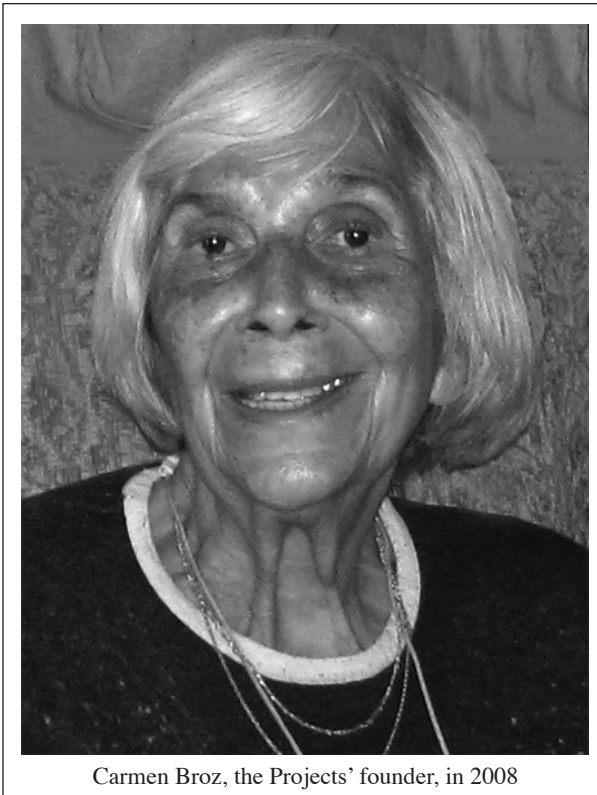


TWENTY YEARS OF  
Palo Alto Friends Meeting  
EL SALVADOR PROJECTS  
A Commemoration, November 2009



Carmen Broz, the Projects' founder, in 2008

Celebrating continued success...

# TWENTY YEARS OF DEDICATION

BY TRUDY MYRRH REAGAN

Military rule was imposed in El Salvador in 1932, when in a three-week period 32,000 indigenous people were hunted down and killed. Carmen remembers it: at nine years old, she lost her beloved nanny. She was able to emigrate at age 18 to finish high school in Costa Rica, where she met top Salvadoran exiled intellectuals. After she came to the U.S., she vowed to return to help her country. She had no idea this would take 44 years! As she raised her American children in comfort, she thought, "while injustice prevails, everyone is in danger."

In 1980, the civil war disrupted her country. First, she raised donations for an orphanage there. Then refugees from the war fled to the U.S., and she helped mobilize Palo Alto Friends Meeting to become a Sanctuary Church. When SHARE Foundation asked her in 1986 to be one of the internationals accompanying campesinos (peasants) back to their land in a war zone, she could not refuse. They had lost their cows, a sugarcane mill, everything, in the scorched-earth offensive of the right-wing government, backed by the U.S.

The internationals were arrested, but Carmen didn't go willingly! She went limp, and when

they said "She's fainted!" she exclaimed, "No! you assassins, you shameless people!" In the jail, a young soldier said, "Doña Carmen, remember, we too are human beings!" and they became friends.

The group was deported, but the campesinos she met remained and prevailed to build a new community in the ashes, El Barío. In 1990, this would become one of her first education project sites.

Back home, Carmen reported that her passport, stamped "persona non grata," had fallen in the washing machine, and was sent another! She raised funds for the campesinos to rebuild. The first contribution was from a woman who sold a piece of jewelry for \$5000 for the work.

## How the Projects Began

In 1989, when Carmen was 65, the spirit led her again to wartime El Salvador. Hoping both to offer humanitarian aid and promote education, she sponsored doctor visits once a month to communities, accompanying the doctor over narrow, muddy roads pocked with unexploded land mines. The well-baby checkups introduced her to many mothers. Then, she brought up the idea of a day care center with them. (Later, French technologists would find a way to clear the mines)!

