

EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

JUNE 2018 NEWSLETTER

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Our 2018 University Students

Elections in El Salvador Reflect Discontent of the Population

REPORT FROM THE DIRECTOR, ROBERT BROZ

2017 was a great year for our programs, and 2018 promises to be even better. Once again, we have been blessed by new and old supporters who **have allowed us to expand our work in El Salvador** this year through their generous donations. After reading our November 2017 newsletter, one longtime supporter included a short note with his check: “I want Robert to be able to be able to make his dream come true and increase the number of university students in 2018. If you need more money to make this happen just let me know”. Such confidence makes my life here that much more fulfilling, assuring me that our work does make a difference, and our supporters know that our projects change lives and communities.

In this newsletter I will comment on the recent and upcoming elections, in this time of political instability in El Salvador and the neighboring countries of Nicaragua and Honduras. I will also bring you up to date on our projects, current students, student house, social projects, and some new work we are doing at the school in El Barío. I’ll tell you about an unusual new student, and I’ll highlight one of our successful graduates from Morazán. Expect a fuller than normal report, as our work in El Salvador continues now in our 29th year.

After nine years of central government by the FMLN (the left-wing party), with constant attacks by the right-wing controlled media accusing the FMLN of everything from political corruption to incompetence in reducing gangs and violence to inability to improve the failing economy, **it appears that FMLN voters have lost faith in their party leaders.** After hopes of major party reforms collapsed when the popular Mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele, was expelled from the FMLN in 2017, many FMLN militant voters abstained from voting in the elections for national assembly members and mayoral elections on March 4th, handing over the elections to the ultra-right wing ARENA party, which easily won 10 of the 14 department capital cities and strengthened their position in the national assembly with now 38 seats (3 in coalition). ARENA party leader Mauricio Interiano, in the victory celebration, said “this is our biggest win in the history of the party,” although ARENA won with the fewest votes in their history – more evidence of abstention by FMLN voters and of a drop in popularity of both principal parties. The FMLN lost 8 assembly seats, and overall about 40% of its



Robert Broz

electoral control at both the local and national levels. The FMLN masses have called for major reforms, but the current leaders don't seem willing to make any changes and assure that they will win the presidency a third time in the 2019 elections. Neither of the two potential candidates stands for any major change within the party, and most likely they will not be accepted by the majority of FMLN voters. It is clear to me that FMLN voters will not support the party if changes are not made, which they say will be made clearer in the upcoming elections in 2019.

In its preliminary elections last week, ARENA announced that their candidate for president will be dynamic young Carlos Calleja, owner of the largest chain of supermarkets, a multi-millionaire with rumored backing from the foreign mining company Pacific Rim. The selection of Calleja is reminiscent of past presidential candidates Francisco Flores and Tony Saca, neither of them a militant or founder of the ultra-right party, and both considered new faces and puppets of the rich oligarchy. Regardless of who runs for the other parties, it is assumed that Nayib Bukele, with his newly formed New Ideas (Nuevas Ideas) party, will win. If that happens, he will have to endure two years with a national assembly having none of his own party members, with opposition from virtually all the other parties. If things develop as I expect, it won't be until the 2021 elections that Bukele will have had time to promote the New Ideas party, identify potential politicians among its members, and participate in local and national assembly elections. This could be the change that El Salvador needs in order to make progress, or it could mean five years of little change until either the FMLN or ARENA party makes needed changes to gain back confidence of the Salvadoran population. Whatever happens in El Salvador, **there seems to be a change in politics in Central America, with obvious electoral fraud in the Honduran presidential elections in January and now unrest in Nicaragua**, where the Sandinista President Daniel Ortega has used excessive force and unethical blocking of media coverage of youth riots instigated by his own Sandinista Youth. In both cases, there have been dozens killed and hundreds wounded by government police and military. The international community and US voters should keep an eye open for behind-the-scenes US involvement in the region, as the current leftist governments in El Salvador and Nicaragua as well as the leftist opposition in Honduras are being influenced and changing their founding socialistic vision and becoming more and more like their right-wing predecessors.

