PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING

EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

December 2024 Newsletter

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The Clerk's letter, by Hulda Muaka

Happy Holidays!

It is that time of festivities that we are thankful for and as we reflect on our lives, we look around the world and see who we can bless. This time please think of the El Salvador students from disadvantaged families who yearn to obtain a university education but can't do it on their own. They need a helping hand. It costs about \$1,200 dollars a year per student. Any amount that is donated goes a long way from full sponsorship on down. We receive any amount gratefully. No amount is too small.

With the changing political tide in the US, a committee member, Jamie Newton, reminds us in the appeal at the end of this newsletter of the importance of "...standing with all who are at risk, conscious that at the end of the day, we must be one people."

As usual, this newsletter has stories by the Director, Robert Broz, about our students (past and present) and a little on the current political situation, which helps you understand better our area of operation and why we need your financial help. Robert, who resides in El Salvador, says "recent trends have brought me renewed hope for the country's future."

There is a story of the enterprising sisters, a result of smart decisions, innovative ideas, and empowerment that stems from receiving an education, a sure tool for positive change. Robert echoes the words of his mother, Carmen Broz, founder of the projects. "Education for sure is profitable and can change a country's hope for the future. The students our programs help to gain an education will play their part to shape a new El Salvador."

Finally, read *The Wind Beneath our Wings* and see why one of the longest serving clerks needed no convincement to serve on the Committee.

Wishing you light and courage for these times.

Director's Report



Dear friends & supporters,

It's a pleasure to reach out to you whose support makes our work possible, including some who have been part of this network of generosity for thirty years and others who have discovered the El Salvador Projects only recently. I'll begin with my

Where They Are Today section, sharing a story of enterprising young women in the Pintin family, whose initiative and mutual support led us to a new and positive option for repayment of student loans. Next, I'll report on our current programs of support for university students, the youth program in El Barío, and a few special projects where small amounts of money bring gratifying results, such as our Saturday tutoring program for high school students. Finally, I'll offer my perspective on current political and social conditions in El Salvador. Readers of our newsletters in the past few years may be surprised to learn that recent trends have brought me renewed hope for the country's future. But... The US elections coincided with preparation of this newsletter. As the results were revealed in the week following November 5, 2024, we paused to reflect. My report concludes with my initial thoughts on the implications for El Salvador and our own work.

Please - read on!

WHERE THEY ARE TODAY

Suzana Pintin's inspiring story begins soon after my mother, Carmen Broz, started the university loan program 26 years ago. At that time, the program was limited to two-year technical programs and three-year teaching and nursing programs. Students received only what was required for enrollment, monthly stipends, and medical expenses when necessary – about \$600/year for most. We opened our first student houses in suburbs of the city, sometimes unavoidably with gangs operating nearby because we could afford to rent only in those risky areas. None of the students in those first years had academic problems. They were highly motivated, the first generation to attend kindergarten through high school after the civil war. Parents understood that education was a family project, and that they would have to cover expenses such as buses, food, and internet.



Bordados Artesanales Pintin Logo

The Pintin family was close, with Suzana's older sister, Juana, studying nursing and the father selling corn and beans to help both get through each month. Suzana graduated from high school in 2000 and entered our program

in 2001, its third year. She obtained her Technical diploma as an Engineer of Clothing Confection from the ITCA (Central American Technical Institute).

Suzana declined the first job she was offered, telling my mother that she would not be a sweatshop supervisor, making the workers work harder to increase profits for the owners. As foreign businesses were made to comply with local labor laws in El Salvador and conditions in foreign-owned maquillas (clothing factories) improved, Suzana took a job as an assistant engineer in clothing confection methods, where she learned a great deal about the textile industry.

Suzana was a single mother with a daughter of 12 when the pandemic struck in 2020. With no programs for textile work from home she took the

leap of opening her own business, manufacturing clothing and handicrafts from home. Soon her younger sister, Virginia, added hand-embroidered designs to the clothing that Suzana was making. Seeking ways to sell their products, they used social media to sell from home, relying on small low-cost delivery companies. When a third sister, Silvia, joined they formally established Bordados Artesanales Pintin. They sell online and participate in festivals whenever possible. In 2024 they were given permission to sell at a permanent weekend festival in Suchitoto, where I have been able to catch up on the past 22 years of their lives.