In San Salvador, she bought a house and collaborated with Norma Guirola de Herrera to open a day care center. Then, all hell broke loose! The “Final Offensive” battle took place in the heart of the city. The FMLN guerrillas expected to win, but the popular uprising to support them didn’t happen, and they were strafed by airplanes. Carmen’s sons insisted she fly home. Norma, meanwhile, was assassinated!

In 1990, when Carmen was able to return, the Palo Alto Friends Meeting formed a subcommittee to support her and receive donations. Carmen brought Montessori teaching materials to start a center for children in her home. The mothers were impoverished, some of them community organizers (dangerous work). She fed the skinny kids soy milk and soy bread, and bathed them daily under a hose.

In El Barío they held school under the trees. She helped them fund a school, beginning in 1990. Year by year they added grades. The youngsters went to high school in nearby Suchitoto. Tragedy struck: the bus carrying them had defective brakes, and in a roll-over, seven of our students died! It took two years, but a high school in El Barío took shape, one that now draws students from neighboring villages. The government began to pay for basic staff of the whole school. Your donations provided

significant enhancements: a computer lab, library, and salaries for a science teacher and two librarians.

In 1993, two FMLN ex-comandantes, Menelio and Sebastian Chicas from the embattled province of Morazán, showed up at her door in San Salvador asking for help. They scared her a little, but she struggled over 140 miles of bad roads to El Gigante near Perquín with medical help, to get to know them.

This would become her next big project. (About 1998, Sueños en Jocoaitique would spin off from El Gigante).

A French nun, Sister Monica, drew her into a very poor community, Apulo, set precariously on the rim of the crater lake, Ilopongo. Most Apulo youth drift into crime and prostitution, but the sister had high aspirations for teens who loved community service, and Carmen helped with their education.

Carmen’s *modus operandi* was to find people doing constructive things and collaborate with them. About 100 children a year in several communities received small scholarships to go to school, and medical aid helped many. At times, she brought help from abroad. A Spanish grant was essential for building materials for the 12-room school in El Barío in 1999. There were ten other projects, too. For example, a day care center run by Sister Nieves by the Mariona Prison, still going, was begun by her. By 1999,

however, she and the Palo Alto committee decided to focus on education in four main communities.

“I have discovered that the quickest and least expensive way to lift people out of poverty is through education!” On trips to the U.S., Carmen traveled widely to convey this idea, which accounts for the wide geographical spread of our supporters.

### Major Themes of Carmen’s Leading

Carmen felt throughout her life that she must give back to El Salvador, a country that had endowed her with many aspirations. She was full of admiration for her teacher friends who had stayed, teaching during years of oppression. And she felt that Quaker peace-building practices could help her country.

Without a sense of mission, Carmen could not have done what she did. Not only was Norma killed, but in San Salvador in 1993 (after the war) an FMLN ex-comandante bringing his child to her center was gunned down at the door. Living conditions were rough, and the roads to the communities still rougher. El Salvador is a country beset with natural disasters. The ones Carmen found most unnerving were the two major earthquakes in 2001, because severe aftershocks were felt for months. Crime in post-war El Salvador is still rampant. Her car was vandalized. In 1995,

a drunk driver hit her car head-on and broke her hip. Poor medical care led to an infection, which sent her back to the United States for almost a year of recovery. The projects could have ended at that point.

Yet, by 1996 she was back, and 1997 was incredibly productive! While she was sick, she realized that the continuation of the projects depended on others knowing her work in the communities. The young volunteers she induced to come help were Carin Anderson, Marieka Brown, Julie Gerk, and Miranda Buffet. Living in the communities, they became her eyes and ears. One taught them all accounting, the better to show Carmen with receipts where the money was going.

With great effort, a meeting of all of the communities was organized by a volunteer, and their leaders became acquainted. Robert Broz has been able to create a local committee out of this to aid in the governance of the programs.

In 1997, she was able to interest the University of Central America (UCA) in holding Alternatives to Violence (AVP) workshops with her. In Palo Alto, her committee was asked to find trainers from the international pool of volunteers. Two Americans, a Canadian, and a Nicaraguan came forward.