OUR PROJECTS AT WORK

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

This year your generous donations enabled us to support more university students, and to increase our budget for modest but vital assistance to schools in rural Suchitoto.

In 2018 we support 21 university students, 8 of whom are new in 2018. Our students study at several universities in varied programs: three in medicine, three in psychology, three in law, four in English or modern languages, two in industrial engineering, and others in sociology, social work, systems engineering, public relations, and nursing. It is interesting to note how our students' fields of interest have changed over the years. Back in 1999-2005 the majority studied teaching, nursing, English, and



Milton with sponsor Arlene Schaupp

business administration, rather than the more technical programs involving science and math, such as Medicine and engineering.

I'd like to introduce you to our three medical students, all of whom are enrolled at the University of El Salvador. **Milton**, now in his fifth year, continues to do well this after experiencing some academic problems two years ago. Milton and his two sisters were raised by his mother in a small village in rural Suchitoto. He is a dedicated student who strives to be the best in a highly competitive program. Our next future doctor, **Keira**, now in her second year, feels the pressure as she moves from basic classes like biology and chemistry to more advanced topics, such as anatomy and pathology. Unlike Milton, Keira travels from her community in Suchitoto each day. This is dangerous, and takes time she could spend studying. Although I encourage her to move to our student house, I expect that Keira will continue to live with her family unless her grades drop. Our third medical student is **Orbelina**. "Orbe" is unusual in that she graduated from high school several years ago, and only this year decided to leave her work with the local youth group in her community and try to get into the national university. She was accepted by the university in the first round of testing, where only about 10% pass the test. That result, along with her social activities in her community, made her a strong applicant to our program. Orbe also opted to make use of our student house, where she quickly made friends and settled into her studies and life in the city. I mentor Orbe and our other seven new students in the change from rural to city life, as well as in their academics and compliance with our program's policies. As our students, both new and old, work their way through this first semester of the year I always tell them, "Our goal is to see you graduate, not just support you for a semester."



Keira



Orbelina



At the Student House

As always at this time of the year, I am confident that we chose qualified students to support, and I look forward anxiously to see my confidence confirmed as time passes and the student invest their own effort.

HOUSING AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT

The student house we share with several other programs

is full, with 22 students (twelve men and ten women – nine new to the house this year). Twelve are supported by the Palo Alto Projects, five are from the Santa Cruz Al Salvador program, four are from the local parish program in Suchitoto, and one is from the municipal program. I perceive this as a good-spirited group, and running their living environment well with a newly elected house committee. **Tutoring occurs spontaneously in the house**, with both Milton and Orbe living there, plus two of our law students and three students studying English.



The baking program

TEACHER SUPPORT

This year we are providing much-needed help to the school in El Barío, where our work in education began. Due to national budget cuts in education, and a decreasing number of children enrolled, **the school's budget has been cut substantially**. To avoid having second and third grades combined, **we will provide a small stipend to a local teacher who was never given a permanent teaching job** by the ministry of education. Teacher Rita, one of our past beneficiaries, has taught for many years at the school, and her salary has been paid with funds from many different sources. In the past, Palo Alto's projects provided a monthly stipend for Rita and six other teachers at the school. As the school labored each year to get new government positions, little by little most of the teachers whose training we supported were given government teaching jobs in El Barío. For a time each paid teacher chipped in \$10/month for Rita's stipend. One year parents agreed to give \$1/month, and for the past several years Rita has been paid with unrestricted funds that the school receives from the ministry of education. For 2018, **the reduction in federal**

funding meant Rita would have been out of work, and two grades would be combined. As soon as I was informed I called for two meetings, one with the teachers and principal, and another with the parents. Rita was happy to know that she could go back to work, and I was surprised by her enthusiasm, since what we offered is not close to what a teacher makes. Our commitment of \$150/month will be supplemented voluntarily by many parents who have agreed to give \$1/month, as well as two of our past university graduates, both with children at the school, who have asked if their payments can go toward Rita's salary. Rita started teaching at the school in early April, and with the other funds it looks as though her monthly stipend will be close to \$250.

