

PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING

EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

JUNE 2017 NEWSLETTER

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Our Students' First Meeting, February 2017

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Dear Friends,

I approach this report joyfully, eager to share news of several wonderful developments—a new component of our University student loan program, a service learning trip to El Salvador July 23-August 2, the addition of several promising students to our loan recipient group thanks to your generosity in 2016, impressive progress by the students we assist, and even a surprise donation from a young man we supported years ago! As always, I'll give you my perspective "from the ground" on events in El Salvador. I hope you'll enjoy reading my report, just as I enjoy my part in an on-going conversation with you, my kindred spirits.

Expanded programs, thanks to your generosity!

I confess that I often dread the months of January and February, when my days fill with project work that includes meeting with loan applicants and their families (sometimes visiting their homes) to be well informed as I face difficult selection decisions. I also meet with and approve students from four projects who apply to stay in our coed student house, financed in cooperation with several groups. Managing the student house usually requires renovation of furnishings, painting, other minor house repairs, and computer maintenance, all of which are my responsibilities. After selecting the limited number of applicants we can support, we hold a meeting to orient both new and continuing students about project policies. Some of

this work is emotional and stressful, especially in years when budget restrictions require us to reduce spending. This year was different!

Two things happened that launched the year with joy for me and others, making me feel truly blessed about what I do. In mid-January, the El Salvador Projects Treasurer reported that for the first time in many years donations had exceeded our expectations. Normally I fear that the budget I proposed in November will have to be reduced at our January meeting, but for the first time in over six years your generosity enabled us to cover that budget without tapping the small reserve we have had to nibble down in the recent past. Without prompting, two Committee members suggested that we increase the 2017 budget to support new students we would otherwise have had to turn away. At my request, a modest fund was approved to support the science lab in the school in El Barío, which has not been fully equipped or well used since its construction several years ago. For some time, I have dreamed about strengthening high school academics in El Barío by improving the conditions of the school. Now, I believe, we can take steps to do just that!

Why did donations increase in 2016? Some of you may have given more than usual to honor the memory of my mother, Carmen Broz, who died in 2015. Some may have decided to give now, knowing the need, rather than to leave funds in a bequest for a future donation. Some may have felt a yearning for positive action after reacting with shock and disbelief to the 2016 elections. Whatever the explanations, by enabling us to support more students you've filled the year

ahead with promise and made my work more rewarding and less stressful. Thank you!

A welcome voice from the past, and an unexpected gift

There was yet more news ahead, to lift my heart and soul. Soon after our January committee meeting I received a Facebook message that seemed much like the suspicious messages that are all too common, bringing risk of identity theft and other scams. It was from a man whose name I did not recognize at first, claiming to be a Salvadoran living in the US. He asked for my phone number, saying “Mister Broz, I need to talk to you.” Politely, I asked how he knew me, and how I might be able to help him. He replied that he was Chamba, a student we had allowed to stay in the student house 2007-2009, although he was not supported by any of the sponsoring groups. He was working full-time and studying on his own at night to become an electrician, he was from a village in the Suchitoto area, and he knew students in the house. I recalled that after finishing his two-year technical degree, the strain of a full study schedule and reduced employment hours prevented him from continuing on his dream of becoming an electrical engineer at the National University, so he left for the US hoping for financial betterment.

To my surprise, he had contacted me to offer help, not to ask for it! Chamba told me he was grateful for the time we allowed him to live in the student house, that he follows the projects through our Facebook page, he is doing well as an electrician in the US, and *solo quiero apoyar un poco* (“I just want to help with a small donation”). The next day I received \$1000 through an electronic transfer! That very week we invested the money in eight new mattresses and some much-needed computer upgrades at our student house. I thought this would

be the most appropriate use of his donation, as our house now has 22 students from 4 different programs plus one or two like Chamba who are not in any of the programs but need a good place to stay while studying in San Salvador.

Perhaps you can imagine how I am still glowing from this unexpected support from a Salvadoran immigrant who benefited in a small way from our work years ago. When we received Chamba’s donation, I was working on the final selection of our 2017 university students, repairs to the student house, and many other project-related responsibilities. Now, weeks later, I continue to feel the energy of seeing how our work can change people’s lives in such a direct way. It has helped me stay inspired.

