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Dear Angela, Ginna, and all the contributors,

At 8:00 AM Micki Kaplan, Beth King, Ani Ventocilla, Citlali Medeiros, and I set out to visit the Wounaan community in San Antonio, just up the Chagres River from Gamboa. We were met at the beach behind the Serpentarium at the Gamboa Rainforest Resort by Almodio Membache and his motorboat. Almodio is the spokesman for the San Antonio Wounaan and son of Lucida and Filipe Cabezón Membache. Filipe is the head of the San Antonio Wounaan. The weather was gorgeous, the second day of the dry season (verano), warm, with sunny, clear skies and a great trade-wind breeze.

The trip to San Antonio was about five minutes, and we landed at the village dock and proceeded up a short trail past various thatch huts and the small cinder-block computer building / wash house to the meeting building, where a few benches had been arranged. It took about 15 minutes for various villagers to assemble. We waited and chatted.

Once everyone was assembled, I got up and made a presentation for each of the checks separately, explaining that these checks were the work of a penny drive in Angela's fifth-grade class and a pie sale at her Sunday school. Micki and Beth took photos, and we passed around the photos taken by Ginna. In the fifth-grade class photo, they tried to find Angela, who is barely visible. This was fun. After the presentation, we assembled for a group photo (for those who wanted to be in the photo - there were more just watching). Next, Almodio and Filipe each gave short speeches.

Almodio describe their plans of what to do with the money. The central theme was that in the past, the elders of the Wounaan community had not seen education as important, and that most Wounaan children did well to make it to the end of primary school - the sixth grade. For those that made it to the sixth grade, this was a great sacrifice to them and their families, who often did without food to purchase the required school supplies - including the mandatory school uniform and shoes - and to get up early enough to get to the school in the town of Paraiso, about 16 km and a half hour away by bus. The Wounaan children have to get up in the dark. If it is raining, they have to first go down the river by boat, and only then get fully dressed, so as to not ruin their cloths - the mandatory shoes barely last a season. Next, they walk a half kilometer to the bus, and finally ride it to Paraiso. The new (and young) elders of the Wounaan recognized that to succeed economically in Panamanian society the children needed more than a primary education, and so, the education fund was established to try to help at least some of the children complete secondary education. Up to this point, no one has completed secondary school. With the help of people who could

do the calculations, they determined that they needed \$500 per child per year, and with ten children, they needed \$5,000 per year to arrive at their community objective. Needless to say, the gifts totaling \$2,318 will help about half the children towards this goal.

Filipe, then gave a speech that detailed their longer-range hopes regarding the education of their children. Not only would they like their children to complete the secondary school, they hope some go on to the university. The two areas that they see as the most important for the Wounaan are lawyers and doctors. Filipe pointed out that the old elders had not prepared them for this need. The old elders were afraid that if the children were too educated, they would become Panamanian or gringo. Also, the Wounaan in the past practiced traditional healing techniques. There were two problems with this. For one, the healers (curanderos) wanted to charge for their services - for example, a snake-bite cure cost \$50 to \$100 - not only that, but the healers didn't want to teach people their knowledge, because those that learned might be in competition. Thus, when the healers died, the knowledge of many cures did likewise. Not only that, Filipe noted that there are now many new diseases for which there are no traditional cures. The Wounaan children seem to be more susceptible to many of these diseases, and the children's hospital in Panama City seems to have an excess of Wounaan and Embará children.

After Filipe's talk we sat around and chatted about many things. The Wounaan children wanted to know why the students in the fifth-grade class did not wear uniforms. Filipe and Almodio wanted to hear more about how Angela's family lived, and they were interested in the furniture making, wanting to know about the types of wood used, and the like. We also purchased a few baskets, but they did not have many to sell at the time, and we want to leave things for the tourists from the hotel, who would be visiting at 10 AM. It should be noted, that their main annual income is from tourists during the dry season (January to May), and for much of the rest of the year they just get by.

The Wounaan community is preparing a thank you card and some presents of appreciation.

Filipe brought us back to the dock. It was an auspicious donation, and the children and the families that donated to this educational cause should feel good about how they have helped the San Antonio Wounaan.

Saludos de Panama



Bob Stallard

PS here are Almodio's particulars:

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