Here is another theme: her consistent Quaker vision, speaking of ideas sometimes years before they

could be realized. She visualized a Quaker center, where AVP would be taught. Flash forward to 2004 in Suchitoto, when a Catholic, Sister Peggy, bought the old convent across the street from Robert Broz' house, and started Centro Arte para la Paz. She, Robert, and the other Quaker in town, Frank Cummings, collaborated to hold a series of AVP workshops. Now, in 2010, Val Liveoak of Friends Peace Teams expects to be more or less in residence for the next six to eight months and conduct more. The hope is to train many leaders to multiply this work, in a country that still deals with violence. We are now distributing *Fé y Practica* and other Quaker materials in Spanish to the communities. Robert and Frank hold a small worship group.

## Higher Education

Our emphasis on higher education began when Carmen helped the first student, Yeny Casco, through college in 1994. By 1998, she hoped to copy the Guatemalan Friends' college loan program, and in 1999 got sponsors for our first 12 students. One of these was the El Barío schoolteacher, Lupe Casco, who obtained her teaching credential, and is now principal of the school. Ten years have passed, and the scholarship/loan project has helped 62 students! The students repay as they are able by service to the community, or money to help other students attend college.

Technical training can last two years, but a university degree often takes five or six. See our web site for profiles of many of the students your contributions have supported, [www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org](http://www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org)

## New Landmarks

In 2000, as Carmen realized she would need to retire, *gracias a Dios* her son Robert had already made his decision to work in El Salvador. He was working as an agronomist for another Quaker group. Robert lives in Suchitoto, close to El Barío. He's better able to travel around to other communities and to meet with college students. Kind and gregarious, he has good rapport with them. The local committees he's set up use a consensus process when discerning how to spend the funds, and discussing their work.

In his town, he and Frank Cummings are well-recognized leaders. At the University Fair they organize annually, students who come from far and wide learn what their higher education options are. Frank also began a scholarship program, and persuaded the local priest to help raise funds.

Carmen (now retired in Santa Rosa, CA) has given her enthusiastic support to occasional projects that extend the definition of education: for instance, workshops in making methane from manure; making fuel-efficient stoves; and a year's salary for two art teach-

ers at “Walls of Hope” mural program. For a time, “Club Leo” was able to gather quantities of colorful childrens’ books in Spanish and donate an encyclopedia from Mexico for library use.

The AVP workshops continue. As well, volunteer Bren Darrow in 2006 helped leaders in Sueños en Jocoaitique to organize crafts workshops and social gatherings for elders run by young people. (Many lonesome elders had lost all their descendants in the war.) It became Project AGE (Adults, Glasses and Education). The reading glasses you donate enable them to sew and read again.

Unlike his mother, who had a pension, Robert couldn’t work for free. The Palo Alto Meeting gives him a contract payment. He has been able to augment this modest income with his restaurant and hostel and his Gringo Tours. For our supporters who travel there, this is a great resource! He also runs a small internet cafe for local people in his home. His computer experience has been invaluable to the schools. Robert and his computer students designed the web site for the Projects.

In 2005 Barbara Babin, a bilingual school teacher involved with the Projects since 1990, felt led to take a group of 15-18 year-olds to El Salvador. They came back astonished. “They treat life with care that Americans lack.” She

was able to organize two more in 2006-7. Robert gave them tours of the communities, where they were able to do small service projects.

At this moment, we are looking for a qualified person to lead a tour in 2010, one that could include adults as well as young people.

One of Carmen’s main goals was to show Americans how most of the world has to live. It is life-changing for both individuals and groups in this country. Twelve different Friends in Palo Alto Meeting have visited, and bonded with the projects. “If every congregation could adopt a poor community, we would be on the road to ending acute poverty in the world,” Carmen says.

The background to all our work has been the evolving political situation in El Salvador. Now, that the FMLN party has won the presidency, a new air of hope is in the land. May it continue!



**Barbara Babin,**  
leader of teen trips  
from 2005 to 2007.



**1986:**(see story)

1) The arrested international group had Carmen ask if they would be harmed, or worse.



