



Extraordinary Respect



Story by Rene Franco Salas – Kusi Kawsay President

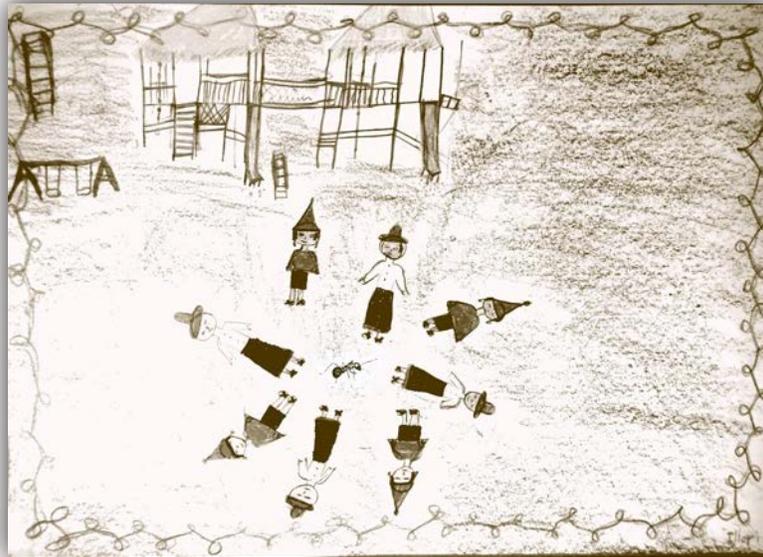
During the second or third year, on the first day of school, I was walking up the hill to Kusi Kawsay. I had almost arrived when I saw a group of children at the entrance. They were standing in a huddled group and I wondered what this was all about. As I got closer, I saw that there was a lot of sorrow and concern.

I began to worry that perhaps one of the children had had an accident. I rushed up so that I could help.

When I approached, there were many students standing in a circle and some of them began calling to me: “Professor Rene, there has been an accident!” I asked: “What happened? Who is hurt?!” One student said to me: “He’s wounded, he’s hurt!” Hearing these words, I instantly felt my heart drop.

I looked, and the students said: “Look Professor Rene, there is a wounded ant! I think he has broken his leg, or maybe fractured it. It is badly hurt and cannot move!”

When I realized what was happening, I had an incredible moment. It was as though I had entered a different dimension, because I looked at the children, all of different ages and thought, “Wow, look at what these children are doing here. They are valuing the wellbeing of another living being ... an ant.”



I felt overwhelmed by the humility of this moment. We live in time in which humanity is constantly at war, there are major problems of violence and here are the children of Kusi Kawsay, worried for this tiny being.

One little boy suggested: "I know what we should do, we have to lift it very carefully." Another student said: "No, no, no, do not touch it because when there is a fracture, it is very delicate, and lifting it will hurt it more." "Let's take a stick or a maybe a leaf," suggested another student. I was awe-inspired by their attitude. It was a feeling of joy, but also something inexplicable: extraordinary respect. I did not know what to do, as I was analyzing the situation that I was witnessing. I realized that the children with this awareness are those who had already been with us at Kusi Kawsay for a year or two. They are indigenous children from the countryside, from high altitude Andean communities.

There was also a new student who had just arrived at our school. This boy was from the city of Lima, the most urbanized area in all of Peru. He stepped forward and shouted: "What is this nonsense, why is everyone so concerned for a stupid ant?" He took a big step and with his foot squashed the ant.



All the other children and myself were in shock. Some of the boys and girls began to cry. One of the boys was Abel, he was about 13 years old at the time, and is now one of the youth leaders of Kusi Ñan, our organic farm project. I saw him cry and saw other children overcome with sadness. I also began to cry, because I was so disappointed by the difference between the rural and urban experience.

Indigenous children are always in contact with the earth, with nature, they live on the land with the plants, animals and the mountains. They are sensitive and very connected, with a deep respect for nature.

I then realized that it was not the fault of the child from the city. His insensitive behaviour was the result of an attitude that is nourished in modern society. The boy's action arose from an attitude of disrespect, disconnected from the land, and from the natural world. Unfortunately this attitude permeates our government, the cities, and modern technology. It was this consciousness that was the culprit, responsible for the child's lack of kindness and caring.

My great hope is that our school instils respect for life and nature in all of our children. If we can reach this level of respect, then humanity will be able to live in harmony –

regardless of skin color, borders or nationalities. It is so important that we stay true to this harmony, deeply connected to all life.

I often remind myself that the work we do at Kusi Kawsay is already very advanced. It is necessary to share this way of life so that it reaches more people, not only here, but also all over the world. This is a very difficult task, but achieving respect for all life is deeply satisfying.

I would like to say that if you have ever supported Kusi Kawsay, then you are doing something immense for humanity, for existence and for the cosmos.

Thank you!



**drawing by Kusi Kawsay student*