

PALO ALTO FRIENDS EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

October, 2006

Dear Friends of the El Salvador Projects:

We are all aglow with the results of an amazing number of contacts we have had this year with the communities we serve in El Salvador. We continue to offer invaluable educational help to students in four projects, and graduate ever more students from university and technical schools, which your generous contributions make possible. Carmen Broz has often observed that this is the surest method she has found to lift people out of poverty.

First, I'm sure you want to hear about El Salvador and our projects!



Carmen Broz dances with Tita Broz at Tita and Robert's wedding

Progress Report for September 2006 from Robert Broz, Field Director

Although time seems to go by very fast here, as in the rest of the world in most third world countries, progress is very slow. Politically, El Salvador could be considered a small Central American version of the United States. Our current president follows George W. Bush on virtually all policy issues. For example, Salvadoran troops still serve in Iraq, the right-wing central government fully supports the Latin American Free Trade agreement, and the fight against terrorism is high on its lists of priorities. As I have mentioned in other reports, one of the beautiful things here is that most social development takes place at the local level, within the municipalities. In the March 2006 elections, the FMLN maintained control of the majority of cities in the greater San Salvador area and throughout the country. The FMLN also increased the number of its assembly members in Parliament, giving them power to promote progressive policies at the national level. Where I live in Suchitoto (near El Barío, where a large part of our project funds are focused), the FMLN continues to govern. Former Mayor Isaias Sandoval has left politics after four terms, and Javier Martinez, a young professional from Suchitoto, was elected in his place. Javier has been the director of a local nongovernmental organization for some time, and he has lots of experience managing social development projects. With his experience and devotion to Suchitoto, he will surely make a good and just mayor.

Our projects continue to have very positive effects, and with our new local committee now fully functional with representation from each of the communities where we work, decision making and planning are done very democratically.

This year our projects are supporting 14 university students, and after six years of dedication and hard work two of our students will become the first ever to graduate with BS degrees. Unlike the four-year program in the U.S., in El Salvador a *Licenciatura* (BS or BA degree) requires 5 years of studies and 10 months of seminar, thesis, or professional practice, so it's really more like an American master's degree. We also have a young woman from Apulo, the very

2. poor urban community where our involvement is more recent than in the rural areas, who will graduate in August as a registered nurse. Since 1999 we have helped many students with their studies. A total of 31 students have completed their training as teachers, technicians, and nurses. The majority of these are employed; and some have pursued further studies on their own. Of our graduates, five are repaying their student loans monetarily, nine have repaid or are in the process of paying through work that benefits the communities, and four are canceling their loans by putting younger siblings through college. Our university student loan program now absorbs the majority of our funds. In 2007 we hope to support 14-20 university students yearly thanks to your generosity.

Within the communities where we have projects, our work continues normally. This year we are supporting junior high and high school students in El Gigante and Sueños en Jocoaitique in Morazán (in the northeastern part of El Salvador), and we support high school students in Apulo, on the edge of San Salvador. In El Barío, where the new school makes it possible for most children to attend without needing direct assistance from us, we are paying the salaries of a high school science teacher and two librarians. Also in El Barío, we are supporting an effort by the youth group to create a garden where vegetables will be grown for elderly people of their community who have no younger family members to provide for them. The object of the project is to help these youths to become directly involved in promoting the wellbeing of older people. My mother, Carmen Broz, founder of El Salvador Projects, has had this dream for years, and she has personally financed the initial investment of close to

\$3,000.00. The project is fulfilling her hope that the young people in these rural communities whom we have helped to gain an education will work hand in hand with the elderly, who have experience in vegetable production, and that some of the produce will be sold and the rest will be given to elderly people who don't have enough to eat. Since August 2005, I have been coordinating plans with the youth group, the communal board of directors, and Carmen. The project was launched in July of 2006, in time for the visiting teen group to help with some of the work. (See their report in this newsletter.) A similar project is underway in Morazán, with leadership from our local committee member Cristóbal "Menelio" Chicas and American committee member Bren Darrow, who spent several months in El Salvador last year working with me and also living and working in the communities. In July, the first in a series of workshops for elderly people was held in Morazán. Young people whose education we've supported helped to provide social activities and handi-craft training to older people who have very little income and whose younger family members were lost during the war years.

As you can see, we are continuing the work in El Salvador that many of you have made possible with your contributions through the years, and we are opening new, promising efforts. There is still much to do. It is all possible only with your continued support.

