

Integral Heart in Guatemala

by Debora Prieto (<http://www.mickquinn.com/uncommon.projects.guatemala.htm>)

When I was a little girl I was sent to study in a Catholic nun's school. I remember that as part of the activities of the school there were many days when we would watch movies. I remember this clearly, because it was really exciting to do anything other than attending class. Most of these movies were about missionaries, of the same order as those who were running the school, who were doing social work and helping people in Third World countries.

I can recall that I was always fascinated by how other people could drop their entire lives so that they could go to help others. I found it great that they would do that, but I had a life, and of course, we already had those lovely, nice nuns doing that "dirty" work. It was great to watch them work and to admire them from a safe place. Also, the possibility of having to become a nun wasn't the most attractive idea in the world. Of course at that time I thought that only nuns, monks or priests could be volunteers.

Today at 37 years of age and, as funny as it might sound, I am living in a third world country where I do humanitarian work, and I also am a nun... (in the Zen/Soto tradition.)

My husband, Mick Quinn (author of "*The Uncommon Path*"), and I live in Guatemala with our two dogs Panchito and Bella. Guatemala is situated just below Mexico, in the middle of Central America. Here are some details about this, otherwise wonderful country: 43% of children under five years old are chronically malnourished. This is one of the highest malnutrition rates in the world. More than half of the population is below the national poverty line and 15% live in extreme poverty. Poverty among indigenous groups, which make up 38% of the population, averages 76% and extreme poverty rises to 28%. In addition to all I just mentioned, this country is coming out from a horrible 30 years long civil war. Much pain, resentment, and mistrust are the current outcomes of this terrible and sad event.



One room for 8 people, Jocotenango, Guatemala – 2 miles from the 1st World town of Antigua Guatemala.

Mick and I decided to move here after randomly picking this country for a vacation in August of 2009. We were living in the States and were working on our coaching practice and the promotion of our book, “The Uncommon Path”. We missed the Spanish culture quite a bit after having lived in Europe for a few years, but didn’t want to deal with jetlag again, so we went to Guatemala. For our first trip here in August of 2009, we stayed in Antigua, a beautiful UNESCO protected town in central Guatemala. Everything was great until we rented a car and visited some areas on the outskirts of Antigua.

We couldn’t believe it but as soon as we stepped out of Antigua, the poverty was plainly obvious and completely overwhelming. From amid the smiling faces of those in the ‘unconsciousness now’ there was dirt and squalor, horrible living conditions, evident alcoholism, prostitution, exploited working children and even more unimaginable events unfolding in front of our eyes; a normal day in the life of Guatemala. We were seeing its true face and character.

Over the following three days I experienced such a devastating state of mind that I had to call Big Mind on myself in order to gain some perspective and clarity. And in all of this, I realized that while it is great to raise consciousness and develop higher levels of awareness, there was and there are people literally dying from starvation while I write this article or while you read it. Sitting around a table and using big words is not the full embodiment of 2nd Tier thinking. It is just our minds trying to show ourselves and others how smart, evolved and enlightened we are. So we came to live here in December of 2009.

Mick and I managed to arrange our coaching schedule in such a way that it allowed us to do that work on Mondays, Tuesdays and part of Wednesday. In doing so we were able to have the rest of the week free to dedicate our time to Conscious Service, which we do.

We have several different projects in which we are now involved. Now we can do this work without even thinking about it. When there is something to do, we just do it, and we move from one task to the next without a blink. But, it hasn't always been that way.

The first time I went to the mountain to do social work with Leonel, the psychologist from the school where I personally am most involved, I knew for sure that the old *Green Meme* paradigms weren't going to work there. (Click on the following link to read more about how to think of [cultural development in colors](#)).

When I saw those mothers with no food or electricity, with water flowing across the dirt floors of their one room tin-walled homes and the only clothes they had were those they were wearing and when I heard those sad stories of abuse by their husbands, I knew for sure that telling them things such as: "Sweet heart, you don't worry, just sit and meditate and everything will improve", or "there is no suffering, it's just an illusion of the mind", or "You are attracting all of this, so if you change your thinking you will change your life", just wasn't going to be enough. In fact, it's not even enough for anybody in the world in their right mind.

