

## PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING

# EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

WWW.PAFMELSALVADORPROJECTS.ORG

## Dear Friends and Supporters:

In this report I will provide an update on current social, economic, and political conditions in El Salvador, including important changes since the current President, Nayib Bukele, took office on June 1<sup>st</sup>. I will review our educational programs, with news of our current work in the village of El Barío, the progress of our university students, and highlights of their social work projects, which the students presented in September. As in past newsletters, I will also bring you some news from several students we have supported in the past.

In my view, the current situation in El Salvador is linked directly to politics in the U.S., as has so often been true in the past. It appears that the Trump administration and our current President, Nayib Bukele, and his team are setting the scene to make El Salvador suddenly seem to be a country with few serious problems and a growing, stable, healthy economy. El Salvador was the second of the three “northern triangle” countries to sign an agreement with the U.S. to receive immigrants seeking asylum from other countries. To many Salvadorans this seems crazy, frankly. A large percentage of Salvadorans face life-or-death risks daily, or at best live in areas controlled by local gangs where extortion is routine, and most people pay it. The goal, evidently, is to use the new asylum/immigration law in the U.S. to deny asylum to any immigrant who has passed through Guatemala, El Salvador, and (more recently) Honduras, because all three are now identified by the U.S. as countries where asylum seekers could have applied to the new programs in each country. How can this happen, when El Salvador and Honduras are statistically the most violent countries in the world where no wars are currently going on, and – although it’s a bit better – Guatemala has its own serious problems with very high levels of violent crime? Personally, I think these bilateral agreements are meant to do more than just reduce the flow of undocumented immigrants into the U.S. Many Salvadorans believe these agreements are setting the stage for the end of Temporary Protected Status for nearly three million immigrants, the majority of whom are from El Salvador and Honduras. As part of the same plan, just days before I began this report the U.S. State Department changed the travel warning for El Salvador from level 3 (Reconsider Travel to El Salvador) to level 2 (Exercise Increased Caution while traveling in El Salvador). This is another public affirmation that both the U.S. and El Salvador governments now consider El Salvador a safe enough place for asylum seekers from other countries to be supported. Here in El Salvador, most people hearing these



Director Robert Broz



Acting Secretary of Homeland Security Kevin McAleenan signs an agreement with El Salvador Foreign Affairs Minister Alexandra Hill Sept. 20, 2019 (AP Photo)

announcements believe nothing has changed in any substantial way to back these political actions, which will most likely only favor the Trump administration and, perhaps, some corrupt politicians here as well as some wealthy foreign and local investors. There are still active gangs in many areas, a high incidence of violent crime, a poor health care system, a poor educational system, and political corruption at many levels of government. Another recent indication is the newly formed border/immigration police patrols on El Salvador's border with Guatemala. This new division was implemented to align with the Trump administration and tap into continued funding, now contingent on active reduction of immigrants heading north from countries including but not limited to El Salvador. Here, the aim is reduce the numbers of Salvadorans who depart daily, now estimated at 300, seeking the American dream or at least a better life than is possible for many in El Salvador, and/or fleeing threats to lives and property from violent criminals.

For insight into how things are or are not improving, especially within the elite and powerful old-school oligarchy, I want to mention what is in the news today.

Some of you may smile when I tell you how blatant political corruption and favoritism are in El Salvador, illustrated by the fall from grace and popularity of the Mister Donut franchises. In late September, three of the over 20 Mister Donut restaurants, all owned by one person, Adolfo Salume, were visited by the national health department and were told that they were to be closed for non-compliance and lack of hygiene, a case that was easily resolved by Salume's lawyer. In early October, the Department of Labor went to two other Mister Donut stores and shut them down instantly, asserting that they were in non-compliance with local labor laws. Just days later it was announced that the U.S. chain of Dunkin' Donuts was going to return to El Salvador, with the planned opening of two stores by the end of

2019. On social media it is rumored that one of Bukele's close friends will own the franchise rights to Dunkin' Donuts in El Salvador. It is public knowledge that Adolfo Salume opposed Bukele strongly during the recent presidential campaign. Most believe the rumor about Dunkin' Donuts, and almost everyone believes that the use of both health and labor ministries to shut down Salume's restaurants is a personal vendetta by Bukele against Salume because of his power and public opposition.