2) The soldier replied, “Señora, your safety is not in question!”

Carmen struggled over miserable roads to reach the communities.



**1995:** Carmen and this little girl were badly injured in a head-on collision with a drunk driver, but both survived.

## Scholarships through the years

It began by helping one individual named Yeny. The formal college program started in 1999, and two of the teachers in El Barío, Lupe Casco (below) and Reina Isabel Miranda in picture (3), opposite, obtained their teaching credentials. Ten years and 62 students later, we have students in many fields.



1994 Yeny Casco

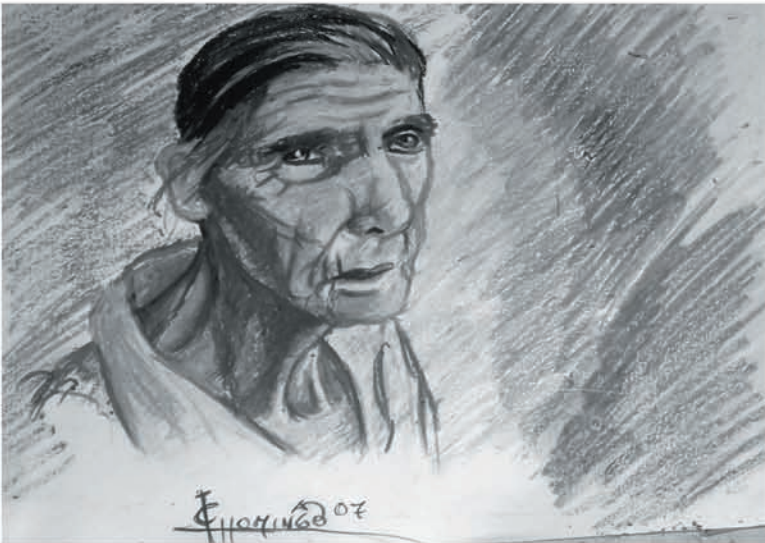


1999: Lupe Casco,  
El Barío school principal



2009: Yoselin Yoseth  
Nolasco, medical student

2010: Our latest scholarship candidate, Juan Domingo Rivas, drew this portrait of his mother under the name "Chomingo." His sponsor is helping him to go to art school.







The development of the  
El Barío School,

1) A few elementary  
grades outdoors



2) More grades  
in a few crowded, noisy,  
hot buildings

3) New twelve-  
room school has a  
high school.



**El Barío**





**Robert Broz** consults with leaders from Apulo.



Mountainous  
Morazán  
Province



Celedonia  
and Quique in  
El Gigante



Menelio and Elvia in  
Sueños de Jocoaitique

Two couples active in the local committee for the Projects.

## **Sueños en Jocoaitique and El Gigante**



Lake Ilopongo



## **Apulo**

Women Apulo leaders, including Sr. Monica



**Frank Cummings,**  
Robert Broz' colleague  
in higher education  
projects, and Alternatives to  
Violence workshops (below).

## **Higher Education**



## TWO QUAKER FAMILIES IN SUCHITOTO

BY ROBERT BROZ AND FRANK CUMMINGS

Excepted from original article published in *Friends Journal*, October 2009

Suchitoto, a small Salvadoran town and municipality, was nearly abandoned by its citizens during the war. Since the Peace Accords of 1992 it has become known for tourism, environmental protection, and community development. Now it is home to two Quaker families, the Broz and Cummings families, whose separate paths to Suchitoto began during the war in the 1980's with roots in Palo Alto, CA and Atlanta, GA Friends meetings.

**Robert Broz:** I was born to Perry and Carmen Broz, members of Palo Alto Meeting. My first contact with Quaker values and history was in First Day School, and I spent my sophomore and junior high school years at John Woolman School in Grass Valley, California. For years afterward, I held these values but did not practice them.

My mother brought our family to Quakerism. Volunteer Service with the American Friends Service Committee in Mexico drew her to Quaker values and to graduate study at Haverford. Years passed. She entered the U.S. in 1942 as an immigrant hoping to study economics, with the dream of returning as a young professional to improve her country.

