

November 18, 2020

Dear Friends,

I have been trying to write this letter to you for several days, and getting nowhere. I finally decided to quit trying to be concise and just write out my heart. The subject is Guatemala's latest hurricanes – two back to back, Eta and Iota. Officially they might be calling them Tropical Storms, which is supposed to make us believe we have been less hard hit, but I suspect the 118,000 people who are now living in 89 schools and countless churches, community centers, other people's homes, and on the sides of mountains think they have been hurricanes. Or don't care. They are just wondering what's next.

I have been in Guatemala for the previous whoppers of Mitch in 1998, Stan in 2005, and Agatha in 2008. This is the first time we've gotten two such storms just a week apart. There are those who think this is about climate change, those who see it as a long-term-poverty issue, probably some who think it is divine retribution for some perceived sin(s), and no doubt there are other explanations. But I know that it's really about chocolate. I have concluded that there is not enough chocolate in Guatemala, much less in my house, to make me feel any better about this, whether it's m&ms or Baileys Irish Crème. The cold and fog that surround our house right now have seeped inside me as I sit here safe and dry in the city, feeling mostly helpless, and not without a touch of survivor guilt. Today the second storm, Iota, is doing her thing, and even if I wanted to go north to help, I could not as the raging rivers have taken out more bridges and brought down more mudslides, thus closing even more roads. Tere went to Chiquimula this morning, left early and got to her sister's house by 9:30 am without any real problems in spite of rain, fog, and mudslides. Thank goodness. Within minutes the road between Zacapa and Chiquimula was underwater – or more precisely, under a raging river. I kind of wonder when I might see her again, but I am glad she is there. She needs to be.

In 2005, at the time of Hurricane Stan, I was working for Mayan Hands and the hardest hit village had one of our groups of women in it. That made it easy and clear to know what to do. Now I am retired, not officially connected to anyone, and fortunately none of the Mayan Hands women have been affected as the storms have gone further north. For those of you who know some Guatemalan geography, or want to look it up, the departments of Izabal and Alta Verapaz are probably the worst damaged, but also included in the declared State of Calamity are eight more – Petén, Chiquimula, Zacapa, Jutiapa, El Progreso, Santa Rosa, Quiché, and Huehuetenango. Ah – as I am writing this, they added Chimaltenango and Jalapa to the list. That is about half the country. In addition to thousands of homes, 145,000 acres of agriculture have been ruined, which means a lot of long-term hunger.

The affected people I know are in Alta Verapaz and Izabal, weaver friends who are stranded and probably homeless, and family who have safe homes and four-wheel drive vehicles. Tere's niece Maritza is the head of the water quality monitoring agency of the Ministry of the Environment for the entire watershed of Lake Izabal, the largest lake in Guatemala. Look for the giant lake northeast on any map of Guatemala and you will see it. Thanks to her work, Maritza knows the mayors, community leaders, and many people throughout Izabal and Alta Verapaz, and has been able to find out who needs help who cannot be reached even by helicopters. Tere's sister Marta and her husband

Mario/Maritza's parents have been staying with her in Rio Dulce since covid began, and she also has the staff in her office, also with families, and all of them have been buying and packing supplies, then delivering them to these remote areas. (See pictures at the end of this.) That has all been done with money donated by friends and family, and even their expenses to make these trips have been paid by donations specifically for that. They have come home every night totally exhausted, and also very satisfied. And with amazing stories of generosity and chaos.

Marta called me this morning and told me that the rains of storm #2, Iota, began yesterday afternoon. These are hard rains, which continued all night and into today, and the word is that they will continue until tomorrow. The official storm reports say that Iota is downgraded, far less severe than it was when it hit poor Nicaragua and Honduras, but they still predicted it would dump 30" of rain in some places, 20" in others, on top of already deep waters in all the same places. Because I am writing this at my computer, I keep getting storm updates, and the roads in Rio Dulce, where Maritza lives, are now underwater. No hay paso. It's hard to guess when they might be able to take more relief supplies out, but it won't be today or probably tomorrow. They will begin again when they can.

The government is doing a lot, the private sector even more. There is no end of both NGOs and just regular folks like Maritza rounding up help and delivering it. I have been in contact with various agencies, and want to give you a list of several I know that I trust. Please check out these websites and see if any appeal to you. To my knowledge, in all cases all of the money you donate will go to relief, not overhead. You can also give money to me, but the biggest drawback to that is that hardly anyone wants to write checks and mail them anymore, and I have no electronic means to receive money – old fashioned me, sorry.

[Rotary La Reforma Guatemala](#) – a local chapter of Rotary International – working in all areas, a wide reach To see their projects, check their [facebook](#) page and/or their [website](#).

