

Paradíso

There is no greater thing than the Sixaola River. It acts as a border, but for a farmer like myself that lives on the river banks, I do not see it like that. If the river is always changing, which it does, one always has to be united with everyone here.



**PARADISO, THE SIXAOLA RIVER (NEARSIDE - COSTA RICA, FAR SIDE — PANAMA).
PHOTO: J. TANNER**

Yes, I could say, “that side is the border of Panamá and this side is Costa Rica,” but that doesn’t do any good, the separation. I want to know what I am doing here on my land on the Sixaola, how that affects people all along this river system — not what only affects Costa Rica or Panamá.

I was in River San Juan before the Sixaola River. I was born in Heredia in San Jose, but raised in Nicaragua. I had my family farm at the banks of San Juan River, at the border of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. When

there was the war, unrest and conflicts of the Sandinistas, I had to leave. I arrived here in Paradiso.



FARMER, PARADISO, THE SIXAOLA RIVER, COSTA RICA. PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)

I love it here on the river, my home, because, how could you not like it? Just look at it! I grew up alone on these banks. I had no papa and no mama. I grew up with my grandmother who was 80 years old. From seven years of age, I had to become a man, and to begin work on the farm. In all this time, six decades, I have never worked for anyone. I have only worked on my land, and for myself. I had to learn how to farm. Sixaola, she taught and still teaches me when I need to plant my crops. *This is banana.*



BANANA FARMER, PARADISO, THE SIXAOLA RIVER, COSTA RICA. PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)

Banana arrived as a cure for my family. It's the main crop here. Banana planting began in Talamanca about 70 years ago or so. The banana is the source of income for me, I have other crops, too, but none near as profitable. Chiquita came to the basin years ago. They only worked bananas and plantains. We saw, and learned from them.

There's a story behind this, one that I am not very proud of.

At first, when I started out farming, I had poor practices. I was pouring poison on my crops, insecticides to keep out the bugs and more to fertilize the soils. I was killing all the nature. I have learned since. Right now, I'm trying to preserve nature. It's taking me a little bit of time to get used to, especially without nematicide, cultivating without poison and without anything to preserve some land, and but time will tell to see if the crop is better.

The Ministry of Agriculture are giving educational talks and training for small farm farmers. In the time that I was growing up I had no one to guide me, I saw what the big farms were doing, and did the same. But these specialists said to me, “look you're doing it wrong.”

I worked as I wanted, but not now. I am more aware of the needs of the environment, and going along with this, taking care of this river. I am grateful to have learned now, and not when it's too late. At least we have people who are giving us knowledge, bringing all the farmers on all sides of the river and the valley, showing us different approaches— how to be better. That's where we're going, together. Our future.

This river is a source of life, she gives life to one and all. Waters like these are not found anywhere. We call her “El Rey,” because she takes whatever she wants in her path. She doesn't care what side of the river you're on, she consumes everyone's farms. She makes us all surrender. She unites us. This water is forceful and alive. Just look at her. Feel her currents. She is brilliant.

Some people in the area drink tap water that comes from wells in the ground. Others drink from tanks that are delivered by the governments. But I say its better take this water in, just as it is. I have never not bathed in it, drank from it, and used it for my crops. It's a precious source for me. I cherish this river.

To support the river banks, and to improve soil health, which is incredibly difficult with the constant floods experienced here, I am reforesting my land with many different trees. One is melina, it's a fast

growth tree, another is called espavel (wild cashew), and plenty of avocado trees, they grow incredibly well in our climate.