I was surprised when as I looked around at the parent meeting I saw just a few faces I knew, only a couple of the community's founders, now attending the parent meeting as grandparents. The majority of the parents were younger, the new generation, who were at one time children themselves at the school. It was easy for me to motivate them to help, talking about the history of the school and Palo Alto's support in the community and school since 1989. All had been beneficiaries as children, as we built the school and paid teachers they all knew so many years ago. Many expressed their gratitude, feeling fortunate that they, unlike most of their parents, were able to go to school from kindergarten on!

BAKING, A VOCATIONAL PROGRAM

This year we are supporting a new vocational baking program at the school in El Barío. With minor funding, we will be aiding about **40 high school students who are learning to bake** traditional Salvadorean breads and pastries. I have offered to personally work with the students to teach them about nontraditional breads and cookies, where I hope to show them how to make carrot and zucchini breads, pizza, and oatmeal raisin cookies. Although not among my specialties, we may even try out some pastries like vanilla and chocolate cakes and cupcakes. I think **the program can become sustainable**, and perhaps teach the kids how to operate a small business.

IN MEMORY OF CARMEN BROZ

A work in progress is a mural of my mother, Carmen Broz, a project of one of our graduates who studied art, Chomingo (Juan Domingo Rivas). We have no deadline, but I hope it will be completed in 2018. At the end of 2017, the wall was finished and prepared with fine stucco. This year the wall has been sealed and painted base white, and now there is a sketch from a photo of Carmen in her late 80's. **I hope to include more photos of the artwork, and the final mural itself, in our next newsletter.**

SOCIAL PROJECTS, AND IMPROVING HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMICS

This year we have implemented high school tutoring and academic workshops on Saturday mornings in El Barío. The purpose is to reinforce the four base subjects, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Spanish language. We also hope that the program
3. will work to motivate potential high school graduates to continue

their studies. The classes are being taught by some professional teachers, as well as some current and past scholarship students. With support from the new scholarship youth association, ABE-SUCHI, I hope to expand the program to the other 4 rural K-12 schools in Suchitoto in 2019. We should be able to measure the effect of our project through results of the annual high school exit exam given in October to all graduating high school students. One of our supporters was so inspired by last year's social work projects that he donated funds specifically for projects of this kind. Part of his donation will be used to pay travel expense for some of our teachers. Because the experience with social work projects was successful in 2017, **this year we have implemented the program with all of the students in our student house.** This was made easier because the Santa Cruz al Salvador program had also decided to have their students



high school tutoring

comply with the required 40 hours of social work each academic school year, based on our model in 2017. My suggestion to the new association that oversees the Cummings family program as well as the Parish and Municipal programs will be to ask that they add the same requirement for their students, thus continuing to unify five programs as we have in the past where one application, similar deadlines, and basic requirements are common to all programs. The projects the students have written up are even more varied than in 2017, with students working in the planting of green belts, high school tutoring in two schools, English classes in two schools, reading and writing with first to third graders in two schools, physical education by two students in one school, sex education, environmental education, and more. I will provide photos and more about the social work program in our next newsletter.

ONE UNUSUAL NEW STUDENT AND A SUCCESSFUL PAST STUDENT

I always enjoy composing these reports and find much of it very easy, but I think my favorite part of the report is when I choose which students to highlight. Many times I have to look back over old newsletters to see what I may have mentioned about a student or graduate in past mailings. I always find myself smiling as write about each student, thinking back to when I first met them, how they entered our program, their families, and all the little details. Today I want to start with one of our eight new students, one I would consider **a very atypical candidate** for our program.

