

Friday: After a 3 am wake-up call, our group of almost strangers piled into the 3CE vans to head to PDX to begin our amazing journey to El Salvador. Although our flight was changed so we spent all day in the Houston airport, the layover gave our group of sixteen the chance to really get excited, to start writing our journals, and to get any last minute fears out of the way. We landed in San Salvador at 9 pm, and walked out into the humid heat of Central America.



Saturday: For our first day in Guarjila with the Tamarindo we celebrated the Anniversary of the murder of Óscar Romero, the Archbishop of San Salvador who dedicated his ministry to the poor. He was murdered during the civil war, a war of the repressive government funded by the United States against the poor fighting for social justice and land reform. The older generation still remembers and honors him, and we heard their testimony on his life, his work, and the difference he made to those who fought in the civil war. The afternoon was spent at the river Sumpul, a 1980 massacre site where refugees were trapped running from the Salvadoran army on one side, shot by American planes overhead, and shot by Honduran armed forces on the other side. Hundreds of people died that day, and John explained that for decades people would not come to the river because of the atrocities committed

there, but now the children play in the water without a second thought. I haven't decided what to think - life is moving on after the war, but does the next generation know what happened there? Is it acceptance of the tragic past or forgotten history?

Sunday: The entire Tamarindo, Bishop Chatard high school and ourselves turned out early to pick up trash in the morning. Jeff's comments on the task: "I have to admit that there was a lot more garbage than I had expected. I found it odd that people living in such a beautiful place would be so careless with their refuse. In some ways, I think this may speak a bit to a certain degree of fatalism that many people in Guarjila seem to have. It seemed that a disregard for the future was not uncommon, especially among youth, and often resulted in maladaptive behaviors, including drug use and violence. However, there was also the presence of hope and activism, of which we were lucky enough to be a part."

The afternoon was fantastic; we competed in a mango picking competition and lost, but ate mangos until we couldn't eat another bite, then turned to throwing them or smearing them all over each other. The day didn't end there. While the high schoolers played kickball, we collected food from the market and under Cecilia's excellent direction the LC crew cooked Argentinean *locro* for 80+ people for dinner. It was a blast, and we had *arroz con leche* for dessert, then an impromptu mud wrestling session as the skies opened and it absolutely poured. It was certainly a messy day, but everyone went home tired and content.



*The Mango Competition Winners*



*Chopping veggies for soup*

Monday: Monday was our school day. The teachers are now certified, but when Guarjila was rebuilding, the teachers were *maestros populares*, or popular teachers with little formal education. The original school was swelteringly hot because they built it with inches-thick concrete for the roof to protect from bullets and mortar fire. Now it's a



beautiful area with room for elementary school in the morning and middle and high school in the afternoons. The government provides school supplies and uniforms, and Guarjila is trying to push itself upwards and forwards through quality education. We spent the day in the classroom, then cooled off at La Pozona in the late afternoon before heading back to the Tamarindo for three-on-three soccer matches.





*Taking the leap at La Pozona*

Tuesday: This was an incredibly difficult and powerful day. We traveled to San Salvador to visit the Universidad Centroamericana (UCA) where six Jesuit priests, the housekeeper and her daughter were murdered by the Atlacatl battalion, a Salvadoran Army unit trained in counterinsurgency. The priests were the intellectual heart of the resistance to the government, teaching liberation theology and supporting the FMLN resistance. Their massacre was a turning point in the war as the murders garnered international attention and horror, pressuring the United States and the Salvadoran government to end the atrocities. John made the entire experience real and heartbreaking, telling the stories of the deaths of his friends and the power of religion. As we stand at the foot of the cross staring at destruction and terror we ask, "What have I done? What am I doing? What will I do?"



*Left: John recounting the murder of the priests. Below: Rose garden plaque for the priests.*





Wednesday: Morazan is another province in El Salvador, and we spent five hours on the road to reach El Mozote, another massacre site, for another emotional day. Over 900 noncombatants, largely women and children, were massacred by the Atlacatl Battalion in the town of El Mozote. The army had gathered the villagers together purportedly to keep them safe while they did a sweep for guerilla fighters in the area, but somewhere along the lines plans changed. The army divided the townspeople, shooting the men first, then the women and children. They riddled packed houses with bullets, then burned anyone left alive. Hundreds of children were murdered and hundreds of young girls were raped and killed, all of which the Salvadoran and US governments vehemently denied. There are still bodies yet to be uncovered, because the Salvadoran government refuses to let anthropologists finish documenting the dead. There is a beautiful monument around the rebuilt church, with a mural on one side and a “garden of the innocents” in memory of the children on the other side. The one survivor, Rufina Amaya, recently died and is buried beneath a statue of four outlined figures, and the names of the dead surround her grave. The reflections our group had that night were exceptionally powerful, and we really came together as a group through the shared experience, and the internal crises we all felt as Americans and as humans. It is hard to wrap my mind around such enormous atrocities, especially those funded by my own government that killed people like the Tamarindos, people I have come to love.