The most shocking part was realizing what a moron I had been. I thought that I knew it all. I was a [2nd Tier conscious being](#), I knew about Spiral Dynamics, Evolutionary Enlightenment, Big Mind, Integral Theory, the Quinn Technique and so on... So when I was in front of that lady I met up the mountain, in her home, I simply had no idea what to do. I was terrified, frozen and looking like an idiot. I was smart, educated, with great passion and intention but I had no idea what to do with all of it. How could I apply these wonderful theories and maps outside the laboratory and intellectual soirees, on the ground where they are most needed?

It was quite sad to arrive home and to recall over and over again that first meeting with the people of Guatemala. I wanted to help but I didn't know how, and the feeling of stupidity was growing bigger and bigger. I realized that I was fooling myself for years in thinking I was 'there', that I was already a full embodied 2nd Tier human being who had transcended and included all the previous memes of the spiral. But, none of that made sense in the face of the reality I met that day.

In our push up the spiral of development, ever higher and higher, we forget how important and present all other lower memes are. Yes, we transcend them and we believe we include them because we understand them, but the fact is that we have no clue. Guatemala taught me that embodying the lower memes of the spiral can be as enlightening as moving up into the higher ones. A huge sense of humility inundated my whole body prompting me to figure out how to use this wealth of knowledge to really communicate with and help other people.

As Genpo Roshi said many times... it is not by screaming from the top of the mountain that we can be of help to our fellow man; it is by being willing to go down the mountain so that we can walk hand-in-hand with those who are striving for a better way.



Two brothers, who have never been to school, say goodbye after a home visit in, Jocotenango, Guatemala.

The key, my husband and I realized, was to open our hearts and then to translate all this high talk to work on lowest ground. We just worked harder and never gave up. We learned how to apply everything we knew and how to translate our thoughts into the memes of the human beings we were talking to.

And since we moved to Guatemala in December, 2009, we have gotten involved in many different projects with primarily two different NGO's (non-governmental organizations or non-profits). The first is [*The Godschild Project*](#) whose headquarters is in North Dakota (*Nuestros Ahijados* in Guatemala) and the second is [*CasaSito*](#), a Texas based organization. My dearest place is a school called [*The Scheel Center*](#), which operates under the umbrella of the Godschild Project. With 130 students, located in a town called Jocotenango, The Scheel Center is situated at the bottom of a mountain called Vista Hermosa (Beautiful View). The site of the school used to be a dump and a significant number of the kids now attending the school were working, alcoholics, drug addicts, pimps, prostitutes and so on.

The Scheel Center has students of all ages in the same classes, depending on their level, and some of them are teenagers, who had never gone to school at all. Their families are basically surviving and suffering from every kind of problem that you can imagine. Some of the children are rescues from human trafficking rings, or from their own families who had no scruples in selling them for labor or sexual slavery. I love all the kids and I know they have great potential, so let's give them the chance of overcoming their past. If they are good survivors, and I know they are, they can achieve whatever they want in life. Let's own a healthy Beige Meme!!

Here are some of the projects we are involved with: (you can also see them online at <http://www.mickquinn.com/uncommon.projects.guatemala.htm>)

- **Sponsoring Kids Program:** This is a project to connect hearts with hearts in which funds are directed to school supplies, food and shoes. For that we are working on a new website, posting pictures on social media site such as facebook or twitter, and distributing information through our newsletter, and by email.



Jasmine loves to pose.



Mick with Marta who is being sponsored by Mick's mom, Norah.

- **The Radio show:** We have a group of five kids that Mick and I trained at our home every Saturday for about 6 weeks. We empower them to speak out, to let them know their word is important, that no matter what has happened in the past

they are right here right now and can be heard. Show topics have included domestic abuse, eating disorders, and drug addictions.



Outside Jocotenango radio station, 92.3FM with kids, teachers, and volunteers.