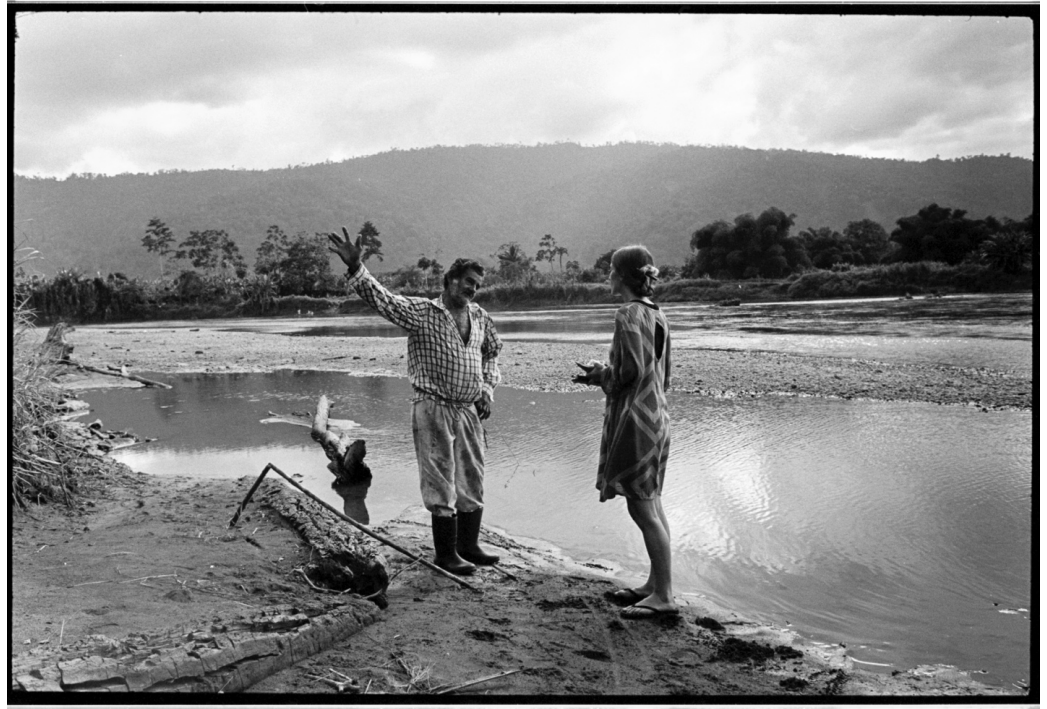


CACAO FARM, PARADISO, THE SIXAOLA RIVER, COSTA RICA. PHOTO: J. TANNER

I also plant tree for timber. These are the cocobolo, used for shade and for their wood. But it will take 25 to 30 years to harvest. In the meantime, they serve a great purpose, providing shade for the bananas. And at night, the dew from the leaves will keep the soil moist. From all the rains that we have had this season. It smells strongly of the natural fertilizers I am now using.

I am interested in doing more planting. However, I do not write. And in order to obtain payment for environmental services, it requires me to submit written requests. I have been told, that if I learn to write, then I might able to be placed into these programs, so that I may carry out more of this work.

Look over there, across the river. That is ‘Panamá.’ But when the river changes, just like the tail of the iguana, where we are standing right, is this land, now Panamá? With every flood, which are many, I have to lose just enough land to keep myself afloat. The fact is, what does not hold from the floods — *this river kills*.



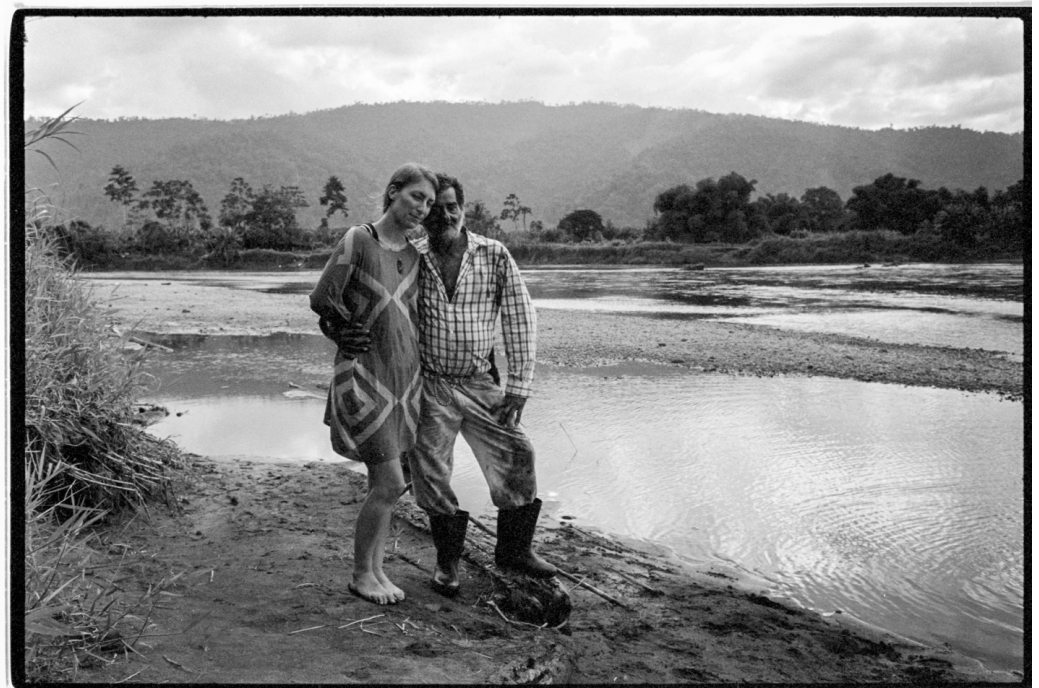
STANDING ON THE BANK OF THE SIXAOLA RIVER, COSTA RICA. PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)

I have sown sotacaballo, a strong tree species to protect the river. Its roots give strength to the banks, and help clean the river. For almost 40 years, the Sixaola River has had many changes. Through this time, changes in depth have been noted, and it dries very quickly. At any time, it rains, the river rises too. *Quickly*.

For most of my life, I have watched the Sixaola. For me, it is sad to think of the destruction and carelessness that has happened over the years. What has flowed from these banks, along the entire river systems, and

especially throughout the middle to the lower basin, is tragic - how all of this eventually finds its way to fill the sea.

That is pure banana sea - the chemicals, the excess nutrients from the peels, the plastic bags used, all that sea is lost. Earthquakes are another story. Historically, that is just another igniter for the flooding to begin. The first floods generally arrive in August. Almost every year have to think about what I will do, and how I will plan. But I feel this river, with whatever I do — she laughs at me.



FARMER (RESEARCH PROJECT COLLABORATOR) AND RESEARCHER, PARADISO, COSTA RICA, THE SIXAOLA RIVER. PHOTO: J TANNER (2016)

This year already, there have been three full flood events. It's September. You can see over there; she ate part of my crops. Recovery, it is slow. But I think efforts of the tree plantings could help lessen the damages to my crops that I have experienced in past years.

With everything this river takes, all of us who live here know she is what sustains us, and gives us life. So, we learn to live with her, The Sixaola River – and with one another.



**PRIVATE BANANA AND PLANTAIN FARM, PARADISO, COSTA RICA, THE SIXAOLA RIVER.
PHOTO: J. TANNER (2016)**

This text is an excerpt from “*Navigating Cultural Currents: The Sixaola River Basin Story*, that can be found here:

http://ir.library.oregonstate.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/w9505499c