Ana Isabela started messaging and calling me early in 2017, asking about our program and its requirements. The calls, messages, and even one visit all seemed at the time a desperate call for attention and acceptance. When Ana showed up at my

house one morning, I realized that she was not some young high school student but rather **a mature 30-something single mom.** As I explained our requirements and asked my usual questions to see if she met them and could apply, I saw a very up-front and self-confident person with a desire to improve her situation. I also noted what at the time I considered deficiencies – she graduated from high school so long ago that she had little or no training with computers, internet, or other technology – but on the good side she was not addicted to her smart phone's small blue screen like most of our children and grandchildren today. As I told her that I prefer digital copies of basic requirements, grades, diploma, and application, she asked if she could bring them personally, which she did, all complete and long before our deadlines.

When I told Ana that I was going to write about her and needed more information, she freely shared about her childhood and family. Ana's large family originally included 11 brothers and sisters, but five of her older siblings were killed during the conflict. Her father was active with the Popular Liberation Front (FPL), while her mother and siblings were part of what was referred to as "civil population" in the area of San Vicente, which was targeted by the military government of the 1980s, much like Suchitoto and Morazán. Now 37 years old, Ana remembers little of the conflict. Her parents and six siblings survived and moved to Milingo, a village repopulated in rural Suchitoto. The mother of two boys, 15 and 17, from a relationship that ended years ago, Ana lives with her parents. Three years ago her father had a minor stroke, and Ana realized that her family's future would be uncertain now that her father was now unable to work the fields as in the past.

This uncertainty and instability were the principal factors motivating her to try for the university, to improve her own future and her boys'. Ana decided to study to become a social worker at a small private university in San Vicente, where



Ana Isabela

a couple of her brothers now live. When I asked why she chose that specific university, one I had not heard of, she said, "I didn't want to have to travel to San Salvador with all the crime. My brothers told me they could help out if I needed to spend a night or needed food." Now well into her first semester she is happy. Three of her four teachers told the students that they did not want printed work but hand written, this to make sure they do not just cut and paste from digital sources. She did send me her first handwritten homework bore an impressive score of 90%! Intense emotions bring tears to my eyes as I think about how **Ana told me about her family's involvement in the conflict, the loss of her siblings, her hopes to become a professional and support her family...** I realize anew how important programs like ours are.

This also becomes so clear when we look at where our

INSPIRATIONS FROM EL SALVADOR by Yogi Sharma



*Karla Lili
with honey,
the family
business.*

past students are today, even in cases where they don't find work in their field of study, as is the case of one graduate from Morazán. **Karla Lili**, from the community "10 de Enero" (January 10th) in Perquín, Morazán, is the oldest daughter of two founding members of the El Gigante Cooperative. We started working with Karla's parents, Salvador and Reyna, and the cooperative back in 1993. Some years later Karla and her little brother Ali received scholarships for elementary school. Karla Lili graduated from the University of El Salvador in San Miguel in 2016, with honors, as a social worker. Today her interests have changed, and **for the past two years she has dedicated her time to the family production and growing business, producing both coffee and honey. She is an active member of both the El Gigante Coop and a honey producers' association, ADEL. In October of 2017 she went to Belgium representing the youth from the honey association.** When I visited the family in March, I saw their small coffee production and learned about their 120 beehives, each producing an average of 20 bottles of honey each year. Karla and her father, Salvador, are active in both production and marketing. Karla Lili is ecstatic about working in the family business, with little worry about not working as a social worker, and clearly using her education and interpersonal skills in the enterprise.

I hope this report conveys the importance of our projects and ongoing work in El Salvador. As in the past, I close with my personal thanks, and with appreciation on behalf of the El Salvador Projects Committee in Palo Alto, to those who help make our work possible though your continuing donations. As in the past, I extend an **open invitation for those who wish to visit El Salvador** to see firsthand how our projects work and meet people from the communities we have assisted for almost three decades.

I moved to the US in 2004. I found this land of opportunities very attractive. It was a welcome change from my upbringing in India. I found the independence I needed. I loved open minds of the university campus. I loved the concern for environment in this prosperous society. When I saw immigrant friends from 6 different countries on a dinner table of 8, I realized the diversity I was part of. Sky was the limit of what we could accomplish together.



