



Semana Santa Snapshots

The celebration of Holy Week is an occasion full of contrasts: endings and new beginnings, darkness and light, repentance and renewal, death and life recalled. Our experience here at Rancho Santa Fe is no different.

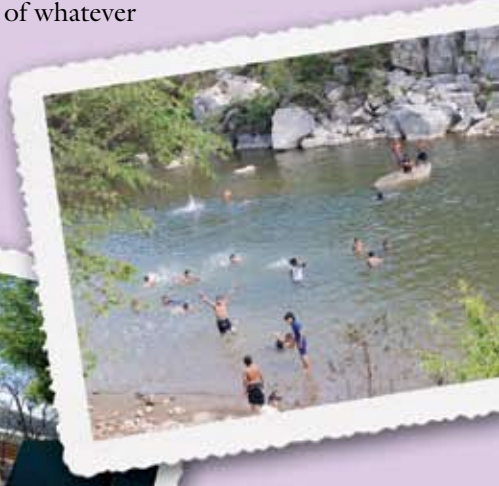
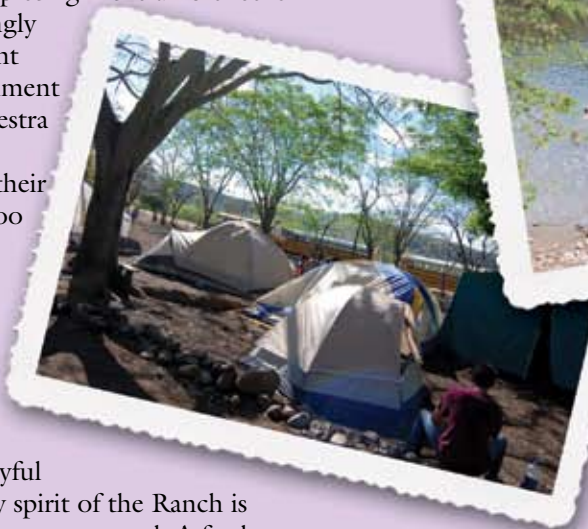
In the weeks leading up to Semana Santa, the landscape, up until this point a vibrant green, retreats into shades of yellow and brown. The earth cracks open and is carried away in thin layers of dust sent flying with the rare, but welcomed, bouts of breeze. All too often the air is also marked by the faint acrid smell of smoke, carried from various parts of our Ranch property where brush fires have sprung up for lack of water and excess of heat. Completing the ambience is the seemingly ever-present accompaniment of an orchestra of locusts, sounding their sirens all too faithfully.

Against these less than festive surroundings the joyful celebratory spirit of the Ranch is only further pronounced. A fresh sense of energy suffuses the property as staff cheerily depart for a few days of hard-earned vacation, simultaneously replaced by squadrons of older pequeños, returning from higher studies in the absence of our normal staff. The children buzz with activity, taking full advantage of a week without school. The whole Ranch seems to take on an even stronger sense of family than normal as all 600 of us meet together daily for religious activities or shared meals. The sense of community and unity is refreshing, and appropriate during this week.

For those who could not share it with us firsthand, below are some snapshots of the major happenings:

Camping

Long a popular tradition at the Ranch, our children start off Semana Santa with a few days of camping in the nearby village of Rio Grande. We set up camp on the grounds of a small school a short walk from a beautiful river studded with splendidly large, smooth rocks, perfect for sunning or launching from, according to one's pleasure. The school yard is a mess of activity. It's crowded with closely packed tents where by night older kids feign sleep and with make-shift shelters constructed by industrious younger kids out of whatever



materials could be scrounged up. The ground is dotted with small, carefully and proudly tended fires, and populated with an unusually vocal, over-eager and confused assortment of poultry which begins to sound the arrival of morning promptly at 12 am.

At night the younger children, and the less adventurous, blanket the floors of the classrooms, arranged jigsaw-style on mattresses previously stacked atop our school buses for careful transport. Vittles are cooked in immense cauldrons over fires in clay ovens, and served regularly and generously three times a day. The overwhelming impression is complete relaxation. It's a favorite time for children and caregivers alike. The ride home, notably more silent than the ride there, is filled with tired and happy kids.