Experience with community service for every student we support

I have openly shared the heartening news of our increased budget and Chamba’s unexpected gift with the communities here in El Salvador, our loan recipients, other students living in the student house, and groups involved in programs similar to our own. I have seen smiles from those I hope will be Cham-bas of the future, those who will continue our work by helping others when and where possible. This boost to my spirit has made it easier to implement some changes for the students we support, improvements I decided to pursue after my visit to the PROGRESA program in Guatemala last year (a Quaker-founded program that is much like our own, but older).

Our student meeting on February 5th began with a brief presentation by each of the 17 students. I announced our increased budget that enabled us to approve the seven new students, explained our selection process, and described how Chamba’s unexpected support led to my upbeat mood. In this first student meeting, we detail the requirements for each

Students living in the student house





Laura Monge helps a student.

student and our obligation as a program to provide their financial support, with access to the student house and academic assistance if needed. This year I also asked them to reply as honestly as they could to a couple of questions: “Would you accept a required 40 hours of social work as part of the annual requirements of our program? And if so, do you have a project that you would like to do?” All 17 students agreed that it would be a good requirement, and several had ideas for projects. One student asked if the work could help to pay off the no-interest student loan we provide. A fourth-year medical student expressed a need to do the project between semesters, due to the time required for rounds at the hospital. Hoping for this kind of positive response, I had printed a summary with dates and deadlines, a consultation period, and basic information required to have a project approved and evaluated. I had set a financial value for the 40 hours, to be deducted from the student’s loan balance, and I had proposed a monetary prize for the best project (to be evaluated by the 17 students, and by me as Director).

The first deadline for consultation and project approval was March 31st. I was not sure what to expect, but in early March I started receiving proposals. Some were so complete that they needed no added information. Others needed some minor adjustments. By March 31st all 17 projects had been submitted and approved. They range from implementing recycling in a village to teaching how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. (Yes, this is the 4th-year medical student’s project!) Students plan to work with youth groups on environmental issues, tutor both within and outside of local schools, and help in a recent adult literacy program supported by our city hall and the Ministry of Education. After initially doubt-

ing my ability to start this facet of our program, and worrying that it might be opposed by our students – who are already required to do hundreds of hours of social and professional practical work supervised by their universities – I am now hopeful that these small projects can make positive changes within the communities of Suchitoto, as well as add to the personal and professional development of our loan recipients. Here is a photo of student Laura Monge, whose project tutoring 1st-3rd graders in the village of Copapayo started in April. I hope to share updates and more photos in our next newsletter, so that you can see firsthand how our students carry out their ideas in their communities.

A community celebrates a student’s success

Although my work is often stressful, it is always rewarding. Still, in some years I get an emotional overload, and the start of 2017 has been exceptional in many ways. Despite some personal problems – minor health issues, strained family finances with two of my children now studying at the university level and a declining economy – I continue to feel blessed, knowing that what I do with your support makes a real difference, and this in a world where so much seems to be failing. On April 1, feeling like a proud father, I attended the graduation of Mirna Yamilet, one of my favorite students over the past years and almost like a daughter to me. Mirna asked me in March if I would accompany her at her graduation. Knowing this is a privilege for which each student receives only two tickets, I made sure she

Robert, Mirna Yamilet, and her mother.





Mirna Yamilet's family with Robert Broz in back row.

would not prefer to have her sister or an uncle join her mother at the event. I knew that Mirna's father had passed away when she was just 12, but I expected her tickets to go to her mother and the older sister with whom she stayed while studying in San Salvador. Mirna assured me that she wanted me to attend her graduation. I was proud to meet her teachers and see fellow students watching her from afar as she received her diploma. It is not unusual for me to be invited to graduation parties, usually held in the villages the students come from, but over the years I think I have been to only three graduations at the universities. I think Mirna felt just as proud, introducing me to her peers and coworkers as the person who made her studies possible and the one who was always there when she needed help.