The example set by Suzana and Juana Pintin led me to approach our committee at the Palo Alto Friends Meeting with the proposal that student loan repayment could fund education for a whole family. I learned that the younger sister, Silvia, was studying at the University but had not applied for support because her sisters were covering her costs. I suggested to our committee that accepting support for a sibling's education as repayment of student loans would be a wonderful way to encourage families. Today that form of repayment is one of the more popular, where former students can support a younger sibling's university education and be



Suzana, Silvia, and Virginia Pintin

credited with a year's debt repayment for each year of successful studies by the younger sibling. When we support a single student in such a close family, we have the potential to help several gain an education. I hope you enjoy the photo of Suzana, Silvia, and Virginia, founders and owners of Bordados Artesanales Pintin.

UNIVERSITY STUDENT LOAN PROGRAM, AND COED HOUSE IN SAN SALVADOR

The school year in El Salvador runs from mid-January to early November. We started our program with 15 students, including ten continuing students and five new students selected in 2024. We're finishing the school year with 12 active students, 9 of whom are on schedule and doing well. The experiences of others reflect changes in university programs and social conditions. I'll tell you about this in some detail so that you'll understand how we tailor support to student circumstances.

In 2024 one student left our program, and three students are considering changing study programs or universities in 2025. The young man who dropped out in his last semester told me that he expects to finish his studies and graduate next year, but that he no longer needed our support enough to meet our modest requirements, such as the social work component. Other students are impacted by disadvantages of virtual study programs and academic delays that began with the Covid pandemic and have remained. I've mentioned in previous reports that the National University's campus was used for the Pan American games, so closed for classes for part of 2022 and most of 2023. The faculty of humanities at the National University was unable to update several of their curricula and announced that due to the delay these programs will not be offered to new students. The most popular are their language programs: Modern Languages (English and French), English, and English for teachers. New students wanting to enroll in these majors simply won't be able to, and will have to look for other options at more expensive private universities or delay their studies until 2026.

Maria Lisseth, who started in 2024, had a terrible time with virtual classes in her Clinical Laboratory program and failed most of them. She is very motivated and complied with all other program requirements. We will continue to assist her as she tries again in 2025, this time with in-person classes and support from a graduate who has a Clinical Lab in Suchitoto where Maria hopes to work one day. Another student, Yaquelin Vanesa, who is in her third year in the same program, told me in October that

the university has changed the curriculum (something that is generally not allowed in El Salvador) and that it will add another year to her program. She has asked if she can change to one of the private universities



Yaqeulin Vanesa Garcia Casco playing soccer

where she would get equivalence credits for 2.5 years. We will wait until December to see if the Faculty of Medicine will be allowed to make this unusual change.

In late October two new students asked for a meeting "to talk about something important", which in my experience usually signals a major change. Karla Guadalupe and her best friend, Nohely Alexandra, both entered the National University in the same Modern Language program in 2024. Nohely passed all her classes in the first semester and is doing well in the second semester. Karla had some problems and failed Intensive French 1, but is doing well in her second semester. Both decided they want to start the process to change faculties and study programs. Nohely wants to switch to Law, and Karla to International Relations. Both women want to continue to learn English, and both of their chosen programs include English classes. Both also want training that goes beyond other languages, which I understand. Although I will support both students, I have explained the process and problems we have experienced in the past with students making this type of change at the National University. The process starts in mid-November, and approval can be delayed until late March when students can actually be added to class rosters and receive grades. They

are usually allowed to sit in on first-semester classes, but unofficially so grades for labs or exams can be missed. Because of this our programs will start support only after they have their official registration. If all goes well this may be in late February. They both understand, and I am confident that they are good enough students to make the change and pass their classes in the first semester of 2025. The childhood friends will now be in two different programs. Nohely will live with family in the city, and Karla will most likely reside in our student house.