Ten months after leaving NPH Honduras as a volunteer, I went back for the first time in December 2007. Only this time, I was there as a visitor, an ex-volunteer, and a godmother. I was thrilled to see the familiar faces and places and my 12-year old godson.

At the first Ranch activity with all the kids, I found a bundle of little boy wrapping himself around me and realized it was my godson Erick! I hugged him and exclaimed about his height. I asked him about his brothers and sisters, his vacation courses and his friends. Soon, I ran out of things to ask. I suggested we play a game or join some of the other kids, but he shook his head and stared at his lap.

As we sat there in silence watching the other children laugh and run, I felt panicky. Oh dear, I thought. He doesn't think I'm cool! Admittedly, if I were a feisty 12-year old-boy, I probably wouldn't think it was too cool to hang out with a grown up. But still, I wasn't used to feeling like such a grown up on the Ranch. No one had told me that being a madrina (godmother) somehow meant being a grown up!

When it came time to go, and I was sure that Erick would dart thankfully in the other direction, he looked up at me and asked, "Will you come eat dinner with me tonight?"

I smiled as it occurred to me that Erick, like most of the kids on the Ranch, loved the opportunity for some special attention, even if being a cool 12-year-old prevented him from saying so.

So I showed up that night for dinner, and many dinners after. And by the time I had to leave the Ranch, I think even Erick might have thought that grown ups could be kind of cool.

*Contributed by Jennifer Clarke
Ex-volunteer*

Semana Santa Snapshots

Via Crucis Stations of the Cross

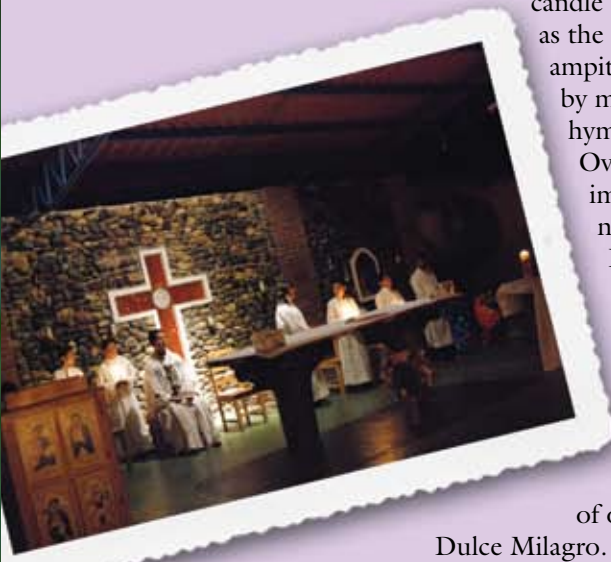
Another central Semana Santa event is the Catholic tradition of Stations of the Cross. Taking place on Good Friday, this procession traces the final hours of Jesus' Passion. This year, for the first time, our boys and girls made two separate processions. Many agreed that this change improved the experience overall as it reduced the size of the group, making it easier to view and hear all that was occurring as well as increasing overall participation in the event.

The children really enjoy this dramatization and are involved in every aspect of it, from rather elaborate costume design (including shoe polish for facial hair), to acting, to decorating the stations, to performing readings. It is quite the production, taking participants all over Ranch property and truly evoking a sense of what Christ went through during those hours.

One can see the sweat and the dirt on the body of the ex-pequeño who stood in as the representation of Christ. The sun beats down and the dust rises up and settles on everyone as the mob of people make their way along rocky dirt paths. One is lost in the crowd as it presses in, especially as Jesus is nailed to the cross, bodies smushing and necks straining to watch. All of this serves the important function of creating a tangible experience from something that was previously just a story. It truly leaves a lasting impression on all involved.

Easter Mass

Sunday morning mass is another special time. Our celebration begins in the early hours of the morning. The Ranch comes together in pitch darkness at 4 am, bundled up against the cold, around a bonfire on the grounds of our boys' home. After some special readings and prayers by Father Reinhold, each person is invited to light a candle which they then carry with them as the group proceeds to our outdoor, amphitheatre-styled church, accompanied by melodies on guitar and singing special hymns carefully practiced the day before. Overall, the occasion is marked by impressive reverence considering the number and ages of those involved.