Thank you in advance,
Robert Broz,
Field Director

Highlights of a wonderful week in El Salvador, January '06, by Jamie Newton

I'll begin by sharing memories so exquisitely joyous that as I write about them I nearly burst into tears. I was simply a courier, carrying 100 colorfully illustrated children's books to each of three campesino communities, but I witnessed delight so profound that it had a quality of awe, even reverence, as children, teenagers, and adults encountered for the very first time books that were meant to bring pleasure and beauty to the reader.

From my brown paper shopping bags I lifted volumes such as *¿Como Ven Los Murciélagos en la Oscuridad?* (How Do Bats See in the Dark?) and *Alexander y el Día Terrible, Horrible, Espantoso, Horroroso* (Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, Dreadful, Hideous Day). I expected the students and parents who had gathered in Jocoaitique and El Gigante, and the teachers at the school in El Barío, where Robert

Broz and I had the good fortune to arrive just as the first teachers' meeting of the year convened, to flip through the books and pass them on quickly. Instead, each book was received as a precious, fragile, unfamiliar treasure and examined with care, first silently, then with smiles and laughter, with children and parents tugging at each other to point out special pictures and passages that engaged their interest. It was like watching people who had never seen a garden explore paths that wound among flowering shrubs and vines bright with ripe fruits and vegetables.

This was the result of an insight my

wife, Marion, gained when we visited El Salvador together in 2004. An elementary school teacher, she recognized that every book she saw in the meager libraries of these rural communities was a textbook, a functional book. During the next two years, with contributions from you project supporters, and with points she earned with orders for her kindergarten class, she collected 300 books in Spanish or both Spanish and English, mainly from the *Club Leo* (I Read) program of Scholastic Publishers. She hoped the books would evoke the wonder and passion of reading for pleasure, and so awaken a lifelong eagerness to read. I was privileged to see that awakening begin.

Bringing books to El Gigante led to a discovery of my own that made me acutely aware of how unobservant I had been. When I asked that each person present record his or her name in my notebook, one of the fathers asked to borrow another man's glasses, but they were of no help. I offered him my own drugstore reading glasses. When he put

them on his face softened, then brightened, and he wrote his name. I realized that as he looked at the books he must have been seeing a fuzzy display of colors and illegible writing. Much later, back in California, Marion asked me if I had given him that extra pair of reading glasses. I hadn't. It simply hadn't occurred to me. As we thought about it we realized that we had seen hardly anyone wearing glasses in those rural communities. But of course, where would they get such costly luxuries as glasses?



Selecting the right strength glasses.

4. Nearly all adults need reading glasses, at least, from middle age on. That fact became important to me as I considered a plan proposed by Menelio Chicas, a leader in Jo-coaitique whose efforts have been central to the success of the education projects there, and our committee member Bren Darrow, who spent several months in El Salvador last year. They proposed a series of social events where impoverished elderly people could learn potentially income-producing skills. I wondered how those people would be able to see well enough for any sewing or crafts without glasses, and Menelio confirmed that vision would be a barrier. We spread the word among project supporters in the Palo Alto area, and within a few months we had contributions of more than 130 pairs of reading glasses of various strengths. Carmen Broz took a few dozen in June, and our teen group carried the rest when they visited in August. When Menelio and Bren organized the first workshop for elders (see Bren's report in this newsletter), assisted by young people we've helped to educate, they passed out the glasses – and many people could see clearly for the first time in years! We expect to continue to develop this project of collecting glasses and offering workshops to enhance the quality of life for elderly people in Morazán. We're calling it Project AGE, for Adults, Glasses, and Education (or in Spanish, Adultos, Gafas, y Educación).

Although I had only a week in El Salvador, that week brought a wealth of experiences. I attended the opening of the Art Center for Peace in Suchitoto, where a remarkable Catholic sister, Peggy O'Neil, and her partners are converting the beautiful but dilapidated buildings of a school that was abandoned during the civil war into a gracious hostel and community resource for the pursuit of peace through the arts. Quaker Frank Cummings, who retired

from Atlanta University to come to Suchitoto several years ago, told me about the scholarship program he and other residents are developing to help the youth of Suchitoto continue their studies after high school. He spoke of his hope that training techniques of the Alternatives to Violence Project could be adapted for El Salvador, a prospect that Friends active in AVP are actively considering. At the Universidad Centroamericana, I spent a day with fellow psychology professors, one of whom has for years specialized in research on the rise of violence in the streets and schools of El Salvador. Robert, his wife Tita, and their three children treated me to a boat ride on the lovely Lake Suchitlán, with its bird refuge and views of the volcano El Guazapa in all its grandeur. My visit expanded my understanding of our work through the projects, challenged me to think deeply about future opportunities and what I myself am called to do, and gave me a deeper appreciation for the sensitivity and remarkable skills of Robert Broz, our field director, whose organizational ability and natural role as a mentor are so crucial to the success of all that we do.