Nohely Alexandra and Karla Guadelupe

Our student house is filling as things return to normal after the pandemic. Capacity is 22 men and women. Currently we have 13 full-time residents from the two programs that finance the house – our own, and Santa Cruz al Salvador - as well as two students who are not receiving scholarships. In 2025 the number of residents will increase, but we won't have a final number until February. In 2023 we negotiated with the owners for a gradual rent increase, so in 2025 we will move from paying \$600/month to \$650/month. In 2026 it will increase to \$700/month, the amount the owners asked for in 2024. Like our own program, Santa Cruz al Salvador has been working in El Salvador for 30 years, primarily in the village of Ciudadela Guillermo Manuel Ungo on the south hills of the Guazapa volcano.

EL BARIO SCHOOL, YOUTH GROUP, AND SATURDAY TUTORING CLASSES

With the new principal at the school in El Bario, Denys Miranda (our former Mayor of Suchitoto), there is improvement in academics, infrastructure, discipline, and administration. This year, after a short meeting with Denys, we decided to reallocate funding from sports supplies to muchneeded roof repairs. Besides this support, each year we provide minimal funding to help with activities for both the kindergarten and the high school graduations. These funds are always in our budget and considered motivational support to both teachers and students

The administrative assistant, Wilson Olmedo, our graduate whom we've highlighted in several newsletters, continues to encourage junior high and high school students while teaching classes in Information Technology and English. Wilson tells me that we have a motivated high school graduating class, and he thinks several will apply for support from our loan program. He also said that many wanted to study English at the National University but because the National University is not offering this major, several students are now deciding what they may do instead. Applications went out in early October, and are due to us in mid-January. We have always given preference to students entering the National University, as it is free and considered the best option, but with the continued problems in 2025 I expect to look at other criteria and put less emphasis on this University.

One new element at the school that we are supporting is the work by Wilson's younger brother, Edenilson, now close to graduation. Edenilson has been teaching physical education at the school for the past several years as part of his social work hours for our program. This year we came to an agreement and his work will be considered part of his student debt repayment. He really enjoys working at the school and showing his love for physical education, which has always been a part of his life. We're looking at the value of each class and how many class hours he teaches each week, but I am hopeful that

his work and loan repayment in this way will continue in 2025.



Edenilson Olmedo with the PE class

Principal Miranda and I are communicating with a former student who left undocumented for the US in 2023. We have been sharing ideas with him and his father, a jack of all trades, about needed support at the school. Our idea is a two-part project at the school next year, one with vocational classes in welding, air conditioning, and or electrical skills that our student's father will manage, and the other providing occasional repairs needed at the school. We are asking the former student, now established and working in the US, if he would be willing to pay his father directly for his time and skills, and we are looking at how to get the necessary materials and supplies needed, which may be part of our budget in 2025. This may become another new method for a student to repay his loan - in a very direct way, providing needed income to his father while at the same time helping at the school he graduated from. Hopefully by 2025 we all will come to an agreement and the project will function at the school next year.

For the past several years we have offered Saturday classes for graduating high school students at the school in El Bario. You may remember that I tried unsuccessfully to do this on a larger scale in 2023. In cooperation with the ABESUCHI Association, a non-profit formed by scholarship and exscholarship students from Suchitoto, a new approach was put in place: the El Salvador Projects finances the Saturday classes, and the association organizes and oversees them. The project started a little late in the school year but with good initial results, with close to 30 students from six different high schools receiving Saturday classes. We learned from this first experience, and overall we feel that it was a great start to what can be a very productive and much

larger project. In 2025, we plan to start our Saturday classes in February and finish in early October, as we did this year.

Although the youth group in El Bario has been very active, they have not taken advantage of funds we had allocated for them in 2024. I've met with the group a couple of times this year without direct requests, reminding them of the funds we generally budget for their work with the elders in the village. The youth group has always taken charge when somebody passes away, raising funds for a casket when needed or for the coffee and pastries at prayer sessions. This year they have held several public fundraising events in the community, such as public dances or playing movies and selling refreshments, as well as organizing a couple of soccer tournaments which teams pay to play. These events to raise their own funds are often supported by other groups working with youth in rural El Salvador. In October I received a request from the current coordinator of the group who asked for an annual fund we provide for an event they do to honor all the elders in their Community, a type of year-end or Christmas festival. In sum, our work in the school and community of El Bario continues much as it has over the past couple of decades, always trying to adapt to current situations, making our funds go as far as possible, and supporting projects that benefit the majority.