After the graduation in San Salvador we went back to Mirna's family home in one of the most remote villages of Suchitoto, one of the 82 that I had never visited. The community of El Chuagüiton (which I believe the name means place with lots of puddles) is situated between two small rivers without bridges that can isolate the village during the rainy season. After knowing Mirna and her mother for eight years, I finally met the rest of the family – uncles, aunts, sisters, nephews, nieces, and cousins. I think they make up most of the village of about 40 families! Before we departed Mirna thanked everyone involved with her studies, giving a prepared speech and not forgetting anyone, including her brother who left for the U.S. three years ago and sent her money to finish her studies, and yes, Roberto Broz and Palo Alto Friends Meeting, as well as personal thanks to her sponsor from Grass Valley, California. Mirna graduated with a degree in Business Administra-

tion, and since January has been working in a program that lasts one year with the Ministry of Hacienda (the local equivalent of the IRS). There is a chance that she may be hired after the year is over, but even if she is not, the experience will make it much easier for her to find work in the future. Mirna did her thesis on work practices and workers' rights here with the municipality of Suchitoto. I hope you enjoy the photo as much as I enjoyed being part of Mirna's graduation!

This year's graduating class at the National University of El Salvador (UES) was dedicated to commemoration of Monsignor Oscar Arnulfo Romero, who was assassinated on March 24, 1980, a date historians consider the start of the 12-year civil conflict in El Salvador. This quotation from one of his masses spoke clearly to my Quaker upbringing: "Let us form in the heart of the youth the sublime idea of loving, of preparing to serve, of giving to others."

Service learning trip, July 23-August 2, 2017

I want you to know that we are planning our seventh service-learning trip to El Salvador (July 23-August 2). A big change this year is that our U.S. coordinator, Nate Secret, is a past trip participant whose experience includes three of our trips and a total of five visits to El Salvador. As I write this report, we have 12 confirmed participants and will most likely close registration on June 1st (our normal deadline, and most likely after you receive this newsletter). I am happy to announce that a scholarship grant of \$1,000 was awarded for the trip by the Youth Fund of Pacific Yearly Meeting. Even so, two participants may still need help financing the trip. If you are interested in sponsoring a trip participant, please contact Nate

at secrestnm@guilford.edu for more information. This will be a multigenerational trip with participants as young as 10, an exception we made for a family of four who will all be on the trip. (Normally, the minimum age is 13.) As in the past, we will work in the community of El Barío; this year teaching English, learning Spanish, and working on the installation of water in the high school science lab as well as some needed road repairs. We will also visit the agricultural coop of San-

and yearly meetings in California, as well as reports and photos from Nate and me in our November newsletter and on our webpage.

El Salvador bans mining, protects community health

I am glad that recent events permit me to close my report on a positive note. Many of you have probably heard that little El Salvador made international news just a short while ago by

becoming the first country in the world to pass a law banning all metals mining. This remarkable development came after almost a decade-long law suit by Pacific Rim Mining, which El Salvador won after revoking permits to the company to mine gold using modern methods and chemicals that would have contaminated the drinking water supplies of several communities in the department of Cabañas. Pacific Rim was asking for 250 million dollars for projected losses due to not being able to extract and sell the gold.

The World Bank tribunal's decision was based in part on evidence that Pacific Rim manipulated their work in El Salvador, even at one point registering in the U.S. to be able to use articles in CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) to their benefit. From 2002-2009 Pacific Rim, working with allies suspected of receiving kick-backs to help get the project underway despite so much local resistance, had been accused of targeting leaders of unions and communal organizations protesting the mining in Cabañas.

Although no concrete evidence could be found, it is assumed that they ordered the assassination of at least one activist.

The World Bank ruled against Oceana Gold, the owner of Pacific Rim, and ordered them to pay 8 million dollars to the country to cover part of the legal fees spent defending their interests in this 7 1/2 year law suit. The slogan in El Salvador is "No to mining, yes to life." Soon after the World Bank made the announcement last October, the National Assembly started working on the new law passed earlier this year to ban all mining in El Salvador, a country that has never had any substantial amounts of minerals suitable for mining.

