

Memories about our intern with ACEASPA

From October 2005-April 2006 I volunteered as an intern with ACEASPA's Program for Sustainable Development. It was an amazing introduction to a vital work field and a whole world of thinking, creating, and community organizing. I helped primarily with the ecotourism project in Achote, a project nurtured by the community of Achote and ACEASPA. I split my time working between Panama City and Achote, often staying for days at a time in Achote. I helped with translations, worked on organizing the library at Centro Tucán, edited a short documentary of the Coffee and Bird Festival of October 2005 AN- helped to coordinate details and logistics of educational visits to the Center and Achote. This work provided me with a detailed background for the project, integrated me into the community and work, and taught me valuable skills in a relatively short time. My interest in ecotourism had started as a theoretical one- I was concerned about the rapid rise of tourism in Panama and what this would mean for communities, populations and the environment- my last semester in college I did a project on tourism in a different area of Panama called: "Autonomy and Tourism in Kuna Yala."

My internship with CEASPA not only provided me with hope for the ways communities can maintain power and autonomy but also a newfound respect for those working to preserve the environment and this incorporation into their daily lives. My colleagues were amazing, their dedication and constant analysis true signs of sustainability. They even made me want to study up on biology and take up birding!

I was also fortunate to explore the connection between art, ecotourism, and community enrichment by attending the art workshops held in Achote and starting work on a Summer Poetry/Story Group with students in Achote. Working on the poetry/story group was especially exciting for me because I studied history and creative writing in college.

The idea developed organically when, after visiting the elementary school in Achote a couple of times with some poetry exercises, some students approached me with the idea of starting a group. We worked on some ideas and ended up holding a handful of group sessions at Centro Tucán during the student's summer. The first group day there were so many students we had to split into a poetry group and a story group! We made and decorated notebooks for writing and drawing, discussed poems, worked on activities and made a collective story. The group was short-lived due to scheduling- but it was great fun. The students definitely taught me a lot about what does and doesn't work in a workshop!

The lessons I learned with CEASPA pop up everywhere; I read an article on bird populations killed by cell phone towers and I think of the visible symbolism of bird life. Their lives as a reflection of the nurture or lack of nurture given to the earth and community and the implications this carries for the future.

The Animal's Party

(Translation)

Group Story Created January 19, 2006, Story Group

The tiger and the Horse walk together. They are going to Canada to look for the Jaguar to invite him to the dance. They walk and dance together towards the Toucan lookout deck where the party will be. The cow is taking his time because he had to cross the River of Bocas del Toro swimming. The duck passed by Sherman, later by Piña, until they arrived at the party. Finally everyone arrived; they danced... (And no one ate anyone?)

They toasted their luck, their health and they told stories because so much time had passed since the last time they had

reunited. At one it started to rain hard and the food ran off. The Jaguar was so hungry since he had wasted all his energy on his walk that he felt hopeless. His friends, suspicious and scared, ran to hide themselves in the jungle. The monkeys arrived to help them and they all left the jaguar alone. The jaguar was scared, and was crying when the Pollilla migratory butterfly arrived…