It's a beautiful sight, watching the long line of small, delicate flames make their way through the darkness in narrow, fluid columns. As people filter into the church the building is flooded with candlelight and a special mass begins complete with the baptism of our adorable youngest pequeña, Dulce Milagro. As mass proceeds the quiet darkness gradually transitions into daybreak. Directly following mass, the celebration is brought to completion with a festive, Ranch-wide breakfast on the grounds of our girls' home in the sunny, crisp morning air.

As the week ends and things gradually transition into normal routines we are grateful for this time of rest, reflection, celebration, and community.

Contributed by Patricia Graham, Home Correspondent



Getting to Know Stefan Feuerstein

An introduction to NPH Honduras' new Deputy National Director

"The Ranch is my favorite place in the world, with my favorite people in the world. I can't imagine a better place to wake up."

"He's young, but he knows these kids." Before his arrival in mid-February, this was the most common reaction to the news about Honduras' new Deputy National Director, Stefan Feuerstein. A quick look at his credentials, however, and, infinitely more important, his heart for this organization and the children it serves, and all ageism threatening to taint one's impression of this 28 year old is solidly laid to rest.

On any given day here at the Ranch one can sight our new Director zipping all over the Ranch on his bike, responding to constant personal summons on the radio seemingly glued to his waist. Tall with a warm, easy-going manner, earnest eyes, and a somewhat sarcastic, but affable sense of humor, Stefan Feuerstein is easily approachable, inspiring confidence and trust in even those he's known for just a short time. The children, especially, are drawn to these characteristics and Stefan is always willing to interrupt "business talk" to give a few moments of loving, needed, attention to whatever child approaches and affectionately latches onto him.

Stefan's first introduction to NPH was as a volunteer in 2003-2004 after completing his undergraduate degree in Economics at a Warwick University in England. His studies had inspired an interest in development policy which continued to grow during his year and a half here at Rancho Santa Fe, working as an assistant to Reinhart Koehler, the National Director at that time. Stefan then worked in Lima, Peru in a microfinance rating firm, and later, realizing how much he missed working with kids, left his office job and worked at a home for about 30 kids from the streets of Lima. Stefan then earned his Masters in Development Administration and Planning with a specific emphasis on development and children, at the University College of London.

In these years following his time at NPH Honduras, Stefan came back to visit the Ranch often.

"When I wasn't here I was thinking about being here and wishing I was here."

These continued visits, combined with his time and the relationships he built here as a volunteer had made him feel truly invested in the lives of our children. It was this very sense of investment and responsibility that led him to accept the position of Deputy National Director—a position, he admits with an honest grin, he's still pinching himself about.

"I really think it'd be quite scary if someone came into a situation like this and wasn't a bit humbled by it."

Humbled, but not intimidated, Stefan's root motivations for being here give him confidence in his ability to make a difference.

"What's important is knowing the kids. Being loving and being patient. That's all they need. Appreciating them no matter what they've done. Gaining their trust."

Stefan speaks with enthusiasm and confidence about his main role as coordinator and supporter. He recalls times as a volunteer when he and others would sometimes complain and had so many ideas about what they would change if it were up to them. With a serious smile and a slight throwing up of hands he admits, "I'm in a position now where I can't really complain anymore." Though this amount of responsibility can be daunting, it is also exciting and he looks forward to the opportunity to help those around him develop and coordinate their ideas, aiding in the process of harvesting real, effective practices.



Stefan has two major goals for this year. One goal is to reexamine the organizational structure of the Ranch, decentralizing it in such a way as to improve communication between departments, thus improving both the effectiveness and the efficiency of resource use. Through improved communication, the various departments on the Ranch can better compliment each others activities, with the resulting benefits being reaped by all of our children.

The other goal is to focus on better preparing our youths for independent life outside of the Ranch and successful integration into society. As Stefan explains, "We're already amazing at providing these kids with a real childhood, but it's a tough world out there." Our home provides children with essential preparation both academically and vocationally, but many of them still struggle to integrate fully into society. We now hope to build on existing efforts to provide them with more practical life-skills.

Stefan points to various sources of wisdom on which he depends. His favorite Fr. Wasson quote, which he says he repeats to himself on almost a daily basis: "It's surprising what you can do in a lifetime if you do it just a little at a time."