Access to water as a basic human right

Another first may be right around the corner for El Salvador, and it's all starting here in Suchitoto where my family and I live! Recently, with the President of Nestle saying that he does not feel that water rights should be controlled, and with reports out about the company's 10 billion dollars in annual sales of bottled water and that Nestle owns 70% of the bottled water companies in the world, the Suchitoto City Council is



Nate Seacrest on the 2011 trip.

ta Anita, where we hope to start the construction of a small building to house a local police outpost and move them away from the daycare center they currently use.

As I am sure you are aware, crimes due to gang activity increased to the worst levels in El Salvador's history in recent years, and in 2015 this tiny country was named by the U.S. State Department the most violent country in the world where there is no active war. This announcement led to a decrease in tourism, as well as visits by delegations and solidarity groups like our own, causing economic problems throughout the region. I do want to let you know that we have always done everything in our means to reduce risks to participants in our delegations, by using private transportation and working with the communities where we have been engaged since the early 1990s. Fortunately, participants on our trips have never experienced any violence, with our only problems being some health issues common to most developing countries. Moreover, in the past year violence has declined in El Salvador. Expect follow up reports on the trip from Quaker youth at quarterly

preparing to pass a local ordinance declaring access to water as a human right. On May 28, voters within the municipality will be asked to sign and check a simple ballot (yes or no) to start the process and ultimately pass the municipal ordinance. This is the first hopeful step toward eventual action by the national assembly to make a right to water national law. The process is difficult, requiring a new law to be presented and approved in one assembly's term and then ratified in the following term. When I heard the idea from our Mayor, Pedrina Rivera, in early April, I told her that if Suchitoto and then El Salvador are successful in this process the news will be much bigger than the recent ban on mining and perhaps governments around the world will follow suit. If passed, the law will have many impacts. In El Salvador water is always scarce during the six-month dry season, causing many municipal water systems to ration water to the public while multinational corporations like Coca Cola and La Constancia SA (local beers, bottled water, and juices), both now owned by Anheuser-Busch, suck local aquifers dry to continue to produce their products and make large profits.

I end my report wishing to express how I try to let the Inner Light lead my life, in both good times and bad times, and thanking you all once again for your faithful support of the El Salvador Projects – for opening life opportunities for determined young people from poor villages in the Salvadoran countryside, and for smoothing their way and mine.

Peace to all,

Robert Broz

With your support, the El Salvador Projects has expanded a successful program of assistance to the rural poor of El Salvador...

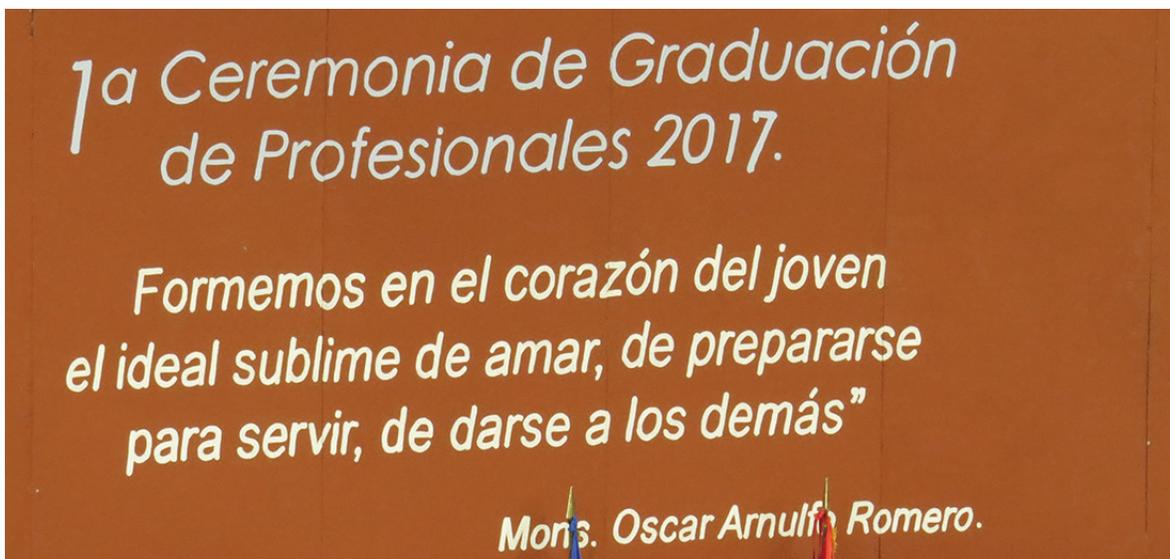
Tones of optimism, encouragement, even exhilaration are interwoven with the resolve and sense of purpose you're accustomed to finding in our newsletters. Robert Broz's *Director's Report* shares the joy of being able to offer loan assistance to several additional promising students we were able to support this year because your generosity