CONDITIONS IN EL SALVADOR TODAY

After years of frustration with the New Ideas party and President Nayib Bukele, I now feel renewed hope for a better future. I remain part of the small opposition (perhaps 15%) to what I see as a dictatorship within a democracy, built through questionable elections, changes to El Salvador's constitutional and judicial systems, and limited understanding by the population.

Salvadorans may finally be starting to wake up and see through the superficial facelift of new highways, renovated city centers, "Surf City 2" (a tourism project that involves eviction of thousands of farmers), and reduced gang activity. Some factors in this awakening, as I see it, are recent reports of unexplained increases in the net wealth and property of President Bukele and close family members, a 2025 budget that reduces spending for health and

education while freezing pay raises for government employees in both systems, a mysterious accident where a key witness and the main person accused of embezzlement in a financial scandal died, and embarrassment to President Bukele when the Supreme Court of Costa Rica declined to meet with him ahead of a planned visit to that country. I'll expand on each of these developments.

President Nayib Bukele and his brothers inherited wealth from their father, Armando Bukele, the son of Palestinian immigrants. Large government contracts facilitated by his friends in the FMLN party, of which he was then a member, enabled him to build one of El Salvador's largest publicity firms. Entering politics, he was elected Mayor of Nuevo Cuscatlán, part of the Greater San Salvador metropolis, and then Mayor of San Salvador, a stepping stone to the presidency. Joking that he is the world's coolest dictator after transforming the legislature and the judiciary to consolidate his power, Bukele has increased his personal net worth and property holdings and those of the corporations that he and his brothers have started since he took office six years ago. Bukele's family and allied politicians are taking advantage of recently passed laws that promote continued improvements to property where investors receive 15 years of tax-free income to recover investments. Supporters of Bukele and his New Ideas party are beginning to be disillusioned, as they see the effects of other legal changes that protect some politicians from financial accountability for up to seven years after they leave office.

Public confidence in President Bukele was also shaken by the suspicious crash of a military



Manuel Coto detained (Redaccion UH)

helicopter in early September that was carrying Mauricio Arriaza, the Director of El Salvador's National Police, and Manuel Coto, a fugitive who was

apprehended in Honduras as he attempted to escape to the United States after allegedly embezzling thirty-

five million dollars from COSAVI, the financial cooperative of which he had been executive director. Bukele declared on X "What happened cannot remain a simple 'accident'. It must be investigated thoroughly and to the last consequences." More than two months later, there is still no news from any investigation of the crash that killed all on board.

President Bukele announced that for the first time in El Salvador's history, the 2025 budget would not increase foreign debt, and would be sustainable and funded from within the country. When the budget was presented a week later, it showed major cuts to public health and education, freezing expected pay raises to workers at every level within both systems. Despite the promise of no new foreign debt, the budget includes the refinancing of 1.5 billion dollars of current foreign debt on terms not favorable to El Salvador. The budget allows public funds for superficial improvements to flow through new agencies like Constructora El Salvador S.A. de C.V., a public-private corporation that is given all large government contracts, and Departamento de Obras Municipales (DOM – Department of Municipal Works).

On October 19th, after pay freezes were announced, health and education workers went to the streets in the first massive and peaceful march since Bukele was elected. As thousands took to the streets,



Marcha Blanca (white march) Oct. 19, 2024

protesters said on camera "now is the time," telling people watching to "not be afraid of the Ley de Excepción," which has been in effect for almost three years, removing most constitutional rights. "We can march and show our discontent, we need to wake up and be active, before it's too late." One teacher who was shown on local news speaking out publicly at the protest was fired on Monday as she reported to work at a public school in the capital. She was interviewed saying that being fired would not keep her quiet and that she would continue to criticize the many other problems in the public school system. Since the march several other health workers have been fired for their participation. This may be the start of more organized marches, and perhaps the 15% of opposition will grow!

