

PALO ALTO FRIENDS MEETING

EL SALVADOR PROJECTS

June 2024 Newsletter

WWW.PAFMELSALVADORPROJECTS.ORG

The Clerk's letter, by Hulda Muaka

It is with gratitude that we come to you again with the message of Hope for the continued good in the world. The Director's report brings you hope for a better future for our students and families and El Salvador as a whole. Recounting the stories of progress among the current and past students, Robert reiterates Carmen Broz's (his mother's) vision of education as a tool for changing lives for the better.

Reaffirming the importance Education holds in the development of a country, the report highlights the plight of students and their willingness to work hard and succeed. It is very encouraging to know that donors' efforts are put to good use.

The political situation in which we operate has highs and lows, but the best news is that the notorious gang situation seems to have been successfully handled. We hope to renew our Service-Learning Teen's Trip in 2025 since safety and the pandemic had hindered the trips. Participants who went on these trips were transformed on return and were more interested in helping others.

The Wind Beneath our Wings section features the Committees' longest serving member, Trudy Reagan. She has served on the Committee since it was formed in many different ways. Read how being involved in the project changed her life.

Last but not least, please read the Appeal letter by another long serving Committee member, Jamie Newton. The letter expresses the need for helping others as we all are connected. There is hope for dreams to be successful and many have been achieved due to your continuous donations. Please **DONATE** to ensure the continuity of the good work in El Salvador.

Thank You!

Director's Report



Dear friends/supporters:

I begin this report keenly aware of how I need hope as a nutrient, as each day brings more news of war, collapsing ecosystems, famine, homelessness, poverty... and the list could go on. In my 30 years of life in El Salvador, I have done my best to make the world

a better place for others, as I know you have. I am convinced that as each of us does what we can, together we do make a difference. I hope my summer report will strengthen your hope for a better world, with peace for those who suffer from war, food for those who hunger, shelter for those on the streets, love for those who are alone, and education for those with a desire to learn.

The El Salvador projects have been active since 1989, and providing interest-free student loans for post high school, technical/vocational, and university studies since 1999. In 2024 we are supporting nine continuing students and six new students. As you get to know some of these students, I'm sure you will see why our work here benefits our students, their families, and their communities. I will also describe how our modest financial support to the rural public school in El Barrio enriches the education of 300 plus elementary and high school students from the seven surrounding communities. Over our 33 years working in El Salvador, the El Salvador projects have opened opportunities for thousands of people from rural El Salvador. Despite

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the current political situation, for the families and villages we have assisted the quality of life remains greatly improved.

El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele and his New Ideas Party have eliminated the gang violence and predatory crime that has terrorized El Salvador for 30 years. This accomplishment involved suspending valued constitutional rights for almost three years and arresting an estimated 80,000 people. Consolidating power at all levels has left Salvadoran democracy without an effective opposition, President Bukele has a new model for dictatorship, of which most Salvadorans now approve.

A highlight of my work here in El Salvador is to become friends with our graduates. This comes through a gradual relationship change from beneficiary and project director to long lasting personal friendships. You can imagine my feelings when I am invited to a student's graduation, see students start their own businesses or marry, or when one obtains a tourist visa to the US and takes a vacation to visit friends and family. What I enjoy most is knowing that the majority of those we have assisted will not fall into the shadowy life of undocumented Salvadorans in the US.

I'll begin my update on our current work in El Salvador with an uplifting account of your responsiveness to our call for additional funding that enabled us to support deserving students. In January I presented what I considered a conservative budget for 2024 after our Treasurer reported declining donations since 2020 – understandable, with so much happening in the world that concerns us all and the post-Covid economic situation. After nearly a decade with a budget that supported 20-24 university students, our committee decided we needed to be more cautious about our spending now and in the near future. My initial budget was limited to our nine continuing students and a proposal for five new students. This year I received only nine applications, six of which met our criteria for support, I was glad to be able to support five. And yet, there was a sixth deserving, motivated student.

