Jeweler Eng Works with Munay Rumi

Peggy Eng is an artist. Her medium is aluminum from which she crafts one of a kind pieces of jewelry. And in late April of 2009, the Bridge of Hope team, along with artisan group Munay Rumi, considered themselves lucky to make her acquaintance.

Eng flew into Lima, Peru late on a Thursday night not entirely sure what to expect as a Bridge of Hope volunteer. After spending the weekend exploring the city and the markets, soaking in the common styles of jewelry made in Peru, Eng along with Mission Coworker Alexandra Buck, YAV Katie Rains and Director of Bridge of Hope Jorge Travezaño, took the twenty minute cab ride out to the district of San Juan de Lurigancho where the workshop of Fair Trade artisan group Munay Rumi is located.

A donation of tools was made by Eng and some fellow jewelers from the states. The most important of which was a drawplate. Munay Rumi mixes their own silver and fashion their own silver plate and wire, and had been renting the expensive tool. The donation would save them so much in overhead, the words to express their gratitude were hard to find.

With a goal of 50 new pieces of jewelry looming, work began immediately. Peggy asked each member of the group to show her their favorite piece of jewelry they currently make and to explain why they like it. Ernesto liked the group did not reach the goal of 50 pieces, they continue to grow new pieces in their own styles, in their own lines.

The group also received their largest order for jewelry from Partners for Just Trade ever. Be on the lookout for their new work available this fall at http://partnersforjusttrade.com. Check out Peggy’s work on her website http://www.peggyeng.com.

"The love you feel for jewelry is like what we feel for jewelry and we are moved and excited for you to be here and share this with us.

Thank you so much.”

- Ernesto Alca, Munay Rumi
Violent clashes between Peruvian police and indigenous protesters in the region of Bagua, Peru occurred this past week. The indigenous communities in the Peruvian Amazon are protesting because of fast-track decrees that allow the entrance of extractive industries to their native lands. These decrees are part of the implementation of the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement which began February 1, 2009.

Friday night and Saturday, the Peruvian police were called into the area, called “The Devil’s Curve” and opened fire on the communities who had been performing a protest and blockade for several weeks. The communities were armed with sticks and lances; the police with guns, helicopters, shields, and gases.

Numbers of those killed are unconfirmed, as allegations that the police are hiding bodies have been made. The government also called a curfew, preventing indigenous residents to search for the missing. Many have disappeared.

Democracy, development, and human rights are in question here in Peru. Watching the news with my Peruvian colleagues, I listened to outbursts and protests against the government’s callous interpretation of “order” and “citizenship.” Few media channels are relating live footage and numbers of dead have been controlled by the government. A mass grave has been discovered of indigenous people. And yet, President Alan Garcia is on record for calling the indigenous protesters terrorists. For many Peruvians, this situation brings up memories of the terrible Years of Violence between government and guerrilla forces. This is one example of the violent results of Free Trade.

On Thursday, June 11th, an ecumenical vigil for the Amazon communities was held in Pueblo Libre. Here, the people are living on hope, a hope in God, that the violence stops. Many people have traveled to Bagua to demonstrate that the communities there are not alone, that they are supported, and that there is a movement against the Free Trade decrees which the government must heed.

As people committed to an alternative to this deformed development, the Bridge of Hope Fair Trade team has recognized the horrific effects of the US-Peru Free Trade Agreement in these events. As Garcia’s government pushes fast-track legislation decreeing exploitative industries in the Amazon to implement the FTA, residents of that area - indigenous peoples - are trying to voice their protest to protect their ancestral territory. The forces at work of globalization and neoliberalism silences these voices with military force by pushing guns into their faces. This is not a new story, unfortunately.

We, the Bridge of Hope team and all of the artisans, offer our solidarity to the indigenous communities in Bagua. We hope, along with them, for dialogue, transparency, respect, justice, and peace, all requisite elements of Fair Trade. As we sign off at Bridge of Hope, we are hoping, praying and working...Por un Mundo más Justo y Solidario...for a world with more justice and solidarity; we need your solidarity, too.