Reading glasses are still needed for elders in the communities served by our Projects. Do you have unneeded nonprescription glasses? Can you ask your friends and family for some? An inexpensive pair of glasses in good condition can open life opportunities for campesinos in El Salvador. Please send them to Jamie Newton at 1007 Almanor Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025. Thank you!

—**Jamie Newton**
committee member

Bren Darrow, our volunteer from the University of Pennsylvania, wrote this before the young Friends (shown below) visited. 5.

Palo Alto Friends Meeting's most recent project in El Salvador has been a great success. After receiving donations of reading glasses from the meeting, Carmen Broz was able to bring 30 pairs to El Salvador with her. I brought the glasses with me to Jocoaitique, where Menelio Chicas planned an event for the elderly with the help of the students who receive our scholarships.

First, Menelio's brother, Sebastian, recited a parable about the body's organs, in which the stomach is deemed lazy by the others, who then refuse to feed it and starve. A brief discussion of the parable followed, and then the glasses were distributed. The six students who participated helped match 12 of the 18 elderly attendees for reading glasses, using newspapers as sample reading material. Six people remained in need of either stronger or weaker lenses than were available. Next, Menelio's wife, Elvia, and his daughter, Yoel, demonstrated how to make necklaces out of small seashells. Those not interested in making necklaces set about embroidering several patterns. After the arts and crafts we all enjoyed chicken sandwiches and horchata beverage, along with music performed by Sebastian.



Doña Mariana threads a needle!

The elderly recipients of the glasses were delighted. Perhaps the highlight of the event was when Doña Mariana threaded a needle for the first time in years, catching the attention of everyone around, and grinning from ear to ear. Several of the men set about manufacturing necklaces at a staggering pace, whereas the women who embroidered took a more leisurely approach, enjoying the chance to resume a pastime that they all seemed to be familiar with. Everyone seemed to enjoy the event, including the students, who played a critical role in organizing and implementing both the glasses distribution and the arts and crafts.

Total expenses were a mere \$125, spent almost entirely on lunch and art supplies. Menelio worked closely with his Cooperative "Sueños", which provided the location, planning, publicity, and manpower. Palo Alto Friends Meeting provided the funds as well as the glasses.

Another 100 pairs of glasses will arrive with the teen group, and Menelio is excited to plan a larger scale version of this event. He has also met with national director of *Asociacion Salvadoreña para la Promocion de la Salud* (ASPS) who have offered to donate medical supplies for future such outreach events. —**Bren Darrow**



Our young Friends visit the 10th grade class at the school in El Barío

6. Teen Trip to El Salvador in July

It took a year and a half to plan a one-week trip! The El Salvador Committee in Palo Alto arranged for young Friends to go down and visit our projects. We were blessed to have Barbara Babin, a classroom teacher and AVP instructor, lead the group, which consisted of eleven teens from Palo Alto, Monterey Peninsula, Santa Cruz, Redwood Forest and Lake County, plus Carmen's grandson, Adrian. Three adults accompanied them.

They were met in El Salvador by Robert Broz, the projects' Field Director, and Bren Darrow, a college-age volunteer, who made wonderful trip arrangements and managed the visit. The photograph shows a tenth grade classroom where the teacher was absent for the day. We found the students studying and tutoring each other. Students in the class ranged from 14-19 years old. We had other opportunities to spend time with the high school students. Our group learned that there have been great improvements in human rights since the end of El Salvador's civil war, but the standard of living is not much better than before. The teens returned with the idea of a two-week service project in 2008!

The Palo Alto Teen Group raised money for it by producing a \$15 cookbook of recipes by folks in their Meeting. As it turned out, frequent flyer miles and other funds were available, so funds raised by it will go directly to the projects. We still have some cookbooks! (See the box to check on the form to order one).