This is not the first time we have had a tight budget. As a faith community, our committee approached this year's situation as we have in the past, with confidence that a way could open. We decided to reach out to our donors, letting them know what we faced. As Quakers say, we would hold our work "in the Light." Reaching out to just a few donors I know personally brought a quick response. In less than a week we had pledges that allowed us to add the sixth applicant. Our Treasurer, David Hinson, was so moved that he thought we could add a seventh or even an eighth new student if there were additional qualified applicants! We all feel much more confident that in 2025 we'll be able to sustain this level of support. So, *Thank you!*

Since 2020, I have been concerned by a notable decrease in students who wish to continue



Rosa Margarita Caceres Henriquez
(highlighted below)

their education after high school. As I have mentioned in past newsletters, many universities continue to offer virtual classes only. This has continued into 2024 at the National University, where several departments are still virtual in this first semester, delaying their return to in-person classes due to construction on the campus. All are

hoping that by next semester students will be back in classrooms, but there's another problem: many private universities are offering permanent virtual and semi-virtual programs, allowing them to increase profits by enrolling thousands of new students, while leaving many students desiring real in-person classes. Many high school students I talk to express a desire to study, but not virtually. I expect that as things

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return to normal in El Salvador we will see the number of applications increase, making our selection more difficult and limiting financial support to only the most highly qualified applicants.

Let me now highlight some of our continuing and new University students. Rosa Margarita Caceres Henriquez, who attended high school in El Barrio, is our first student from a village of about 20 families known as "Las Vacas Bravas" (*The Courageous Cows*). The name of the village - *The Mad Cows* in slang – is the name given by the Salvadoran armed forces during the Civil War, referring to the valiant women who defended their homes. Many of those women incorporated into the ranks of the National Resistance or Popular Liberation Front, two of the five groups that eventually formed the political party FMLN. Some women who didn't incorporate were forced to leave their homes and migrate to nearby Suchitoto. Later, as the civil conflict was coming to an end, families returned to their lands. Las Vacas Bravas is the closest of seven communities whose youth attend the school in El Barrio. Like most new students, when I first met Rosa Margarita a little over two years



Kevin Edenilson Flamenco Pineda

ago, she was soft spoken and very shy. Today I see a very different Rosa Margarita, a determined young go-getter with perhaps some characteristics of her grandparents. Now in her second year of studies at the National University, Rosa Margarita has proven to be an excellent student in the B.S. program in Clinical Laboratory

Sciences. Kevin Edenilson Flamenco Pineda, now in his third year of studies at the Technological University

(UTEC) as an International Business major, continues in his second year in our program. When I met Kevin to discuss his application, I discovered a resolute young man who had enrolled in a private university without any financial support. To meet expenses he worked off and on while studying part time, so it took him over two years to finish his first year of course work. Today with our support and living in our coed student house in the city he can concentrate on his studies, and is on course to graduate in 2027. Kevin has also learned English, a part of his study program, he now teaches English to middle school students at the school in his village for the social hours we require.

Keilyn Estefani Gomez Rauda is a Business Administration student at the National University, now in her fourth year and doing well. When I



Keilyn Estefani Gomez Rauda

considered Keilyn's application four years ago, I was not convinced that she had the basic education needed for University studies. She had entered the National University, a challenge for most students and a sign that perhaps I wasn't seeing the entire picture. Over the past 3 ½ years, Keilyn has proven to me that one really has to see the inner desire and motivation to do whatever is needed to pursue the dream of a better life. One of our policies is that students must study full time, which usually means not working. However, Keilyn has done extremely well academically while at the same time holding as many as three different jobs. I saw her working weekends at a fruit and vegetable stand, and then at a funeral I noticed her working for the funeral parlor.

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When I mentioned the two jobs to my wife, she said that Keilyn also works washing dishes at one of the larger restaurants in Suchitoto – all while carrying a full academic load! When I met with Keilyn in April, I learned that she may need to take next semester off to have her eyes operated on, depending on tests and dates set by the clinic. As Project Director I will approve her request for a temporary suspension in her stipend, resuming her studies after the surgery. I asked how she will pay for the procedures, and she is hopeful that the nonprofit clinic will assign a reduced fee, for which she has been saving up in 2024. I know that Keilyn will graduate one day, find work, and in the process make the world better in her own way.

For over ten years, inspired by my dear friend and mentor Frank Cummings, who was my unwavering partner promoting education in the municipality of Suchitoto, I had contemplated changing one of the older policies of our programs, to begin accepting applications from high school graduates throughout the city, and not only from the 83 rural villages. Frank had told me over a decade ago that the poverty level in some families in town was as bad or worse than those in rural Suchitoto. This year, with memories of Frank in my mind, I took the leap and approved two applicants who live in or very close to Suchitoto.