The trees acted as witnesses, and they remain long after we are gone.

*To understand the massacre, read [The Massacre at El Mozote](#) by Mark Danner.*



*Wall in the Garden of the Innocents*



*Monument at El Mozote with the names of the dead on wood behind*

Wednesday: We visited the FMLN combatant museum, run by ex-combatants, to learn more about the guerilla army, how they lived, how they trained and how they fought. After a little mishap of forgetting all of our gear at the hostel, we got on the road back to Guarjila for our night with the Tamarindos. Given a night run by the LC crew, we



planned team building activities then broke out into groups for ping pong, no rules ultimate frisbee, nail painting, puzzles, coloring, and bracelet-making with beads and hemp. It was a huge success, and the girls and guys were really into all of the activities. I ran the bracelet station, and was surprised to see as many boys as girls. The boys also wanted to learn to make the pattern bracelets, whereas the girls had no patience for learning the steps. I had a blast, and was thrilled to see so much active participation.

Friday: On Friday we finally had a little time to breathe and enjoy our last day in the Tamarindo. After a late breakfast of fantastic food (as always) at Betty's, we hiked up to La Mesa, a hill with a view of all of Guarjila. Friday was my day to hear a multitude of personal accounts of the war, and to translate. Before breakfast we talked to Betty about her experiences, learning that she lost many friends and family members, but also that wartime was beautiful in a way. There was an incredible sense of community and purpose during the war, she explained. At La Mesa, I acted as translator again while Luis recounted his childhood in Guarjila. He recounted his fear as he heard mortars falling and hid under the bed with his sister, and his fantasies of being a guerilla shooting down at the army as they marched through Guarjila from the perfect vantage point La Mesa provided. We found shell casings buried in the dirt, making the story all the more powerful. Upon our return to town we visited the Jon Cortina museum, a museum dedicated to the priest who dedicated his life to ministry in Guarjila and who started the organization ProBusqueda to find missing and stolen children from the Civil War and reunite them with their families. We spent the evening cooking again - a grand *asado* (BBQ) with fire-cooked meat, roasted veggies and potatoes, hand-made tortillas, and mango *fresca* from fresh-picked mangos to drink. The night ended with everyone suiting up for roller hockey. We really had no chance - the Tamarindos are the NATIONAL hockey team and they compete internationally. For our side, Dale was the only person who had ever played hockey before and no one had been on skates in at least ten years. It was quite the experience, and a fantastic way to end a fantastic day.





*Group photo outside the Jon Cortina Museum*



*Translating for Luis on La Mesa*



*Jon Cortina Museum*



*Jeff preparing to be goalie*

*Jessica making tortillas*

*Cooking chicken*

Saturday: We said our goodbyes then drove to the coast to spend our last day on the beach to enjoy and reflect on the week. We took a small group of Tamarindos, picked up John's daughter, grabbed lunch food and headed to the beach house. We spent hours playing on the beach, surfing, playing in the pool, and chatting with each other and the Tamarindos. Gio scaled a coconut tree with a machete and hacked down seven or eight coconuts, hacked open the top and we shared coconut milk and meat.

John is planning a bike ride across the United States starting in August to raise money to build a field house for the Tamarindo. Sports keeps kids in Guarjila out of trouble and out of drugs and violence, providing them a safe space and opportunities. The field house will be an awesome new space that will be open 24 hours for everyone to create a community and participate in sports and activities rather than hanging out on the streets. We have become part of the Core 500, five hundred people who will each get thirty people to donate thirty dollars (approximately one cent per mile ridden) to the Tamarindo Foundation as John rides across the United States and gives talks to raise funds. The Tamarindo is like stone soup - everyone brings a little to the pot and the word spreads. People are what make the Tamarindo possible, and John is trying to reach as many people as possible. The Tamarindo changed my perspective on life, and I for one am committed to helping make a difference for the Tamarindo.



*John Giuliano*



*Surfing at Costa del Sol*



Sunday: 6 am flight back to Houston, then a 5 pm flight to Seattle. The bus came over an hour late, but we finally arrived at midnight at LC, back to the rain. The week in El Salvador was life-changing, revealing new perspectives on life and living.