allowed a modest expansion of our expected budget. A few examples will illustrate how much this means to the students and their families.



The Bottled water victory

- Raised by an aunt after almost all of her immediate family in northeastern El Salvador were killed during the civil war, a young woman completed a teaching degree and is now a school principal with children of her own.
- The son of parents who learned to read as teenagers in caves during the war completed law school and is a practicing attorney.



Monseñor Romero's words from the school banner:

“Let us form in the hearts of our youth the sublime ideal of love, of preparing themselves to serve, of giving themselves to others.”

- A *maestra popular* (people's teacher) who taught with little more education than her elementary school students, squatting in the dust under a tree, earned an education degree and is now the principal of the large school in El Barío.
- Nurses, pharmacists, social workers, accountants, teachers, and graduates in other specialties who studied with financial assistance, housing, and academic support from *The El Salvador Projects* enrich the lives of people in their communities and support their families.

Carmen Broz, founder of the El Salvador Projects, believed that when one bright young person was well educated, no one in that person's family would ever again be destitute. More than 25 years later, our experience continues to confirm that conviction. When a determined young person from a village in the Salvadoran countryside gains an education and is productively employed, a family is raised from poverty and an entire community knows that dreams can become reality. Notice how Mirna Yamilet's entire village celebrated her graduation! A powerful spirit of civic engagement motivates these students, as demonstrated by the enthusiastic response of the current group to Robert's proposal for community service projects and

the surprise contribution of \$1,000 by Chamba, an electrician who once lived in our student house while he was a student. (See Robert's report in this newsletter.)

Our appeals for your donations often emphasize need, and the needs of El Salvador's rural poor are very real. This time, however, we emphasize success as well. Carefully managed funds bring powerful benefits from a surprisingly small annual budget. With less than \$40,000 this year we will support 17 university students, upgrade a computer lab at the El Barío school, pay a part-time stipend to our Project Director – and bring life-changing experiences in El Salvador to a group of U.S. travelers with our service-learning trip. (The trip costs are covered by travelers' registration fees and special donations for travel assistance.)

Please give what you can to sustain the unique, successful work of the El Salvador Projects. Please help us reach out to others who share your commitment to peace, justice, and equality for all the people of the world. We encourage you to give this newsletter to a friend or family member after you've read it. Thank you so much for your support, and your faithful partnership!

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YES! I WANT TO HELP SALVADORANS IMPROVE THEIR LIVES!

Mail donations to: Palo Alto Friends Meeting - El Salvador Projects, 957 Colorado Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94303

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Check here if you want your gift to support a college student.

(Please specify on your check memo line "College Loans.")

All donations are used for education programs. Most donations are used for our university student loans and some smaller donations are used for other educational purposes such as high school tutors or supplies.

Contribution checks should be made to PAFM - E.S. Projects. Your contribution is tax-deductible.

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Or visit our projects web page at www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org

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PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING EL SALVADOR PROJECTS NEWSLETTER



JUNE 2017 NEWSLETTER—WHAT'S INSIDE

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- The upcoming service learning trip to El Salvador July 23-August 2,
- Thanks to your generosity in 2016, we are serving more students,
- Impressive progress by the students we assist,
- A surprise donation from a former student.
- The El Salvador government scores a win!
- How your continued support matters.

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