- **Philosophy classes:** In coordination with Luke Armstrong, the director of the Godschild Project in Guatemala, I teach a philosophy class with the kids. I use among others tools, the Big Mind Process with the invaluable help of its creator, Dennis Genpo Merzel. The director of education at EnlightenNext (Andrew Cohen's organization) Jeff Carreira with whom I have shared numerous phone calls also wisely guides me in the work. Jessica Roemischer, of pianobeautiful.com has also shared her work with kids and they are learning how nothing is impossible and by being present to her work they feel the peace that

arises through listening to her music. And of course, the priceless advice of my dear husband, Mick.



Jessica Roemischer speaking by skype video with some of the kids at The Scheel Center.

- **Building Leaders Project:** We do business and personal coaching with the Guatemalan directors of four different schools under the supervision of parent organizations who are responsible for those schools. We are using Integral Theory, The Big Mind Process, Evolutionary Teachings, business coaching exercises, NLP and theories and practices from The Uncommon Path. We also train them in marketing techniques using social media networks.
- **The Arts Project:** The kids here have lots of dreams of their own. We observe them and help them to discover and express their full potential in whatever field they wish. As a result of this observation, we realized that some of our kids showed a special passion and gift for art and drawing, and so the art project was

born. So we connected these kids with the Big Mind Western Zen Center, in Salt Lake City, where every July they have an arts month. Stephanie Young Merzel, wife of Genpo Roshi, gave us permission to display our student's drawings and to offer them for sale. As a result of this effort, 6 kids were sponsored and we also raised 600 dollars that has been spent on different families from the project.

- **The Duets Project:** In collaboration with Jessica Roemischer, of www.pianobeautiful.com, we are going to have kids with musical sensibilities play piano duets with her using skype technology. This project is being possible also with the collaboration of Laurel Jacobson, owner of a beautiful hotel and restaurant here in Antigua, called the Panza Verde. She is very kindly allowing us to use the grand piano at her hotel. That is a big plus for the kids since they never been into a restaurant like the Panza Verde and are really excited about the idea of playing piano there.
- **The Solar Lighting project:** Estimates place the number of homes without power in Guatemala somewhere around 500,000. Considering the size of the average family, that's millions of people in the dark after sundown. And, most of these people have no light and not much hope of getting access to the national grid.



This project has four main goals:

- Provide widespread awareness of **Portable Solar Lighting Units**.
 - Provide employment in the promotion of the units.
 - Provide access to microfinance (through Genesis Funding) for the units.
 - Provide access to private micro-loans so that **no family** is left in the dark.
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- **Psychology:** This project involves the one-on-one work we do with the kids and families associated to the school. For instance, I have two kids who travel every Friday from a town located six hours from the school, to receive psychological attention. The reason they travel is because no one else is nearer who can speak to them about the problems they are experiencing and they had been looking for help for about seven months. I do this work in collaboration with Leonel the psychologist from the school. Some mothers and students prefer to speak to me simply because I am a woman.



Debora with a group of mom's during a house checking visit after Tropical Storm Agatha, in June, 2010

- **Social Work:** Leonel (the psychologist from The Scheel Center) and I personally visit the neediest families of the school every week. We go to their homes to make sure that the family is in best situation possible, also to see if there is something they need, and if so to determine how we can help. Part of that help might include food, clothes, beds, just human support, medical care, the construction or repair of some part of the house. These visits are not only to ensure that the families have a more comfortable life, but to ensure they continue to send their kids to the school.
- **Meditation class:** This project is one of the most recent ones. It began in the last week of August and occurs every Friday morning before classes. During one of my philosophy classes in which we talked about the concept of freedom for the Greeks, I decided to call the voice of 'the one who knows what freedom is' and 'the one who is completely free'. The kids then asked about meditation and if they

could do it. They love it and are great meditators. They don't move at all and they are, for the first time consciously experiencing how busy their minds are, something they didn't know before. They were also amazed that they were making choices unconsciously based on an extremely busy mind. Now they are more careful and they are beginning to gain clarity and awareness on the arising of their thoughts. They are also beginning to practice at home, on their own, and making tones of questions.



Some of the kids in our meditation class.