Volunteer Service with the American Friends Service Committee in Mexico drew her to Quaker values and to graduate study at Haverford. Forty-four years passed.

In 1986, she traveled to El Salvador with an international group to accompany peasant families returning from refugee camps to reclaim land and rebuild their homes. In 1989, my mother returned to El Salvador and within days she was doing service work in rural areas. Soon Carmen had initiated projects with Quaker support in 14 communities, offering day care centers and medical check-ups, providing notebooks and uniforms to enable poor children to attend school.

In late 1994, at a turning point in my own life, I flew to El Salvador. I fell in love with the country, the pace of life, the people, the simplicity. Since my arrival, I have been fortunate to work for groups and projects directly related to or managed by Quakers. As work with one group was ending, my mother decided to return to the United States. Our committee in Palo Alto asked if I would take over local management of their projects.

Today the El Salvador Projects of Palo Alto Meeting work with

four communities. Although we still provide some teacher salaries and scholarships to junior high and high school students, almost 80% of our budget is used to provide zero interest loans to university students. Since 1999, we have supported 62 students in many fields, including education, nursing and law. Although my work as project director is part time, I stay busy, sometimes acting as a career counselor or a friend to a distraught university student in addition to my more formal duties. This diversity in my life and work is as much of a challenge as it is satisfying. Having a part-time job also allows me to participate in other aspects of life in Suchitoto, where my Quaker values find expression in education, politics and business.

**Frank Cummings:** My wife, Carol, and I began attending Atlanta (GA) Meeting when I started teaching at Atlanta University in 1967. With the Central American wars intensifying in the early 1980's, Carol worked with a small group that helped the meeting to declare itself a sanctuary for Central American refugees.

In February, 1991, during the conflict, Carol came to El Salvador as part of a delegation that visited the community of El Sitio Cenicero. El Sitio is situated lakeside, a ten minute launch ride from a little Suchitoto port. Soon

Atlanta Meeting joined El Sitio in a sister community relationship fostered by annual visits of the Cummingses from 1992 to 2001. Carol and I were accompanied several times by meeting members and by our eldest son, Andrew.

Accompanying the people of El Sitio set deep roots in our family. With each visit we learned more about their life as they built new houses, a school, struggled to educate their children, and eked out a living raising corn and sesame. So, in the late 90's, we decided to live in Central America to use our talents as the way opened. In May 2001, we took a flight to El Salvador with the fleeting sense that we were jumping off a cliff.

In November, 2001, we moved to Suchitoto, wanting to be close to El Sitio. We decided to focus on opportunities for youth in the urban area in art, education and small business development, there being virtually no youth work in the city. We found a key ally in the local parish priest, Padre Solomon. We soon broached the idea of using a large room in the parish center as a youth space. The padre, a progressive Baptist minister, and I met weekly to plan activities and discuss events. Over four years, these meetings developed a level of "social capital" that is scarce in Salvadoran society which still retains a great deal of polarization across several divides. Quakers accomplish much with few

people because our way of acting, derived from the Testimony of Simplicity, engenders mutual trust.

Carol joined several neighborhood committees and helped out in the kindergarten. I took up tutoring eighth and ninth graders, plus teaching a weekly intensive English class for a group of ninth graders in a large public school. This close contact led us to establish a small program of high school scholarships and then a few university scholarships. When the padre asked for support for some parish students, the Parish Scholarship Committee was formed, unique in receiving support from poor Salvadorans as well as from our family. Separately, Atlanta Meeting members funded a scholarship loan program for rural youth patterned on the Palo Alto program. These efforts, along with the Palo Alto program, now provide some \$50,000 a year in scholarships or loans to over 60 students.

**Joint Statement:** When we first met, we were surprised to find that our meetings had been working for years in communities two miles apart. After Carol's sudden death in 2006, we became closer friends. We meet for worship occasionally, especially when other Friends visit. We were founding members of the local language school and of the Art Center for Peace, where we have been trained as teachers for

the Alternatives to Violence Project.