Blatant corruption is also illustrated by housing development projects in areas where essential water supplies are already inadequate. Two new mega projects were recently approved by the El Roble Group, a huge housing and commercial development company owned by the Poma family, one of El Salvador's elite and wealthiest families. They promote them as projects that will benefit thousands of middle-class Salvadorans, but fail to mention that local grassroots groups oppose the projects, claiming that the area in question does not have the resources, especially potable water, to support even the existing communities, let alone these mega projects. The projects were on hold by our Ministry of Environment until the approval of feasibility studies, but now under the new Bukele administration

they are being pushed through with little public information. Although Nayib Bukele and Fernando Poma were at odds with each other during the campaign, now that Bukele is President of El Salvador the El Roble Group, just one part of the Poma family's empire, has been given the green light. As you can imagine, Bukele is friendly with the many in the Poma family, one of the five wealthiest families in El Salvador. The phrase used in El Salvador is "más de lo mismo," or "more of the same," referring to some 30 or more years of political corruption and favoritism to elite economic interest groups and families, with some of these economic empires extending back in El Salvador's history to the early eighteen hundreds. Although I am sure this has also



El Salvador President  
Nayib Bukele

happened in other parts of the world, it always surprises me that such incredible wealth could be accumulated by just a half dozen or so families in a tiny country like El Salvador. The heads of the five wealthiest families in El Salvador in 2019 are Ricardo Poma, Roberto Kriete, Carlos Callejas, Javier Siman, and Nayib Bukele. An interesting fact is that both Carlos Callejas and Javier Siman were considered as presidential candidates for the right wing ARENA party in our recent elections, and it was in fact Callejas who ran and lost to Bukele.

I hope my report this month does not sound overly pessimistic. Some friends and supporters contacted me after reading our last newsletter, saying, I sounded very pessimistic about the situation in El Salvador and asking me if I really thought that things were that bad. I told them, as I tell all of you, that there is a lot of uncertainty in El Salvador, Central America, and I think even worldwide, but that I always have hope. In fact, the Projects you support are important, as we all realize they are, largely because the conditions of life in El Salvador are so harsh and unjust for so many people. Even when I think things are at their worst, I feel positive and happy with my life, my work, and our programs. This makes even the most uncertain of times feel tolerable, and brings me a truly positive hope for a better future. I do feel blessed with my life and work. So let me share some of what I see in our programs in hopes of lightening up your lives as well!

I have mentioned in the last several

newsletters that our programs have been receiving increased support from your donations for over two years now. This does make my work here easier in many ways, and allows us to expand our work where it is most needed. So following that theme, let me tell you what we have been doing in the school and village of El Barío, where our work started back in 1989. This year we have continued to support the school directly with a small stipend for teacher Rita, enabling the school to continue to keep 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grades separate. Rita's stipend is increased by two of our graduates, who in repaying their student debt requested that these funds also be earmarked for her pay. This is now our second year of support from our graduates for this expense at the school, where daughters of our graduates now study as their mothers did years ago, making it feel all the better. We also continued through September with our Saturday classes for the senior high school class at the school in El Barío. We will know the results soon, as the students have taken the high school exit exam and nine of the 23 students went into the city two days later to take the entrance exam for the National University. We may face a financial shortfall if all nine enter the National University, but we will cross that bridge if we get to it. The project with the youth group in El Barío is now in its second year as well. They continue, as last year, to visit elders every week in their homes. This year we are providing a small fund so they can bring some basic needs items and food supplies to those elders who have little support from family. Again, it amazes me how so much is

done with so little, and to see the photos reminds me of how my mother Carmen would say the same thing so many years ago. I do not see the financial part as the main thing that makes a difference, but more how the youth are able to see the need and



The Students visit elders Marta Artiga and Aparicio de Jesus Casco

don Francisco León is a war survivor.