Please take a minute to send off two letters.

One, to Nancy Pelosi and the House Trade Committe leaders (http://action.citizen.org/t/1153/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=27410&track=dia061009). They need to know, and admit, that the US-Peru Free Trade agreement is negatively affecting Peruvian communities, and that people in the US care, and want it to stop.

Second, send this message to Peru President Alan Garcia (http://amazonwatch.org/peru-action-alert.php). He needs to know that the international community is watching, indignant, and willing to act.

Ask your church or worshipping communities to observe a moment of silence every time you meet until this conflict is resolved. Your prayers, thoughts, and energy are very much needed by the people of Peru.

Read more:


Pray with us, as we sing:
I sing to God, my Creator God
For life, our life, which today wants to live.
The beautiful things that you gift to us, the mother earth that we have to care for
For the happiness and the colors that encourage us to continue
And for the people of my country, for those that love without conditions
For those that fight, that dedicate themselves for a homeland with dignity
And for the hands that hug us, for care and good will
For the tenderness and the existence of consolation and liberty
I sing to God, my Creator God
For life, our life, which today wants to live.
Florandina: Huancavelica’s Premiere Dairy Plant

by YAV Leslie McKnelly

In 2003, Epifanio Cardenas Arias was making yogurt in a small room to the side of his house. The yogurt was very strong and acidic, and it was hard to sell. He needed help. Cardenas joined forces with the Minister of Agriculture of Yauli, a small town about 20km outside of Huancavelica. Together, they invited ATIYPAQ to join them in mobilizing the people to come together and form a milk co-op. There was a lot of milk production in the area, but there was little knowledge of how to pasteurize it, sell it, or use it to make other products. ATIYPAQ jumped at the opportunity to work with them on this project.

Immediately they started milk production in the Cardenas home. They started recruiting families from Occuchuc (pronounced ooch-coos), a rural settlement of about 15 families between the towns of Vista Alegre and Yauli, to buy milk from and little by little their business grew. They began to make a variety of cheeses and different flavored yogurts to sell in Huancavelica.

In four years they grew from one family to eight and were producing 200 liters of milk each day. Three other families partnered with Cardenas and in 2007 when construction began on a milk plant near the small town of Vista Alegre settled between all of the families that sell their milk to the plant.

APAIR (Association of Rural Agroindustrial Producers) Florandina left the tiny room in Cardenas’s house and opened their plant for business in early 2009. They now produce 120 liters of yogurt and over 300 kilos of cheese monthly, and they collect over 250 liters of milk daily from the collective families in the region.

The milk-plant has brought a steady influx of money to an extremely poor region of Huancavelica; Florandina now has about 12 families regularly selling them their milk, and the families are learning the worth of their milk. They now know that it is an extremely good source of protein for their growing children and that it’s best to save some each day for their own families. They also know how to pasteurize it so it’s safe for their kids to drink.

YAV Spotlight: Meet Leslie McKnelly

Name: Leslie Maurine McKnelly
Nickname: Gringa
Age: 24
Degree: BS Spanish, Education, Geography
School: Appalachian State University
YAV Placement Job: ESL Teacher Trainer in Huancavelica, Peru and ATIYPAQ support staff.
Future Aspirations: Complete my Masters of Education in ESL and Spanish Education from Virginia Tech, continue humanitarian work at home and abroad, be the most stellar language teacher there ever was, rescue Great Danes and travel the world.
Favorite thing about Peru: My favorite thing about Peru is the diversity. From the Amazon in Iquitos to the beach desert of Paracas, the geography is as diverse as the people themselves. Their music, language and zest for life shines through a little differently in each province. The Incan, Spanish and American influences are layered thick into the culture creating a unique value system that again varies greatly from province to province.
Favorite food: I love Pachamanca. It’s a traditional Peruvian dish made for special holidays. You layer an obscene amount of food into a hole in the ground lined with hot rocks. Then you cover it with hot rocks and dirt and let it cook. The top layer is usually a meat, like alpaca. The second layer is usually habas, Peruvian lima beans. Next will be tamales, sweet potatoes and then various layers of different kinds of potatoes. It’s a feast that rivals Thanksgiving in my book, and its by far my favorite food in Peru.
Favorite quote: “Never lose your childlike enthusiasm” – Under the Tuscan Sun
Doe Run Peru Asking for Gov’t Bailout