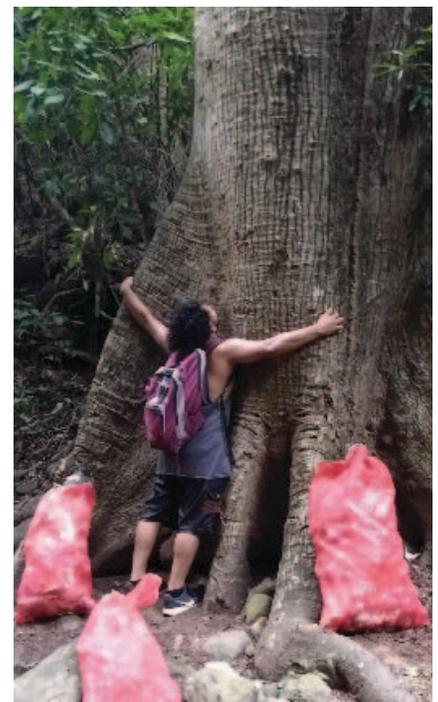
Yogi Sharma

Not everything was rosy though. I was uprooted from a society with deep roots in community. In India, I enjoyed the informal gatherings of friends to play a sophisticated version of baseball in sunny afternoons where my parents did not keep an eye on us. I missed it. I missed my village of 2000 people where nobody was really a stranger.

Both these extremes of cultural spectrum are, well, extremes. They have their advantages and disadvantages as extremes always have! I have always wondered if it is possible to pick the best of both worlds, a marriage of, for lack of a better term, the east and the west lifestyles.

I found this working marriage in a place I did not expect it -- El Salvador, and in particular the communities I visited: El Barrio and Suchitoto. I found this community extremely close knit, and at the same time, concerned by issues much bigger than individuals and their small community: clean environment, women's empowerment, sustainable agriculture, preservation of national and cultural heritage and such.

The tree picture really does tell me more than what thousand words would be able to communicate. "Please save our environment" is a loud cry from this small gesture. The acknowledgement that our environment is much larger than us, too big for us to wrap our own hands or head around it, is a powerful lesson in humility too. At



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the same time, actions speak louder than words, and bags of garbage collected from the nearby river shows that this guy is willing to work for it, not just wish and pray for a cleaner environment. As the African adage goes: "when you pray, move your feet", the community is really moving its feet.

As powerful as this picture is in indicating the simultaneity of intent and action, the context around it makes the story even more inspiring. We decided impromptu to hike down to the river on which this tree stands. We made our way to the waterfall to cleanup the trash after a meeting at Concertacion de Mujeres to discuss our roles in environment sustainability. We filled out a long survey answering questions (in Spanish) about whether we buy groceries locally, or how much energy we use in our house etc. We realized that we were using way more energy than earth can sustain for 7 billion people. (I needed four earths to sustain me, and I thought before this exercise that I was environmentally conscious, so much for that!) The concern for the environment in developing country like El Salvador was a refreshing outlook I observed. Sometimes, in the name of development, we forget that we cannot go against the nature and its beauty if we want to succeed in the long haul. People from Suchitoto and El Bario get this!

The feeling of comradery and community in El Bario reminded me of my roots from small village life in India. The simplicity of everyday life, the connections between neighbors and community, connection to nature, and welcoming attitude towards outsiders and stranger like ourselves reminded me of the "east" I was used to while growing. Combine this with the progressive views of people towards environment, towards preservation of national heritage and history with humility, towards equality of women and their empowerment, towards sustainable agriculture, and we get that sweet spot between Eastern tradition and Western progression. We all have a lot to learn from El Salvador.

6.



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Como jóvenes tenemos muchos obstáculos por vencer, miedos que nos llenan de inseguridades a la hora de luchar por lo que queremos, pero es cuestión de personalidad y salir adelante, explotar nuestra potencialidad, capacidades y habilidades para emprender el camino que cada uno/a queramos.