To acquaint you with some of our new students, I'll begin with Karla Guadalupe Tobar Herrera, the sixth new student we accepted. Without the generous support we received at the last-minute, Karla would have been unable to enter the program this year. Karla graduated from the National Institute of Suchitoto (INSU) last year, applied to the National University of El Salvador (UES) in Humanities, and is now studying her first semester in Modern Languages, French and English for Teaching. She lives in Suchitoto with her mother, who has a small store. She has three older brothers, all of whom studied only through high school. When I met Karla as she dropped off her application, I was struck by her appearance. I saw a beautiful young woman, a down-to-earth girl with no makeup and regular clothes. I also saw a person with exceptional self-confidence, not like the timid seventeen year olds who are

commonly shy and not very assertive. Karla was keen on using our coed house and living in the city, something that has been delayed as her department was one that canceled in-person activities until next semester. I am hopeful yet cautious as I am with all of



Karla Guadalupe Tobar Herrera

our new students, as over the years some have failed to meet the challenges of university studies and life in the city. I do hope with all my

heart that Karla will reach her goal and become the first in her family to graduate from college.

As we have for the past eight years, we will continue to support the school in El Barrio with a part-time salary for the high school English and Computer teacher, Wilson Olmedo, who continues his work in the mornings as the school's administrative assistant, then teaches English and Computer classes in the afternoon. (Yes, this is the same Wilson Olmedo whose achievements and awards I described at length in our last newsletter!) Also, as we have for more than ten years, we will continue in 2024 to provide a small fund to help support both the kindergarten and high school graduations, making these events a little less stressful for the students, parents, and teachers. Having been unable to arrange a larger Saturday tutoring program last year, this year I looked for support from our allies at ABESUCHI, the scholarship youth association that was founded in memory of my friend Frank Cummings and has been running strong for several years. Our program will provide the teachers' salaries, but the organization will be in the hands of the Association and its acting director Narciso Rivera. The Saturday classes are scheduled every two weeks. They will cover the four main subjects, Math, Science, Social Science, and

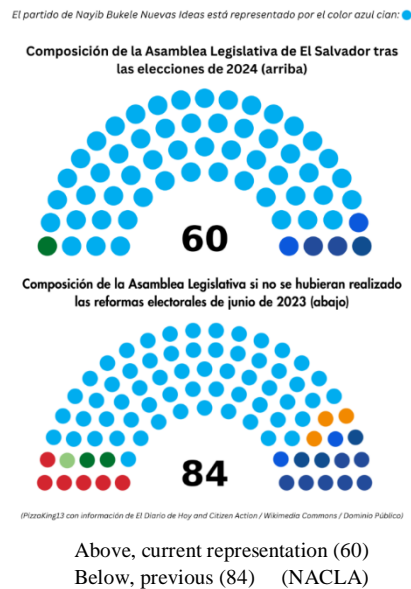
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Language, and they are open to students from the entire municipality. Our hope is that this program will continue over the years, but much will depend on the high school principal in Suchitoto where the classes are held. Her current support may change, as politics and conditions in El Salvador adapt to recent political restructuring at all levels.

After nearly 20 years as Project Director, I continue to believe that the fastest and least expensive way to end poverty is through education – just as my mother, Carmen Broz, believed when she founded this program in 1999. This I have seen time and time again as our students graduate, find work or start businesses, help their immediate families and communities, and by doing so transform El Salvador from the grassroots. The power of education persists through decades of adverse conditions and constant political-economic changes in El Salvador. When asked by those who do not know about our work in El Salvador, I describe our main goal as to give Salvadoran youth the education they need and deserve so they won't have to consider heading north, undocumented, to make a decent living. When visitors to El Salvador ask what El Salvador's main exports are; I respond “Unfortunately, its people!”, as remittances sent to El Salvador are currently around 23% of the country's GDP. El Salvador does export textiles, coffee, and sugar, but in most years the remittances total more than coffee and sugar exports combined. Until a couple of years ago some 3000 Salvadorans left for the US each month, compared to an estimated return of 1500 deportees. Today, 2.5 million Salvadorans make up the second largest Latin American population in the US. This may change as our current president promotes El Salvador as the safest country in Latin America, the first country to adopt Bitcoin as legal tender, host to the 2024 Miss Universe Pageant, giving \$500 million to Google to open a new IT center in San Salvador, and opening its arms to China. A newly revived and easy-to-market modern metropolis with new roadways and modern, colorful lighting make visitors rave about the country, but many still question why they see so many police and military if the country is supposedly safe.