Students report on Projects  
Giovanni Chevez



comply with the requirement. Daniel Rivas, now in our program for two years, was voted the best for his presentation and work in the local school in his village. This was not a project in academics, but more in environmental support, organizing elementary school children to plant, maintain, and harvest the school's vegetable garden. This covered his 40 hours and more, but later on his own he planted a small corn plot that was used by the school to raise funds by selling corn on the cob and other local corn treats at a school event. In 2018, Daniel's project came in second of 17. Our second-best project and presentation in 2019 was by a new and, I think, our youngest student, Deysi Avalos, who helped with the high school senior class in her village of Copapayo, tutoring the four main subjects in preparation for the high school exit exam. For a first-year student in our program, I thought her report and presentation was the best, and I am certain it's a sign of how far she will go in life as she continues her studies and shows her willingness to help others. Voted third by his peers was Giovanni Chevez, who once again did some intense work with a small group of youth in his village. After having problems last year in talking about children's rights and our local laws regarding them, Giovanni's theme this year was teaching about sex education, sexual orientation, and self-esteem. Giovanni is a third-year law student, and although he encountered resistance from some of the adults and parents in his village he was able to bring these sensitive, even taboo themes into mature discussions with many of the adolescents. I think his maturity in his verbal presentation is what made his peers vote his project number 3, as I don't think that many others in the group would have had the maturity to talk about these things with adolescents only a few years younger than themselves. I cannot describe all 24 projects or even update you on all of our students, but I do want you to know that all were wonderful projects and that as we get close to finishing the 2019 academic year our students are doing well.

mutual benefit of sharing their time with those of age who no longer have family nearby.

Besides this work in the school and community of El Barío, our university scholarship program continues stronger than ever. We will finish the academic year with 24 university students, after we had one drop our program and another re-enter in the second semester. We recently had our mid-year student meeting where students presented their social work projects in person. This is our third year with this newer component, and it is a change that now influences hundreds of other people in Suchitoto where our students do their 40 hours of social work. Each year students, local schools, institutions, and I myself are changing, adapting to make this an ever more worthwhile experience for all involved. Some schools and local institutions where projects had not been done in the past are asking if we have students who can come and help them. Some students were asked by school principals to change the focus of their projects to meet the needs of the school and students. This year for the first time it really felt like all 24 students developed and applied their hours as best they could, and not, as in the past for some, just to

Talking about the social work projects, I want to mention some recent visits I have had by university students who have been in our program in the past. Romelia Chicas de Vasquez, now married and using her husband's last name, had



Robert, Romelia, Odalis,  
Robert's grandson Angel, Ismael and Wilber.

contacted me in early September saying that she and the family wanted to visit. Romelia is much more than a past beneficiary, and we have stayed in contact and become close friends since her graduation in 2003. She lived with my mother, Carmen Broz, for some time after my mother's serious auto accident in 1995. A few of you who have traveled to El Salvador and met Romelia know she was the sole survivor of her immediate family, who were all killed in the civil war when she was only two years old. Romelia has now been working as a teacher and principal of a small rural school in Sensembra, Morazán, for 12 years. We have seen her on trips to Morazán over the years and she has come to visit us here in Suchitoto as well. Romelia was on our local committee for over two years and had made some payments towards her debt over the years. When I learned that she and her family would be visiting on the weekend of our student meeting, I took the opportunity to ask her if she would be willing to speak to our current students, as the majority do not know the history of our work, or how many students we supported from other parts of the country.