Karla Lili Martínez

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"As young people we encounter many obstacles to surmount, fears that fill us with insecurity at the moment we are fighting for what we want, but it is a question of personality, moving forward to explore our own potential, capacities and abilities in order to start on the path of what each one is wishing for." — Karla Lili

Seeking Asylum & Seeking Education

by Trudy Reagan,
Clerk of the El Salvador Committee

This newsletter reaches you against a backdrop of the Mexican side of the US border, where Central Americans camped out, desperately seeking asylum. For so many, there is no escape from violence in their home countries. The response has been a decree by Attorney General Jefferson Davis Sessions that "the asylum system has been abused, and must stop," slamming the door. Notice that Sessions was named after Jefferson Davis, who in 1861 was president of the Confederacy of states fighting to preserve slavery.

Millions will be spent militarizing the border, money that might improve the lives of Central Americans to keep them in their homes. During the Salvadoran Civil War, our priorities were similarly perverse.

Almost two decades after the Salvadoran Peace Accords, the war reverberates. Young ex-combatants who lack years of schooling, have turned to crime. In the US, young refugees cast adrift joined gangs. When they were deported for criminal offenses, they brought the gang culture to El Salvador, among other countries. Fortunately, the area we work in north of the capital has been largely spared.

Our efforts in El Salvador shine a light of hope in this darkness. Almost all our graduates choose to remain in country, improving their country by becoming teachers, medical professionals and civil servants. Carmen and Robert's influence has expanded to the whole community: The local diocese has begun offering scholarships. You may remember the late Frank Cummings, Robert's friend who also granted scholarships. His work continues. Together, they rent the student house in San Salvador.

We value your continuing support to maintain and expand these opportunities for young people. It's so important!

What do your donations accomplish...?

They educate young Salvadorans, keep families together, and strengthen communities!

Many of you have supported the El Salvador Projects for years, and you're familiar with this insight of founder Carmen Broz – *Education is the fastest way to raise people from poverty* – that shaped the program your donations make possible. Now, nearly three decades after we began helping little kids go to elementary school, then older kids complete high school, and currently young adults from poor rural families earn university degrees, we know that education has become even more vital. When the children of subsistence farmers and cane workers become teachers, nurses and pharmacists, lawyers and accountants, they are not driven by desperation to attempt the often fatal journey toward the United States, where officialdom makes them less welcome and more at risk.

In this newsletter, Robert Broz told you how graduate Karla Lili returned to her village in Morazán, one of the most war-ravaged areas of El Salvador a generation ago, to help her parents succeed in their honey production and strengthen her village's cooperative. He told you how Ana, a bright, mature mother of two, launched her university education to care for her parents as well as her children – thanks to your donations.

You supporters of the El Salvador Projects are a unique community, even though most of you aren't acquainted with many of your donor partners. Our newsletter goes to 480 addresses, mostly individuals and families (and a few Quaker meetings and churches). Last year 112 of you donated, a striking 23% response rate, with generous gifts that enabled the Committee to make loans to additional promising students.

Marion Newton, now responsible for sending thank-you notes, says: *I can hardly express the power of my experience, recording the checks and seeing the breadth of the world they arrive from. All donations represent your loyalty, hopes, and vision for a better world made possible by your generosity and faithfulness, whatever the amount of the gift.* Watch for Marion's article on the experience of serving on the El Salvador Projects Committee in our next newsletter, and... *Thank you!*

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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.

FRIEND US ON FACEBOOK! Search on: Palo-Alto-Friends-Meeting-El-Salvador-Projects

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

Please contact Dave Hinson if you want to receive your newsletter by email at davidphinson@yahoo.com

PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING EL SALVADOR PROJECTS NEWSLETTER



JUNE 2018 NEWSLETTER—WHAT'S INSIDE

The Director reports on:

- Recent and upcoming elections
- Latest on our projects
- Current students
- Our student house in San Salvador
- Successful graduates from Morazán
- Born in India, Yogi Sharman enjoys El Salvador
- How your continued support matters

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