In late February 2009, Doe Run Peru claimed that it was on the verge of bankruptcy. After three years of record gains, Renco Group, DRP’s parent company, was calling for a government bailout from the state of Peru for their metallurgical processing plant in La Oroya. In mid March the plant did indeed place thousands of workers on leave without pay as the plant reduced its operations to minimal capacity. Doe Run Peru claimed it needed a $150 million credit line in order to resume business. Ira Rennert, sole owner of Renco Group, declared that if the state of Peru did not bail out his company, it would go bankrupt.

Doe Run Peru is a unique processing plant on two accounts. One, its advanced technology allows it to break down metals and minerals into quantities of by-products and sub by-products to be sold on the market that other processing plants are not capable of doing. Two, because of its tremendous capital it is able to employ a business model wherein it purchases concentrates from nearly 30 mining companies in Peru in order to sell the by-products on the global market for its own financial gain, as opposed to providing a service for the mining companies (as other processing plants do) wherein the mining company retains ownership of the products and thus the financial gains on the global market. It is this second unique aspect of Doe Run Peru that has led to its apparent financial crisis.

In order to purchase the concentrates from mining companies, Doe Run Peru has engaged in a revolving fund with private Peruvian banks and creditors. In late February, citing the rapid fall of metal prices on the global market, as well as a decline in sales, the banks withdrew their credit line to Doe Run Peru, thus leaving the company unable to purchase concentrates from the mining companies.

In early April, an alternative bailout agreement was apparently met. Mining executives offered to open a $150 million credit line in concentrates. However, not wanting to let Doe Run Peru nor Rennert off the hook, it was stipulated that an additional $150 million debt that Doe Run Peru owes to Renco Group must be converted into shares and delivered to the government of Peru to hold onto until Doe Run Peru completes its state mandated clean up program in response to the severe contamination of La Oroya by the pre-determined deadline of October 2009.

Joining Hands Peru) worked in partnership with other civil society networks and its presbytery partner in the U.S., Giddings-Lovejoy to raise the voice of conscience, declaring that in no way should the state use tax payers’ money to bail out a private industry. Through letter campaigns and public announcements in Peruvian newspapers, it appears that the voice of conscience reached the ears, if not the hearts, of Peruvian congress persons and mining industry executives.

Having accepted the agreement, Doe Run Peru declared it would have its plant fully operational within a matter of weeks. As of late May, the plant was not yet operating at half of its capacity. Furthermore, it was revealed that Renco Group had not yet abided by its end of the deal; it had still not turned Doe Run Perú’s debt into shares for the state of Peru to hold onto. And, furthermore, it claimed that it would not do so until the state provided “more flexibility” with the clean-up program. To note, the deadline for the clean-up program has already been “flexibly” extended four times by the state.

Outraged by the lack of cooperation by Doe Run Peru and Renco Group, the National Society of Mining, Petroleum and Energy (a consortium of private industry executives in Peru) threatened to expel Doe Run Peru from the society for its failure to abide by the agreed upon terms of the deal. Likewise, the state declared it would indeed close down the plant if Doe Run Peru did not meet the October deadline. No body – not the state itself, not the mining industry, not the workers’ unions, not civil society -- no one (except perhaps Rennert himself) wants the plant to close down. And, no one is budging.

And in the midst of it all, we continue to search and find our voice of conscience, remembering that our call is for the justice of La Oroya, the welfare of its people. Regardless of who operates the plant – Doe Run Peru, the State, or another mining company altogether – our goal is for a sustainable and integral solution that prioritizes first and foremost the people. Our end is the rapid and relentless downward flow of righteousness … that not only the course of the river may be changed, but the course of history, too.