But our principal cooperation has been expanding and strengthening the university scholarship and loan programs. To help convince youth that university education is valuable, we organized an annual University Fair in 2007. We have increased outreach to the five high schools, collected information on graduates, and shared that information widely. We are slowly making progress toward convincing the municipal government of the need for educational support. Given the limited work available in Suchitoto, there are two options for youth: to make the dangerous and socially disintegrating trip north to the United States, or get a higher education. Surprisingly, the financial cost is about the same.

Two Quaker supported projects in the small town of Suchitoto, El Salvador – is it coincidence or have we been brought together for other reasons? We are two families of Friends working to change a country where education has historically not been an option for the majority. We find ourselves living in a small town that could be a model for all developing countries. We work by convincing members of the local population, one by one – politicians, school principals, nongovernmental organizations, the old and the young – that through active participation we can all make a difference.

✕

## Yes, we are asking for your financial support...

The El Salvador Projects are funded entirely by contributions from people like you – people whose ideals and sense of connection to the whole human family persist even in hard times. The popular press paints a pessimistic picture for charities worldwide, with donations down at least 10% from last year. In fact, contributions to the El Salvador Projects have declined by just about that much, so for the year ahead we are making commitments to fewer new students. With rising prices for basic commodities making it even harder for poor families to manage, we would like to be supporting *more* students who could begin to lift their families from poverty in a few years. Enabling a bright young person to gain an education is truly an investment that yields great returns for the community.

We know that everyone has to be especially careful with their hard-earned money in the current economic climate, and many people feel a need to re-evaluate their charitable contributions. We hope you can tell from our newsletters how well your contributions to the El Salvador Projects are managed. Because our Field Director allocates funds in consultation with a committee made up of representatives from the communities the Projects serve, we can be sure that every dollar goes to meet the greatest needs in each community and to support the most promising, dedicated students. Your dollars are “leveraged” in El Salvador. Just \$150/year enables a child from a poor family to attend middle school, \$250/year covers a high school student’s expenses, and \$1400 supports a college student for a year. College students know that they are expected to repay what they’ve received either in cash, by using their skills in approved community service (such as teaching), or by supporting another student.

As we begin the third decade of the Quaker Projects in El Salvador, the needs have never been greater. Although it’s wonderful to receive large contributions, in reality most contributions are more modest, and every single dollar counts. Your gifts join those of others to make a big difference in the lives of people in poor Salvadoran communities. Please – give what you can.

✕ Thank you! ✕

## Your contributions enabled these students to go to college!



Nelson Menjivar



Rosalvia Figueroa



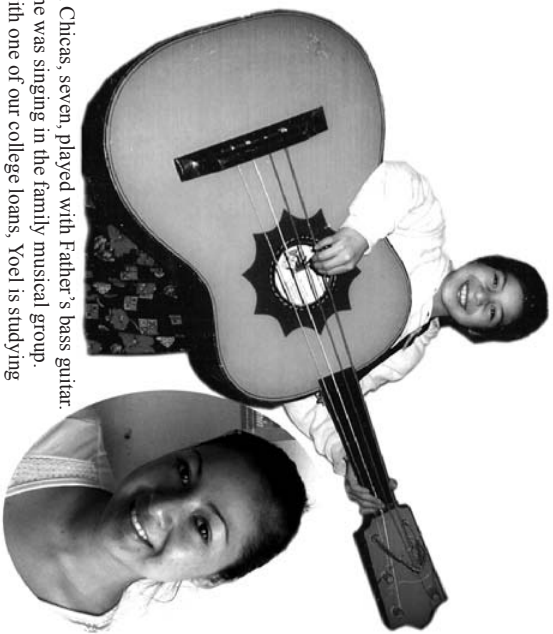
Juan Carlos Duran



Javier Galdamez



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**El Salvador Projects**  
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1999: Yoel Chicas, seven, played with Father's bass guitar.  
Already, she was singing in the family musical group.  
In 2009, with one of our college loans, Yoel is studying  
Information Technology.