



Potters for Peace

By Beth Campbell



By the end of day four I had accepted the fact that I would be touching the horse dung and clay mixture with my bare hands. The work gloves Potters for Peace had provided just didn't allow for the dexterity needed to slather the mortar smoothly on the bricks for the kilns we were building in La Sabaneta, Nicaragua. Most of the Nicaraguans gave us good natured grins as we used shovels and gloves to mix the mortar. They knew better. The best way to mix it is to step (or dance) in it with bare feet, and the way to get a smooth, even wall coat is to use bare hands. By the end of two days of hard work by both our group and the families involved, we had three traditional kilns built. The local potters whose land, bricks (and dung) we were using would be afforded the ability to earn an in-

come from local sales of their ceramics.

This was only one of the ways we would be able to help by travelling with Potters for Peace (PFP), a non-profit organization that works at a truly grassroots level to offer support and information to potters in the developing world. There were twelve individuals, mostly potters, who had signed on for the January 2012 brigade to Nicaragua. We had all discovered PFP independently but had come together to see firsthand the work being done to develop and preserve local ceramic traditions. PFP offers these brigades annually and the organizers definitely know what they are doing. The brigade was part history lesson, part art tour, part ceramics explorations and a very full two week's worth of powerful experiences.

Later on in the brigade we arrived in El Ojoche – a village with a women's ceramic collective that was at a relatively early stage of developing their ceramic skills and business acumen. We were there to stay with them overnight through a firing of their kiln. I was told that I would be staying in a local home on my own (and without any Spanish lessons under my belt). I don't mind telling you I was a little outside of my comfort zone. The home was sparse and clean – a dirt floor, a wood fire to cook over, 2 plastic chairs and 2 hammocks strung across the main room as furniture. But thanks to the information packet provided by PFP I had arrived with two things that would make my stay extraordinary – a ceramics vocabulary list in Spanish and some small cookie cutters. After dinner with the family I managed to ask for some clay and my host happily brought out her work table and about five pounds of clay which seemed to be her entire stockpile. My host, her two daughters and I happily spent the next few hours seeing what creations we could make by inlaying the clay with cut out shapes, marvelling at what worked and laughing over the pieces that clearly were-

n't meant to make it to the kiln. It is these highly personal encounters that PFP excels at creating and encouraging, and it is these experiences that truly allow for growth for both the Nicaraguan and visiting potters. I had very recently graduated from the Haliburton School of the Arts ceramics certificate program; the brigade consolidated the academic concepts I had been taught, and added a very practical element. I learned an incredible amount about kilns, efficient firing strategies, decorating techniques and much more during the trip. But more importantly I learned about resilience and human nature. Nicaraguans have been through more than enough for one group of people. Dictators, natural disasters, revolutions and economic struggles have all left their mark. Yet the people I met had a strong sense of pride, a fabulous sense of humour and I could not have felt more welcome in their homes and studios. PFP has set up an extensive network of supports for these hard-working people; apprenticeships, training centres, pottery community interchanges, marketing assistance and technical aid for the building of wheels, more fuel efficient kilns and more. Each potter accesses whatever information or assistance they need at their particular point in the ceramics learning curve.

Potters for Peace has tackled more than assisting craftspeople to earn a better living in the developing world. They are also tackling the global problem of access to clean, safe drinking water. Goal 7C of the UN Millennium Development initiative is to halve the number of people without access to clean drinking water by the year 2015. PFP has developed a ceramic water filter that can be produced internationally in local factories. PFP

provides training and facilitates the set up of these factories, with the goal of a gradual release of responsibility as independence is gained. PFP is also working to develop alternate fuel burners for kilns (using agricultural waste) in order to reduce deforestation.

These are all critical, global goals being tackled by an incredibly dedicated group of individuals. I came back from this brigade with a new perspective on the impact of the individual and a new found respect for an international aid model that actually works. I have been involved with various non-profit and charitable organizations over the years; most left me feeling like they were band aid solutions at best or at worst - that they may actually be encouraging dependence in the neediest of populations. Potters for Peace really is making a difference, without huge overhead, without seeking recognition beyond that which will help them continue their work.

I definitely encourage any curious potters to sign up for a brigade if you are able. Or if heading to Nicaragua is not in your future, you can still help by going to www.pottersforpeace.org. Potters for Peace is funded primarily by individual donation; you can join us in providing clean water and sustainable incomes for those in need by donating anything you can afford. What a powerful way to combine a love of clay and a desire to do more in our world.



Potters for Peace Mandates

MISSION STATEMENT

Our goals are to offer support, solidarity and friendship to developing world potters; to assist with appropriate technologies sustained using local skills and materials; to help preserve cultural traditions; and to assist in marketing locally, regionally and internationally. The vast majority of [potters](#) in Central America are rural women and the core work for Potters for Peace has always been assisting these hard-working people to earn a better living.

WATER FILTERS

Every day 5,000 children die due to unsanitary water, (WHO 2005). Since 1998 Potters for Peace has traveled the world teaching the fabrication of a low-cost [ceramic water filter](#) that can bring clean, potable water to those who need it most. We do not make, store or distribute ceramic water filters nor do we operate filter production facilities. Instead, we assist responsible local partners to set up filter production and distribution facilities.

www.pottersforpeace.org

Potters for Peace Water Filter Facts

- Every year 1.7 million people, mainly children under the age of five, die from diarrhea which is caused by unsafe water. The UN's Millennium Development Goal is to halve, by the year 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water. The objective of the CWP project is to meet this urgent demand for safe water in rural and marginalized communities by providing technology that can easily be copied by local workshops.
- A ceramic water filter is a simple, bucket-shaped (11" wide by 10" deep) clay vessel that is made from a mix (by weight) of local terracotta clay and sawdust or other combustibles, such as rice husks. The filters are formed by using a press.
- The simplest press utilizes a hand-operated hydraulic truck jack and two-piece aluminum mold. Filters are fired to about 860 deg. C. and the milled, screened combustible material burns out, leaving porous clay walls. The filters are tested to make sure they meet a standard rate of filtration and then they are coated with colloidal silver. The combination of fine pore size and the bactericidal properties of colloidal silver produce an effective filter.
- When in use, the fired and treated filter is placed in a five-gallon plastic or ceramic receptacle with a lid and faucet. Water passes through the clay filter element at the rate of 1.5 to 2.5 liters per hour.

The CWP has been cited by the United Nations' Appropriate Technology Handbook, and hundreds of thousands of filters have been distributed worldwide by organizations such as the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, Doctors Without Borders, UNICEF, Plan International, Project Concern International, Oxfam and USAID.

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