With Salvadoran-Americans coming back for the first time in over 40 years, remittances have decreased by 10% in the first quarter of 2024, likely because after decades of hearing from local family about how bad El Salvador was these Salvadorans now have found a safe country with apparent potential for economic development, and may see their local relatives as just lazy and no longer in need of financial support. Many Salvadorans and now Bitcoin holders are coming to invest and others to retire. The majority of Salvadoran voters see their President as a messiah for a country that suffered from one military dictatorship to another, then a revolution followed by 30 years of corrupt politicians from both of the past majority parties. President Bukele welcomed being labeled a dictator by his opposition, calling himself “the world's coolest

dictator”. His solutions for El Salvador are: first, to end crime, remove constitutional rights, and arrest people in masses, and second; to get things done quicker by eliminating political opposition. President Bukele and the



New Ideas party have reduced the National Assembly from 84 to 60 seats, switching from fractional representation back to direct representation. Besides the reduction to Congress, 262 municipalities were reduced to 80, including my home city of Suchitoto which has now become one of five districts, former municipalities that make up the new municipality of North Cuscatlán. These two changes, promoted as a means to reduce public spending, were planned to consolidate power at all levels to the New Ideas Party, knowing that it would virtually eliminate any participation from the FMLN, today with no

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municipalities or seats in Congress, and Arena, which holds one city and no seats in congress.

Preliminary to the elections in February and March there were clear signs of how the central government was moving, reducing financial support to municipalities with direct support coming from the newly created DOM, Department of Municipal Works. In the campaign to promote DOM, which sounds like “dumb” when said by most Salvadorans, all the city centers where the Miss Universe candidates visited earlier in the year were completely renovated. This again was seen as good by most Salvadorans, who now enjoy the newly painted churches, renovated parks, and fancy street lighting while ignoring failing education and health systems, with absolutely no fiscal transparency at any level. It did seem dumb (DOM) to me when I saw an industrial crane with one man using a 4-inch paintbrush and another to operate the crane working for two weeks to paint our church. Who knows if I was the only one to wonder who owns the company that rented the crane to DOM and why more workers weren't used in a country that has high unemployment. Is this a new type of political corruption under a new type of smoke screen? With all these changes and uncertainties in El Salvador, I am grateful that I can still find some hope for a better El Salvador, this in a way knowing that our graduates will continue to make a difference in the years to come.

To complete my report, I'll bring you up to date on a couple of our past graduates. I like to call this part of my report *Where They Are Today*.

Diego Alexis Martinez Landaverde finished the majority of his course work in Industrial



Diego Alexis Martinez Landaverde

Engineering at the end of 2020, after receiving five years of financial support from our program. In 2021, Diego completed the last three of his

required classes while finding his first job as an

instructor at an industrial packing plant. At the end of 2021, he started his pre-specialization while at the same time enrolling in an English program and finding a new job in security and occupational health, trying to expand his knowledge in different areas of industrial engineering. In November of 2022, Diego graduated. Since 2023 he has changed employment again, now working on temporary projects for the government, foundations, and nonprofit organizations. Diego is conscious about his debt and has expressed his desire to make payments once he is more established in his profession.

Ricardo Joel Argueta Portillo, another past student, is in the process of paying off his student loan. Joel graduated from the National University in 2016 in Business Administration. He is one of four siblings and the second to graduate from the



Ricardo Joel Argueta Portillo
With daughter Zoe Danneth

university. Now three of the four have university degrees, while the youngest brother, Josue Galileo, has opted for a two-year vocational program

in Auto Mechanics and now lives in our coed student house in the city. Since graduation Joel has had three jobs, the first as a financial advisor for a shrimping cooperative in Usulután, and the second a six-year position in the treasury department of the municipality of Suchitoto. He advanced to become the municipal treasurer, a sign that he has found a way to survive in the ever changing arena of local politics. Only time will tell if he continues in this newer position, as with the recent changes from municipalities to districts his job may be given to someone owed favors within the New Ideas Party.

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Joel continues his development in technology, and he hopes to sign up for English classes in the coming months to improve his workplace skills and raise his prospects of a better future in El Salvador. In a recent encounter, Joel told me he has fathered a daughter, Zoe Danneth Argueta Ruiz. Although things didn't work out with his relationship with the mother, he is enjoying being a responsible father and seeing his eight-month old daughter on most weekends. He also keeps busy in his free time, and as captain of the soccer team of El Barrio he stays in contact with youth from rural Suchitoto. After more than a decade of knowing Joel and his family, I'm happy to consider him one of my group of responsible adults, always keeping in contact, making periodic payments on his loan, and greeting me with a firm handshake and smile when our paths cross here in Suchitoto.

When I see past recipients like Diego, Joel, and dozens of others we have supported around Suchitoto, on occasion with their friends or families, it always brings a smile to my face. Looking back, I realize that many of these active young professionals might not have become who they are today without

our support. The challenges of a university degree might have been too much to overcome, and their dreams as young high school students might have ended up as no more than wishful thinking. As my mother hoped when she guided our program toward support of higher education for poor kids, I can affirm that our program is an authentic game changer for the vast majority of the students we have supported.

