On more than one occasion blistering shots from the adversaries were slowed to leisurely rollers making muddy yet relatively easy saves for CARACA, manning the goal for the day. And on one occasion a seemingly sure goal to tie came to a halting stop inches from the goal line before it was cleared away by the defense. The game ended after a frustrating stretch of what more resembled water polo than soccer and although not a pretty victory for Los Galácticos, a win nonetheless, and a new ball for the sports committee.

In other local soccer news, the nearby team from Guarumal that ALEX, JUNIOR and TIMO are playing for qualified for the semifinals of the lengthy and competitive regional tournament with two games to go in the group stage though they lost their first game in over three months when they got shocked by Naranjal, 1-0, in La Gloria. Nevertheless, the following week Guarumal responded

with a decisive victory over third seeded, and one of the tournament's favorite teams, Gamolotillo to finish the group round as the #1 seed. This was quite the moral victory for the small town and perhaps more importantly meant that we'd play the #4 instead of the #3 seed in the semifinals, taking place in the #3 seed's hometown pitch in Gamolotillo.

In the first semifinal game Chires won an exciting overtime match against the home team Gamolotillo. The local fans were stunned as the tough team from Chires scored with less than two minutes to go in the match to send the game into overtime. They then watched their boys lose when Chires scored a late overtime goal sending the #2 seed to the finals to face the winner of the second semifinal game of the day which matched up Guarumal against Vista del Mar, the latter a tough team hailing from a town with killer views of the Pacific. After a sluggish first half that saw los Verdes go down 1-0, the second half was an entirely different story as we scored five second half goals from four different players (CHAVA, WILLY-2, CRISTIAN, JUNIOR) to waltz into the finals against Chires. Emotions are running pretty high in Guarumal as this is the farthest that their local team has ever advanced in a tournament of this stature. A win would be an amazing accomplishment for not only the team but for the entire community, who sends a truckload of fans to all of the games. Their support has been incredible throughout the tournament. The final will take place on Sunday, September 30, just one day before Tim and Robin's departure from Mastatal. A victory might prove costly for the planned early morning departure as the Ranch has been chosen as party central after the game. Wish us luck.



photo by Tom McDonald

Inspirational Impressions: Alice Walker

"In the Baemba tribe of South Africa, when a person acts irresponsibly or unjustly, he is placed in the center of the village, alone and unfettered. All work ceases, and every man, woman, and child in the village gathers in a large circle around the accused individual. Then each person in the tribe speaks to the accused, one at a time, about all the good things the person... has done in his lifetime. All his positive attributes, good deeds, strengths, and kindnesses are recited carefully and at length. The tribal ceremony often lasts several days. At the end, the tribal circle is broken, a joyous celebration takes places, and the person is symbolically and literally welcomed back into the tribe."

--- Alice Walker

Abrazos,

The Ranch Crew