Finally, President Bukele's image was tarnished when Costa Rican newspapers reported that members of the Costa Rican Supreme court had publicly declared that they had no intention of meeting with President Bukele on a planned trip to the Central American country. Most members of the Costa Rican Supreme Court who were interviewed said that meeting with the president, who has completely done away with independence of power within the Salvadoran judicial system, would go against the values of the system in Costa Rica.

The future is unclear, of course. Whether new political parties form or existing parties reform, I believe change will come. Therein lies the basis for my renewed hope for the future, and that the students our programs help to gain an education will play their part to shape a new El Salvador.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE NOVEMBER, 2024 ELECTIONS IN THE US

My summary of conditions in El Salvador today was written in the weeks leading up to the November 5, 2024 elections in the United States. The political, social, and economic realities of El Salvador are closely linked to US policies. The campaign

rhetoric of Donald Trump, his running mate J.D.
Vance, and many Republican candidates for seats in
the Senate and House of Representatives emphasized
vilification of immigrants, with promises to rapidly
deport 10-20 million who are currently in the US.
High-level appointments announced by Presidentelect Trump add credence to these promises, notably
"Border Czar" Tom Homan, who as acting Director of
US Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2017-18
presided over the separation of migrant children
from their parents at the US-Mexico border. The Pew
Research Center estimates that as of 2021
approximately 2.5 million people of Salvadoran origin
resided in the US (see

https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-sheet/us-hispanics-facts-on-salvadoran-origin-latinos/). About 1/3 of these are foreign-born non-citizens, therefore most vulnerable to deportation. If large numbers of Salvadorans were deported from the US to El Salvador, and if the remittances many of them send from their earnings in the US were no longer flowing into the Salvadoran economy, the destabilizing effects would be staggering. We will monitor events as they unfold and continue our work in El Salvador, faithful to our commitment to support and assist young people and their families to fulfill their potential and serve their communities.

In closing, let me wish you a wonderful holiday season, with gratitude for your continued support to the El Salvador Projects.

In Peace,

Robert Broz



If you prefer to receive this newsletter electronically (with color photographs!), please send a message to Dave Hinson (davidphinson (at) yahoo.com). You can see the color version of this and all past newsletters at: bit.ly/3ZuI31L

The Wind Beneath Our Wings

Hulda Muaka

- Mary Pat O'Connell the El Salvador Projects Committee



What causes one to be drawn to work on behalf of poor students living in rural El Salvador, to want to make young peoples' desires to acquire specialized training or attend college come true? For Hulda Muaka, Clerk of the PAFM El Salvador Projects Committee, the answer can be found in her personal journey from Mbihi, Kenya to Palo Alto, California.

Born to Quaker parents, Hulda was the fifth of eight children in a family that highly valued education. Her parents, adhering to the Quaker belief in equality, ensured that each child could pursue education to the level they chose. Hulda's father taught that education is something no one can take away from you, and it is a tool for helping others. This philosophy shaped her understanding of education as a foundation for a better life. Hulda was the first in her family to earn a university degree, obtaining a Bachelor of Arts and a Post Graduate Diploma in Journalism from the University of Nairobi. As a journalist, she saw firsthand the positive impact education could have on communities in Kenya.

In 1989, Hulda moved to the United States to join her husband, eventually settling in Palo Alto, California. In 2001, Hulda began attending Palo Alto Friends

Meeting where she was introduced to the story of Carmen Broz, a fellow Quaker who had come to the U.S. from El Salvador. Carmen's work, focusing on education and community rebuilding after the civil war in El Salvador, resonated deeply with Hulda. She saw education as a means to lift families out of poverty, much as it had in her own life.

Hulda was recruited to join the El Salvador Projects Committee at PAFM, where she began helping with the newsletter and learning more about the work in El Salvador. She was thrilled by the stories of students supporting each other through hardships and reaching out to help the elderly in their communities. Her passion for the cause grew, and in 2011, her daughter, Agidza Muaka, joined a Teen trip to El Salvador organized by Barbara Babin and Robert Broz.