- **Local Donors Program:** Since we moved here we have been making many local contacts. We are now beginning to organize events and venues in our friend's places of business to raise awareness, money, clothes, food and so on. Because of this networking, we are now being contacted by other people who would like to know how they can help. For example: There is a family who owns a butchery business in Guatemala City who is donating meat on weekly basis to feed the

need of the kids in both schools of the Godschild Project in Guatemala, the Dreamer Centre and the Scheel Centre.

- **Finally the Love Project:** This is the big side effect of the work we are doing, the love, relationships, human contact, care, openness, vulnerability, intimacy and trust that we are giving and receiving is immeasurable. We have to also include in this project our best ambassadors: Bella, our Dachshund, and of course Panchito our Golden Retriever.



Panchito entertains the kids at the Alotenango Music Festival organized by the CasaSito non-profit.

As a result of all of these projects, the kids are beginning to appreciate life more, to trust people, and to be responsible for their lives. They are even beginning to drop the victim mentality a little and to overcome their fears and deeply rooted conditioned limitations, to become a little more trusting of themselves and other people.

After the short time of doing this work, I cannot imagine myself doing anything else. Mick and I have many conversations at the end of the day and we are more than amazed at all that has been happening here since we moved to Guatemala. Many doubts and questions arise of course, but we own the fact that the voice of the *skeptic* and the thinking mind are simply doing their jobs, and they always will. In the meantime we keep working and making sure that at least we can get someone to smile today. Wouldn't it be great if we all could be happy just with that smile.



A trip to the water park with the kids of the The Scheel Center.

Another thing that Guatemala and these wonderful children have taught me is that *simple is better*. It is great to know big concepts and ideas but the art of translating them into a smile and plain understanding is something we all should practice.

One day recently I asked one of the senseis (Zen teacher) whom we are working with on koans (Zen riddle to untangle the linear mind), Mugaku Sensei, why did I have that feeling of not doing enough, of not really helping anyone, and of being tied and without sufficient tools. His answer was: You are saving all sentient beings, to which I replied, ‘No, I am not, I cannot give everybody what they need. I cannot help everyone all the way’. Then he said: “Who told you that saving all sentient beings looked any different than that or felt any different than that?” And he was right, who told us that?

So are you willing to make someone else’s life just a little bit more comfortable? Are you willing to help others to grow and to be educated so they can break the bitter chains of poverty? If you are then see how you can help here:

<http://www.mickquinn.com/uncommon.projects.guatemala.htm>

Debora Prieto is a coach, mentor, teacher and writer. She was born in Spain in 1972 and now lives in Guatemala with her husband, Mick Quinn, author of *The Uncommon Path* and her two dogs Panchito and Bella. Debora was ordained as a monk by Zen Master Genpo Roshi in July of 2010 and has been training with him in the Big Mind Process since 2007. Debora has studied philosophy and she is an educator of mental handicapped children. She, along with her husband run *The Uncommon Projects* in the slums of Guatemala, to bring hope and light to those who call this home.

Debora and Mick also offer joint and separate Integral-inspired Coaching programs and retreats to clients worldwide.

For more information about Debora Prieto and Mick Quinn:

<http://www.mickquinn.com>

<http://www.mickquinn.com/coaching.htm>

<http://www.mickquinn.com/uncommon.projects.guatemala.htm>

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=115185541836127>

For more information about our teachers:

<http://www.bigmind.org/Home.html>

<http://www.enlightennext.org/>

<http://www.kenwilber.com/home/landing/index.html>

[http://www.thebouldermountainzendo.org/Boulder Mountain Zendo/Welcome.html](http://www.thebouldermountainzendo.org/Boulder_Mountain_Zendo/Welcome.html)

<http://www.spiraldynamics.net/>

<http://spiraldynamics.org/>

For more information about the NGO's we work with in Guatemala:

<http://www.godschild.org/>

<http://www.godschild.org/itemphumantrafficking.html>

<http://www.scheelcenter.org/>

<http://www.casasito.org/>

For more information about those who are actively collaborating with us:

<http://www.bigmind.org/Home.html>

<http://evolutionaryphilosophy.com/jeff-carreira/>

<http://www.pianobeautiful.com/>

<http://www.kidrobot.com/>

<http://www.quetsol.com/>

<http://www.panzaverde.com/>