Reinhart Koehler, is another source of support. "He knows everything there is to know about everything on the Ranch. You can tell that the children really respect him. I have the utmost respect for Reinhart."

Stefan also understands the importance of keeping things in perspective, keeping the well being of the kids at the center of every decision.

Contributed by Patricia Graham, Home Correspondent



The Connection

As soon as I stepped into my hogar on the first night of the trip, I was unsure of what it would be like hanging out with the kids since I didn't know any of them, and I don't speak perfect Spanish. Hogar means home, and there are about 20-25 kids living in each one. Caroline and I were assigned to go to an hogar with girls from the ages of 10-13. As soon as I put down my backpack that first night, the girls began to talk. Some sat next to me, and others sat around and asked me questions. They were so friendly and open that I realized this part of the trip was not going to be as hard as I thought. Although I didn't know any of their names, I still felt somewhat of a connection.

The next night I began remembering their names; there were a few kids who stood out to me, such as Jasmin and Diana. When I talked with the girls, we never had long conversations, although we did spend some time talking about boyfriends and girlfriends. Most of the time we danced and played games that didn't require a lot of talking.

I looked forward to seeing the girls every afternoon at the canchas (playground) and every night in their hogar. They all knew my name and a fair amount about me. All of the children were so happy, and not once did I have to help cheer up a sad kid. They each have one locker filled with all their possessions, but they have each other, and that's what makes them so happy.

On the last night of hogar, all the girls made me cards. It was really hard to read each one, and think that I wouldn't see them again for a very long time, if ever. I tried to be cheerful and enjoy the rest of my time with them, but on the inside I knew I would miss the strong connections I had happily made with them. On the last day, everybody cried. I visited my hogar to say my goodbyes, and as I looked into each cheerful face, I thought about how lucky I was, and then I wished I could be like these girls, always happy even when not everything is right. I will always remember these children because they had such a strong impact on me, and the way I look at the world.

Contributed by Amy Hoopes
Visitor, Massachusetts, US

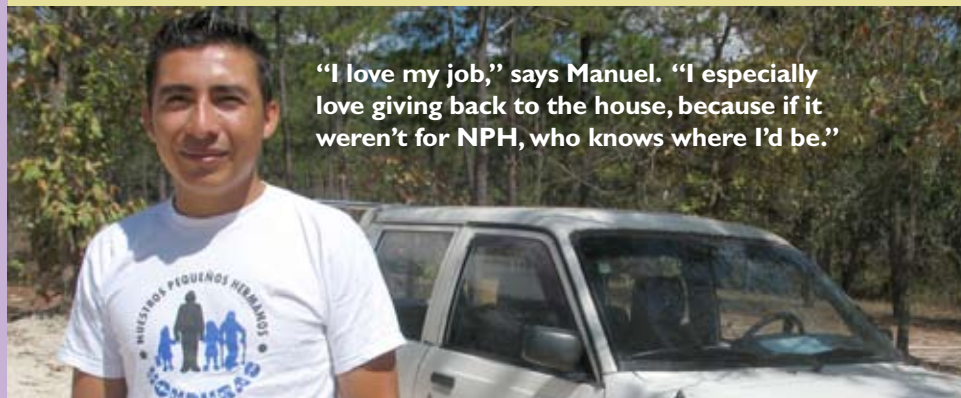
Manuel Behind the Wheel

For even the most traditional families, finagling day-to-day transportation needs can be a real challenge – things like figuring out who is shuttling kids to soccer games and doctors appointments and who will stop at the store on the way home from work. Now, just imagine managing those same decisions for a family of close 600 kids! This is what 21-year old Pequeño Manuel Flores, Rancho Santa Fe's Transportation Coordinator, does every day.

Manuel, who is in his second year-of-service, is responsible for overseeing the Ranch's small fleet of about a half-dozen cars, four buses and three large trucks. He coordinates all transportation for NPH Honduras and also manages the crew of drivers, many of whom are more than twice his age.

"It's not a problem because they've watched me grow up here and we all know each other so well," says Manuel. "We all get along really well and they really help to support me."

Besides just regularly occurring events, like the daily employee bus to and from the city and regular shopping runs for food and supplies, Manuel also has to be ready to roll with other needs as they come up, like taking Ranch kids to clinic appointments in Tegucigalpa, picking up visitors and driving the social work team to investigate new cases. He has to be prepared and flexible to accommodate any last-minute emergencies and is also responsible for the upkeep and maintenance on the cars. He often gets behind the wheel himself – something he loves.