Carmen continued to influence Hulda, encouraging her to embrace and celebrate her African heritage, advising her never to abandon her cultural roots. This advice had a lasting impact, and Hulda continues to wear her traditional African attire every Sunday.

Carmen also introduced Hulda to the work of Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. Inspired by Day's example, Hulda realized that while she may not have large personal resources to give, she could "beg" on behalf of others for the El Salvador Projects. Hulda's advocacy for the cause has extended far beyond her local community, as she serves on the Pacific Yearly Meeting Latin American Concerns Committee and as a representative to the Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). She recently shared the EL Salvador Projects story at the FWCC conference in South Africa in 2024, where the theme was "Ubuntu," a Zulu word meaning "I am because we are." This concept, reflecting the interconnectedness of humanity, resonates with Hulda's own experience of community support and shared responsibility.

As the longest-serving Clerk of the El Salvador Projects Committee, Hulda sees her work as part of a broader, ongoing effort to continue the mission Carmen Broz started more than three decades ago. She believes that the spirit of Ubuntu — the idea that individual fulfillment is tied to the well-being of the whole community — helps explain her deep commitment to this work...

For there is always light, if only we are brave enough...

Carmen Broz began her work with the rural poor, the dispossessed campesinos who had been driven from their lands and homes when the 1980-1992 civil war was at its peak of violence. Her emphasis on education as the fastest way to raise people from poverty emerged from within the suffering of that era. Carmen's central leading was to unite in spirit and in action with people who were struggling for peace, justice, and basic well-being – for their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, we might well say.

If the stated objectives of those who will take control of the vast powers of the US government in January, 2025 are even approached, we can expect greater imbalances of power and wealth within the US and its spheres of influence. We can expect harsher treatment of the least privileged, with widening disparities based on race, ethnicity, national origin, and other characteristics.

So, what can we do? Now, in this present, we can strengthen the bonds that sustain our networks of kindred spirits, joining our efforts for the common good. We can be proactive, guided by the values we share. We can be courageous in the face of intimidation, standing with all who are at risk, conscious that at the end of the day we must be one people.

Many of us gave generously during the campaign season to support candidates and ballot issues we believed in. If you feel that your resources are depleted, you're in good company for good reasons. Still, we invite your donations to the El Salvador Projects now – not because we think this is a propitious time, but because this is the time when we must reach out to you, now, in this present moment. The El Salvador Projects will conscientiously use the funds you provide through your donations to continue to promote education for promising young people in El Salvador, and in other ways that may soon emerge, to sustain hope and build toward the future we all yearn for.

Jamie Newton

The new dawn blooms as we free it For there is always light, if only we're brave enough to see it If only we're brave enough to be it

From The Hill We Climb – Amanda Gorman

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

NAME							
CITY				STA	STATE		
	C \$25	() \$50	C \$75 C \$100	(\$250	C \$500	C \$1000	C Other

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 payable to Palo Alto Friends Meeting, with El Salvador Projects written on the memo line. Your contribution is tax-deductible.

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A reminder of caring for others comes as we practice the Spirit of Ubuntu:
Ubuntu is a Zulu word meaning
"I am because we are."
We are all interconnected and what one does affects another/others
Let us be human and lift those who need a boost



Edenilson Olmedo with the PE class in El Bario



Alexandra Abigail Martinez Rivas



Cristian Geovany Campos Vasquez



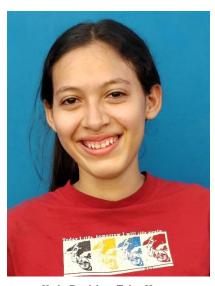
Damaris Abigail Monge Arriaga



Esmeralda del Carmen Alas Castillo



Jeisi Anai Pacas Barrera



Karla Guadalupe Tobar Herrera



Keilyn Estefani Gomez Rauda



Kevin Edinilson Flamenco Pineda



Maria Lizeth Moran Leon



Nohely Alexandra Flamenco Rosales



Rosa Margarita Caceres Hernandez



Yaquelin Vanesa Garcia Casco



Yeferson Anderson Escobar Felipe