My experience convinces me that all is not lost for little El Salvador. Each report I compose for our newsletter is an opportunity to step out of the flow of daily action – to review and reflect. I always end up filled with hope, even with my apprehensions that El Salvador's new leadership is taking the country backward in terms of democracy and justice. My greatest desire is that when you, our supporters, read this newsletter, you will recognize your own vital role in making it all possible, and your hope for the world will be renewed in these times when it is so essential that people of good will sustain their hope and dedication to the wellbeing of all.



The Wind Beneath our Wings

Trudy Reagan

- Mary Pat O'Connell and Hulda Muaka the El Salvador Projects



Trudy Reagan met Carmen Broz when Carmen began attending Palo Alto Friends Meeting. She heard Carmen speak of the need for work for a Salvadoran refugee family and Trudy responded by hiring the grandparents to work in her home. She learned from these people of their experiences of the civil war going on in El Salvador and the reasons people were fleeing. She set about learning Spanish and became involved in the work of the South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC).

Throughout the 1980's, as the civil war raged on in El Salvador, Trudy grew more engaged in the effort to support Salvadoran refugees in the US. She was involved in organizing and supporting a refugee family living in an RV placed in the PAFM parking lot.

They visited the camps of its refugees in Honduras, heard the horrors they had suffered, and was touched by their love and devotion. It was life changing. The experience influenced her work as an artist. She painted a series of pictures based on sketches

made during her visit to El Salvador. www.myrrh-art.com/el-salvador-1988-paintings

In 1992, a negotiated peace was finally achieved in El Salvador and the situation stabilized. Carmen Broz continued her work with people in El Salvador, starting schools, and a day care program. She wrote to PAFM and asked for a support committee to be formed here. Trudy immediately volunteered for this. This support committee grew into the El Salvador Projects of Palo Alto Friends Meeting. The early work involved sending the supplies requested by Carmen primarily related to schools. Support efforts grew over time. Need for basic school supplies changed into a need for computers and technical expertise. Some students who graduated from the local high school in Suchitoto wanted to attend college in San Salvador. The El Salvador Projects committee began accepting donations to support college educations for students from the communities where Carmen was working. This cost one tenth of what it cost in the US. Trudy helped to encourage these contributions. She herself has sponsored numerous students over the years.

In all, Trudy traveled to El Salvador four times, beginning in 1988. She helped raise money through T-shirt sales after the massive earthquake in 2001. On her third visit, she attended a school dedication in Joquaitique.

She has written a booklet about her experiences there and produced paintings based on what she saw and experienced. Three of her paintings hang in the Museum of the Revolution in Perquín, El Salvador.

Trudy Reagan is the longest serving member of the El Salvador Projects Committee of Palo Alto Friends Meeting. She has served as clerk, organized events to garner support for the work, written articles for the newsletter, cropped and edited all of the photos in the newsletter since its inception, and helped to do the mundane folding, and stamping required to mail the newsletter across 20+ years. Her commitment to this effort has been unflinching and her impact has lifted the lives of those this project seeks to help.

Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

Mary Oliver – *The Summer Day*

If you wonder whether your donations to The El Salvador Projects truly make a difference in the lives of real people, please ponder this reality: A generation ago, children in the rural villages of El Salvador could hardly have imagined responding to Mary Oliver’s question. For them, as for their parents and grandparents, a more relevant question might have been: *Tell me, how is it you plan to survive?*

“Idealism is fine,” said William F. Buckley, Jr., “But, as one approaches reality, the costs become prohibitive.” (Quoted in *The Week* magazine, May 10, 2024, page 17.)

Supporters of The El Salvador Projects are resolute idealists, I assert with confidence. We know that the cost of abandoning idealism is cynicism, with its toxic potential to lead the disillusioned former idealist toward mean-spirited disregard for others. Idealism nourishes hope, and hope in turn nourishes community, cooperation, and “helping one another up with a tender hand” (Quaker Isaac Pennington, 1667).

Idealism inspires us all to donate, and to volunteer. It’s an expression of the spirit within us that assures us of our connection to others around the globe, whether we know them personally or not. Every act of generosity, every kindness, strengthens us and affirms our essential humanity as it brings hope to others.

For the young Salvadorans who apply to our program for assistance to earn a university degree, your donations make it possible to respond to Mary Oliver’s question – to plan what they will do with their one wild and precious life, and to pursue that dream successfully.

Thank you for your donations, and for your continuing generosity!

Jamie Newton, for The El Salvador Projects Committee

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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\$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1000 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 to **PAFM – E.S. Projects**. Your contribution is tax-deductible.

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Some of our students 2024



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