Romelia opened our student meeting on Sunday Sept 29, introducing her children Ismael (10) and Odalis (8), and also her husband Wilmer, whom she married in 2008. She talked about the cooperative she was a part of, the first work Palo Alto Friends did in Morazán in health, nutrition, and education, and how she was one of our first university graduates, graduating as a kindergarten

teacher in 2003. She expressed how proud she was to be at the meeting and able to speak to the majority of our students. She told them how fortunate and grateful she felt for receiving the support so many years ago, and that she had come to visit to arrange to repay what she still owed so other students would have the same chance. I took advantage of Romelia's talk to address our students. I told them that Romelia is like a daughter to my wife and me, and that it made me happy when she said she wanted to pay off her debt; that even though some 16 years had passed since her graduation and 12 years since she was hired as a teacher, her presence that day and her willingness to repay her debt sets a true example for all of our current and past students.

Over the past four months I have had two other past students contact me about repaying their debts. This includes one other I want to mention today. Ana Eloisa

Mazariego appeared a bit "off," almost crazy, when she came to me in a rage back in late 2014. I could barely understand her as she told me she did not want to continue in our program, this after finishing her second year with no academic problems at the National University in Agronomic sciences.



Ana Eloisa Mazariego

I tried unsuccessfully to have her explain why, but she muttered on about how much she would owe and that she had decided to drop out of the program. This is one of a couple of cases over the years when I was left at a loss, trying my best to just accept and knowing I had tried my best. I have seen Ana off and on over the past years and I had heard that she had continued her studies, but we never talked. This changed in September when she sent me a message asking for a meeting. I asked what it was about but she insisted that she wanted to meet in person, so we set a date where we both had time. When she arrived that morning in September, I encountered a completely different Ana Eloisa. I told her up front that I had literally

thought she was crazy, and still wondered about what had happened back in 2014. She started by apologizing, saying that she was so immature back then and that she was embarrassed about the way she dropped out of the program. I said all I understood was her concern with what would have been her accumulated debt at graduation. She said that was part of it (you can imagine an 18-year old thinking about owing \$5000 in El Salvador), but she said there were a lot of other factors as well, including problems at home, feeling out of place at our student house, low self-esteem, and more. We left it at that and continued talking about where she was now, how she had managed her studies, and the reason for her visit. She told me how she had received other scholarships, one at the university due to her high grade point average, another project like ours, and how she failed a class which delayed her graduation. She said she was now doing her thesis, which she hoped to finish during this academic year (by December), and that if all goes as planned she will graduate in March of 2020. She went on to mention her desire to repay her debt and had hoped that she could do it as some have by social work, and that this year and next she has lots of free time. We talked in depth, and I gave her some ideas of types of work or institutions she could coordinate with in Suchitoto, which I think will be easy as she is now as an almost graduated Agronomic Engineer. I said that I would like to see a written proposal, but saw no reason why she could not repay her small debt sharing her skills within the municipality of Suchitoto. I also shared with her about Romelia's visit just days earlier, the visit of another graduate asking about his debt, and our new social work requirement for university students. We departed as renewed friends, with a bit of the director-student relationship left to work on her project and loan repayment. I complimented Ana on how she had changed from that distraught young woman to a mature young professional, telling her that she now looked as if she could conquer the world. She smiled and thanked me for the praise, but confided that she still has low self-esteem. After discussing this problem with several students this year, hearing Giovanni's project and then hearing Ana express problems with low self-esteem, I now

## Dear Friends:

In this newsletter, Project Director Robert Broz continues to bring us his unique perspective on social and political conditions in El Salvador, informed by frequent trips through all parts of the country and by his decades of experience living and working there. Has day-to-day violence really declined, as U.S. and Salvadoran government statements suggest? What is the meaning of the recent agreements the U.S. and Central American governments have signed to hold asylum seekers far from the U.S. border? How are the students your donations support progressing in their educations, and with service projects in their communities? Robert addresses these questions, and also highlights the life of an early graduate who was the only member of her immediate family to survive the civil war. She now has her own family and serves as principal of a rural school. You'll learn how her talk to current students inspired them.