"I love my job," says Manuel. "I especially love giving back to the house, because if it weren't for NPH, who knows where I'd be."

"You have to drive defensively and really pay attention and concentrate so you avoid problems," says Manuel.

Manuel, who came to Rancho Santa Fe in 1995 at the age of 9, first learned to drive by watching Mauricio, an older Pequeño, maneuver the chaotic streets of Tegucigalpa. He was hooked. Today he cautiously winds his way through the gridlock of the city and knows all the best shortcuts.

Before coming to NPH Honduras, Manuel bounced around between a few homes as a child and ended up spending a lot of time on the street, hanging out with kids who sniffed glue and smoked marijuana.

"I knew I never wanted that for myself," says Manuel. "I had never studied before coming to NPH, but once I got here I wanted to learn everything."

Manuel got certified in all four tracks of the metals workshop on the Ranch and also learned car maintenance. Last year, he graduated from a vocational high school with a degree in refrigeration and air conditioning repair. After completing his third year of service next year, he wants to continue studying in his field at the university level and eventually become an instructor.

Contributed by Shannon Taggart, Special Projects

Tides of Change Lessons on Improvement



This past January our education directors traveled to the Netherlands for a week-long introduction to a new way of learning. During their trip, Randi Cardona, principal of our Ranch school, Jorge Guadrón, Coordinator of Vocational Education, and Armin Spichiger, Director of Education, visited several vocational schools, observing classrooms and meeting with school directors to exchange ideas. This trip, made possible through the encouragement and planning of retired assistant principal Bernd

Grün, a long-time visitor and supporter of NPH, gave our education staff the opportunity to study some very successful and innovative schools rooted in a new educational approach called "natural learning." This teaching method emphasizes self-teaching and a curriculum that emerges from students and their specific needs and abilities.

Our directors have returned from their trip encouraged and excited to begin implementing some of what they have learned, but also occupied with a lot of new questions: How can we make what our students learn more significant to their lives? How can we create more effective learning environments? How can we foster more innovative, creative thinking and decision making skills in our students?



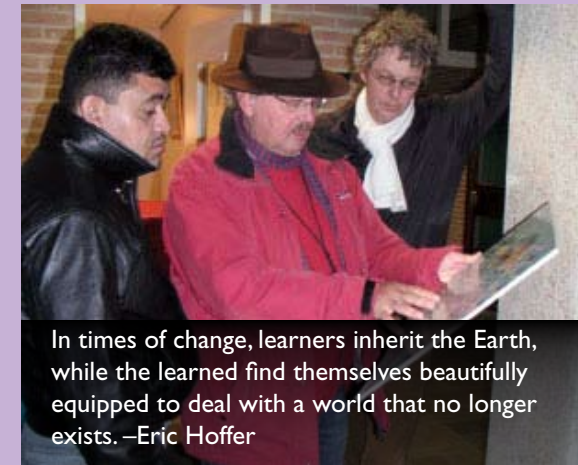
As a beginning response to this call, one large project has emerged: the introduction of a new workshop with the special purpose of facilitating the transition

from Ranch life to life in our student housing in the city. This Life Skills Workshop, slated to begin next year, will teach such basic skills as housekeeping, budgeting, time management, strategies for successful community living, conflict resolution, and simple cooking. It will be a mandatory secondary level course before students leave the Ranch for higher education studies and independent life.

Another projected change is the incorporation of new competencies into the vocational education curriculum. Our educators were strongly convinced of the need for a fresh emphasis on personal competency, including topics like creativity, self-image, interpersonal relations, self-presentation, work ethics, and research and presentation skills. This competency is of special importance for students in our Educados secondary school program, as they are often youths who struggle academically and exhibit behavior problems—springing from, and leading to, issues with low self-esteem.

By 2010, Jorge Guadrón aims to have entirely re-vamped the Educados curriculum, finalizing this shift in focus.