[EPIC](#) – Ecumenical Project for International Cooperation – Guatemala and others, some board members are friends of mine from Estes Park, Colorado and Antigua Guatemala

[GoFundMe Samac](#) – for weavers in Alta Verapaz, through friends of IFAM (International Folk Art Market) through Heidi McKinnon and Alicia Castro Chicol

[GoFundMe Olla Comunitaria](#) – more general, recommended by Allison at Yabal Handicrafts, through Sue Kuyper and La Olla Comunitaria (The Community Pot), a food project

[Cadena – CJG](#) – Community Judaica Guatemala – working in Puerto Barrios, Izabal – donations on a higher level, impressive work

Me, Deborah Chandler – doing what I can, in Izabal through Maritza and through other friends in Alta Verapaz If you want to write a check and mail it to my account in Colorado, use the deposit slip at the end of this.

All of these groups are doing good work and any support will help.



Samac, Cobán, Alta Verapaz – that is not a lake, or at least was not one two weeks ago. Those flat brown things are the roofs of houses. Picture taken by Amalia Güe of the Ix Balam Q'ue' weavers cooperative. Lots of places, rural and city, look like this now.



All that corn on the ground was going to be tortillas next year. Hunger extended.



Some houses were not destroyed, but their contents were. Note the water line above the door.



One of many impromptu shelters created in churches, community buildings, schools, people's homes, and anywhere else there was space. This is a chapel in a cemetery.



Thousands of Guatemalans are finding ways to work in relief efforts. The government is doing a lot, the private sector even more. This is Tere's niece Maritza's staff and some family members packing food and cleaning supplies they then delivered. Maritza in red and white stripes above and below.



Delivering food and hygiene supplies in remote communities has been done by helicopter, four-wheel drive, boats, hiking, and whatever other means were needed or available. Other groups are also delivering medicine, water filters, bedding, solar lamps, kitchen ware, and more.



Maritza's crew also took juice and cookies for the countless children present. We had two beautiful sunny days between ETA and IOTA, and for a moment we could pretend the second storm was not coming.

That's pretty much it. I can give you many more details if you want, or just stories, and am posting things on Facebook fairly often. Please feel free to share it with anyone you think might be interested in helping. I am profoundly aware that Nicaragua, Honduras, and the Philippines are, overall, maybe in worse shape than Guatemala right now, and I would not begrudge anyone choosing to help them first. But I think my job is this, to tell the story and ask for help for my neighbors, and be ever so grateful for any and all you can do. Lots of us are in this for the long haul, and anything you can send will be used sooner or later, as appropriate.

Happy Thanksgiving, however you manage to honor it.

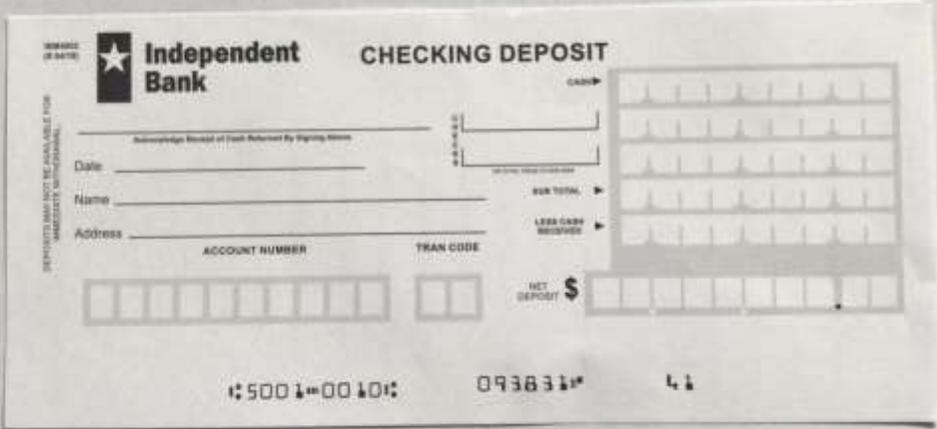
Deborah Chandler – living a life I never imagined

[weavingfutures2012@gmail.com](mailto:weavingfutures2012@gmail.com)

phones that ring in Guatemala – cell 011 502 5308 0234; (through my computer) 970 449 9823

To make a deposit to my account, please make checks out to Deborah Chandler and mail them to

Independent Financial  
935 Cleveland Avenue  
Loveland, Colorado 80537



The image shows a blank 'CHECKING DEPOSIT' slip from Independent Bank. The slip includes fields for 'Date', 'Name', and 'Address'. It also has sections for 'ACCOUNT NUMBER' and 'TRAN CODE'. On the right side, there are three rows for 'CASH', 'PER TOTAL', and 'LESS CASH RECEIVED', each with a grid for recording amounts. At the bottom, there is a 'NET DEPOSIT' field with a dollar sign and a grid. The routing number '09383128' is printed at the bottom right, and a '500' number is printed at the bottom left. The Independent Bank logo is in the top left corner.

The routing number of the bank is 111 916 326. (I have no idea what the 500 number printed on the deposit slip is.) You do not need to write my account number in those boxes, it is already printed on the bottom, starts with 093.

You can print and use this deposit slip. It will probably print small, but it still works, they always copy them onto a new one anyway. Please write your name on the little line beside the amount space, and when you send a deposit please let me know. Thanks.

DC