Thanks, as always, for your donations. Your generosity transforms lives!

—**Hulda Muaka**, Clerk, El Salvador Projects  
Committee of Palo Alto Friends Meeting

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have decided to see how I can incorporate some ideas to help our students in 2020 and beyond. This I hope will be a topic for a future newsletter.

For now, I'll say goodbye and, as always, thanks for your continued support. I also ask that you stay in touch via our Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/pafmelsalprojects/>), as I hope to bring to those interested some live virtual presentations with some of our students before the end of the year, using a new system for audio and video communication.

I send you my desires for peace and well-being.  
— **Robert Broz**, Project Director

## **Join our July Trip in El Salvador! Engage with our Communities!**

Announcing the 2020 El Salvador Service Learning Trip,  
July 19th-29th, 2020.

The inter-generational trip is an opportunity to build cross-cultural connections with Salvadoran communities through ten days of immersive experiences. Participants will play games and hear personal stories from Salvadoran youth and elders, as well as experience a rural homestay, hike to waterfalls, and take Spanish lessons. We engage in service work, tailored to match community needs and participant skill sets. Along the way, we learn about the history of the Salvadoran Civil War, the current state of El Salvador, and the involvement of the U.S. in this developing nation, all while processing our experiences through intentional small-group reflections. During the trip, we visit rural areas, the capital San Salvador, the mountains, and finally the beach.

Does any of this spark your curiosity? Want to know more and how to sign up? Check out our trip packet on the PAFM El Salvador Project website, [pafmelsalvadorprojects.org](http://pafmelsalvadorprojects.org)! Registration opens December 1st, our limited spots will be filled on first-come first-serve basis. We welcome participants of any age who have some Spanish experience or a strong desire to learn Spanish, especially older teens and young adults. The trip cost is \$880 plus airfare; an early bird discount (\$800) is available if all forms and payment are received by April 15th, 2020. We are also looking for donations towards a scholarship fund to make the trip accessible for all U.S. participants.

If you would like more information, please contact the trip coordinators: Nate Secrest ([secrestnm@guilford.edu](mailto:secrestnm@guilford.edu)), Sarah Ludwig ([sarah.k.ludwig@gmail.com](mailto:sarah.k.ludwig@gmail.com)), and Robert Broz ([rpbroz@gmail.com](mailto:rpbroz@gmail.com)).

**Thank you for your support and interest!**

The civil war that ravaged El Salvador in the decade of the 1980's until the settlement of 1992 was at its full intensity when Carmen Broz arrived in 1986 as part of a Share Foundation project to support farming families who were boldly returning from refugee camps to re-establish their way of life in what was then a free-fire zone. From her experiences then and in the next few years, she evolved the focus on education that has characterized the El Salvador Projects for nearly 30 years. The opportunities that your donations open for determined young people from poor rural families have benefited hundreds of people in these three decades, perhaps thousands... Students with university degrees raise themselves and their families from poverty and give hope to others, serve their communities in many ways, repay their loans by funding education for others, and more. Director Robert Broz's report in this newsletter highlights the rising effectiveness of the social work projects all students now design and carry out, with benefits for many people even before they complete their programs of study.

**Glossy publicity intended to give the impression that in El Salvador the risks have diminished from violent gangs, both for residents and for asylum seekers who are taken there under recent agreements between the U.S. and the governments of the Central American countries, contradicts the reality Robert Broz experiences on the ground. The need for alternatives to poverty and to desperate attempts to seek a new life in the U.S. has not lessened. Your generous donations are enabling more students to gain access to higher education than in past years. Please – continue your support for the El Salvador Projects, helping young Salvadorans make visions real and promoting justice.**

**Your dollars do so much for so many!**

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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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