Photos of directors in Holland courtesy of Bernd Grün (wearing hat)



In times of change, learners inherit the Earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists. –Eric Hoffer

Another part of these changes, and effective currently, is the introduction of personal portfolios for each student. These portfolios will document all major projects completed by the student as well as a variety of evaluations. Periodically the portfolios will be reviewed and the students will have an opportunity to present them during an interview. The portfolios will not only be a very useful means of tracking student progress, but will also be a source of pride and sense of accomplishment for the students.

In general, Honduran schools follow a very traditional, highly structured and centralized model. The teachers control the classroom and the students memorize facts which are expected to be regurgitated on request. Our school here at the Ranch functions very differently, but even here, independent, self-learning is not a norm. In order to initiate these new changes, our directors are going to have to work on opening the minds of our teachers, and even our students. Our children are a very special demographic, necessitating extra effort in tailoring changes to meet their diverse and specialized needs. When our children enter our home, they often have had very limited, if any, exposure to formal education. Thus, a lot of extra attention is required to get them back on target with the rest of their age group. Guadrón is optimistic, saying that his instructors have, so far, responded quite favorably to the proposed changes and seem open to experimenting with these different teaching methods in the year ahead.

This trip represents an important step forward in our education department that will be both challenging and rewarding. Our directors are excited for the future and look forward to opportunities to share their insights and collaborate with other NPH homes as we all continue to work together toward providing the very best education and opportunities for our pequeños.

*Contributed by Patricia Graham,
Home Correspondent*



Keila Soars Ahead

Sometimes it's hard for me to believe that 17-year old Keila is the same person as the shy chubby nine-year old I first met when I came to the Ranch as a volunteer in 2000. But then she'll smile her melting grin and let out the same girlish giggle that used to be so hard won — and any doubt is gone. Keila is still the Keila that I've always loved — although physically, she barely resembles her childhood self. She's long and lean and effortlessly gorgeous. But the even more dramatic transformation has been Keila's complete overhaul of spirit. Today, she's a happy, confident and very loving young woman — much of which she attributes to her large family at Rancho Santa Fe.

Keila and her older brother and sister arrived at Rancho Santa Fe in 1999 — and their mother, who was fatally ill, passed away a few months later. Keila was an extremely mature and responsible eight year old who'd already suffered a lifetime of adult-sized problems. Her father had died in 1994 and the family lost its home and barely escaped from Hurricane Mitch in 1998. Keila herself has battled her own share of health problems.

Today, Keila is focused on her future. She's in her final year at a high school in La Venta, a town a few miles from Rancho Santa Fe. She'll graduate in December of this year with a degree in Letters and Science, a basis for her to move on to college to prepare for a career in medicine. Keila wants to become a doctor and specialize in Infectious Disease.

"When I was little, I told my mom that I wanted to be able to cure her," she said. "I really want to be able to help other people."

Keila has plenty of experience helping others already. She did her first year of service for the Ranch in 2006, working

both as a caregiver for the younger girls and in the external clinic laboratory and pharmacy. She got hands-on training in how to conduct and read lab tests, and learned a lot about various medications.

"It was such a great experience and I learned so much," says Keila. "It's a joy to be able to give back to NPH because they take care of us so well and provide us with everything. It's a true blessing."

These days, Keila is equally busy with her studies. She gets up before dawn to be ready to walk to the Ranch's front gate and catch the school bus by 6:30 am. Keila spends the morning in vocational workshops at the school. Last year, she took a cosmetology course and this year she's studying computers. Then in the afternoon, the students focus on academic courses.

She doesn't return home until after 5:30 pm in the afternoon, when she eats a quick dinner, does her daily chores and laundry and then hits the books to do homework for the next day. Often she stays up late studying.

Keila is looking forward to graduation and wants to complete her next years of service in the NPH Honduras internal clinic. She says her somewhat grueling schedule is not a problem when she thinks about her overall goals.

"Sometimes at the beginning you think, wow - am I going to be able to handle this? But of course you can," says Keila. "You just need the will and to tell yourself that you can do things a little better each day."

*Contributed by Shannon Taggart
Special Projects*

"There are people here who've dedicated much of their lives to us and are just like parents to us and I love them so much," says Keila. "Growing up with so many people at your side, you really learn to share and get along with others and it is easy to relate to other people because it's such a normal part of your everyday life."

Photos: Keila with Wendy and Rita. Keila and siblings, Jose Luis and Saira.