I was in a hotel suite for one night [when we returned to the U.S.] It felt too clean and orderly. I felt like I didn't deserve such a nice place, even if it was just an ordinary hotel room. Seeing other people in the hotel made me realize how much we take for granted, because I knew that many of them didn't see how good they had it. After the trip, America feels rich and spoiled. —Robby

What really made me think was seeing children misbehave in Disneyland, knowing that children in El Salvador would be amazed at everything there and how it would be the best time of their childhood. Also the entry fee for my family cost as much as a yearly wage for El Salvadoran teachers (\$400) and we spent it all in one day. —David

Going to El Salvador was eye-opening. Well, I knew even before I went that this trip was going to change my life, but I didn't know exactly how. The experience of actually living with the lower class, the working class, the farmers and craft-people was my favorite part of the trip. Hearing ex-guerrillas' accounts of the civil war was invaluable. As much as you read and learn and think you know about an event such as this war, you never fully understand it until you talk to the people. —Zoe

The greatest thing about El Salvador is the effort spent at certain times by the locals [to entertain us and feed us], but then their happiness and enjoyment of their conversations with each other and also us [was so evident]. That nature of hospitality gave me probably the most welcomed feeling I have ever possessed. They offered up their all, and I had just wished to offer up my all, which was all back in the United States.

The relative maturity of the children was extremely startling, and even the babies, when tossed in their seats due to bumpy roads, never cried and stayed quite silent.

They are the greatest people I have met so far in my young life, and they treat life with care we Americans lack. I wish I had much more to offer, especially when they offered their houses and their food. —Philip

Finally, a letter from Carmen Broz:

Dear Friends:

My last visit to El Salvador lasted about a month and a half, and was full of delightful events:

- Robert's wedding to the mother of his two children was attended by about 150 guests, four being my childhood Normal School classmates.
- The visit of our young people and three adults who now have experienced the realities of a third world country, and know experientially what can be done to help them get out of poverty.
- A chance to repay the classmates that housed me and made my stay a gala affair by my inviting them to visit the magnificent Maya ruins in Honduras, as I renewed my gratitude for having been born in El Salvador, with my incredibly developed ancestors.
- The chance to spend a whole week visiting each and all classes at the Educational Center in El Barío, and making sure that all the teachers were doing a good job. All were the best that I could want, especially our own Reyna Isabel, who is doing a superb job of teaching first grade, and Ana Cecilia, who teaches fifth grade.

I had enough time to spend some in the two cooperatives in Morazán, and for the first time went to El Mozote, where the terrible massacre of over a thousand people took place. My friend Claudia Bernardi, who teaches art at Mills College and California College of Art in Oakland, CA, is painting a mural in the new church in which some of the present inhabitants participate. And I also had enough time to spend two weeks dedicated to get to know my youngest grand daughter, Janet del Carmen. She is tiny, alert, responsive, and I was with her when she began to take her first steps and say her first words!

As always, my gratitude to all of you for your continued support to the El Salvador Projects.

With love, **Carmen**



Tita and Robert Broz exchange rings.



Kissing the bride

8.

Our Current Project

We are working hard to get a visa for the very capable community leader, Cristobal "Menelio" Chicas, to come visit as many donor groups and Meetings as we can manage in November. If your group is in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area, contact Barbara Babin to explore the possibility of meeting with him: 650-369-1398, b_babin@yahoo.com **After this went to press, his visa was denied.**

As always, your help is vital to continuing this partnership with Salvadoran communities, which helps their development so much. We benefit as well from their friendship!



Tortilla Maker by Myrrh

Contribution checks should be made to "PAFM - E.S. Projects" (Stands for Palo Alto Friends Meeting - El Salvador Projects)

Don't forget the teens' cookbook, which I have illustrated! Check the box below and enclose \$15 for it.

As the new chairperson for this committee, I want to tell you that I have been involved with Carmen and her projects from the beginning, during the civil war in the late 1980s, and am so proud of how fruitful they are!

Sincerely,
Trudy Myrrh Reagan

Send to PAFM El Salvador Projects, 957 Colorado, Palo Alto, CA 94303

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, (Country) _____

Amount enclosed: _____

Yes, I want an illustrated cookbook! (An additional) \$15 is enclosed.

Please send **eyeglass donations** to: James Newton, 1007 Almanor Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025