

Palo Alto Friends Meeting El Salvador Projects

~Note from the Clerk~

Dear Friends,

In his report for this newsletter, Project Director Robert Broz gives you his detailed, on-the-ground perspective on probes of political corruption, intensifying conflict between government forces and violent gangs, and epidemic levels of new and dangerous viruses that you may have seen referred to cryptically in U.S. news reports about El Salvador.

Many of you will remember that when Carmen Broz initiated the work we carry on today, El Salvador was in the grip of a terrible civil war. Friends and co-workers were assassinated, and Carmen's own life was often at risk. Conditions that foster fear and despair make it ever more important to offer genuine opportunities that justify hope for the future, now in this present just as in the time of Carmen's initial work in El Salvador.

Robert reassures us that despite what we may have heard about widespread dangers, the countryside in El Salvador remains rather quiet. That's good news to any who would like to travel there and take advantage of Robert's services. He tailors his tours to his clients' interests, helping them talk to many people along the way. In my experience there is nothing like actually getting to meet people to feel like you know something about a country. It is curious that with all the globalization, few of us had a chance to do this.

In my own travels this is what made all the difference! We happily encourage our newsletter readers to experience Robert's unique introduction to El Salvador's natural beauty, culture, and people. After such firsthand experience, travelers often become supporters of the work we have carried on for a quarter century.

Robert was surprised some fourteen years ago to discover another Friends' education project near Suchitoto, where he lives. Sponsored by Atlanta Friends Meeting, it was the brainchild of Frank Cummings, a chemistry professor who retired to Suchitoto. He and Robert collaborated to publicize the

benefits of higher education. They involved the local diocese and priests, and the city government. Almost ten years ago they initiated the annual University Fair, which brings in recruiters of universities and technical schools to inform and encourage applicants. Frank also motivated Robert to work with other groups to finance the large house for students living in San Salvador to attend college. Today, twenty-two students from several different scholarship programs share lodgings in this large house, and support one another's efforts.

We are sad to report that Frank Cummings died recently of leukemia brought on by a rare bone marrow disorder. With Robert's oversight, the





El Salvador Projects participating students, 2016

programs he and Frank developed together would continue. For instance, the University Fair will soon be run principally by students and graduates. Because these young people are actively involved, the projects will gain new energy and longevity.

Carmen Broz's memorial service in Palo Alto was attended by about 150 people, and had to be held at a church much larger than the Palo Alto Quaker meeting house. We were privileged to meet members of Carmen's extended family and some of her oldest friends. In this newsletter, some longtime friends and supporters of Carmen's work share their memories. Donations given in Carmen's memory supplemented contributions from you and other supporters to provide a modest reserve fund, much needed to ensure that we can sustain commitments to provide student loans and meet basic human needs in other ways in El Salvador.

Just as Carmen used to do, Robert is coming to the U.S. this year to attend Intermountain Yearly Meeting and Pacific Yearly Meeting, both of which will be held in June. That will give some of you opportunities to meet Robert and ask questions. We are proud to report that 100 students have gone through our student loan program since 1999, and 13 are currently enrolled. Graduates are supporting their families with their earnings, repaying loans in cash and through community service, and helping younger people gain an education. Your contributions make a very real difference!

With appreciation for your continuing support,

Trudy Reagan
Clerk, El Salvador Projects Committee

Letter from the Director, Robert Broz



Dear Friends and Supporters,

Carmen Broz started the El Salvador Projects in the context of a civil war so viciously destructive that it brought this smallest country in Central America to the world's attention. Her initiatives in child care, maternal and child health, early education, community development, and ultimately support for higher education for young people from poor rural families were transformative, bringing hope and tangible improvements to many lives. That legacy continues today. The candles we light with your support do more than dispel some of the darkness for individuals, as important as that is. Every child whose dream is made real, every family that takes a significant step away from the desperation of poverty into a more secure future, every young adult whose path leads to a role of positive service and leadership in the community – each of these demonstrates to others that there are realistic alternatives to despair. In my reports I share my experiences and observations with you frankly, confident that you will realize that in times of adversity the assistance and opportunities we are able to offer together become even more important.

Reports on social and economic conditions in El Salvador by both domestic and international news agencies are overwhelmingly dismal these days, reflecting a toxic blend of human activities and forces of nature:

- Allegations and investigations of political corruption at high levels.
- Escalating warfare that pits Salvadoran gangs against the police and military.
- A dramatic decline in visits by tourists and solidarity delegations due to fear of violent crime and health risks caused by serious new viruses – Chikungunya in 2015 and Zika fever in 2016 – which are spread by mosquitoes, like the dengue that preceded them, and are now common in the region.
- A failing economy that is affected by all of the above factors.

☐

Reforms to a 1959 anti-corruption law were passed in December of 2015 and put into effect in January of 2016. Since then, 29 investigations have been opened against past and current politicians and high-level government employees. These reforms were pushed through by the governing FMLN in alliance with other parties and opposed by the right-wing ARENA party, which expected the law to be used against former officials of the ARENA party who controlled the central government for more than 20 years with obvious corruption and no fear of criminal charges.

In practice, application of the law appears impartial. High-level politicians including three former presidents, one of them the immediate past president Mauricio Funes (FMLN), are being investigated to determine sources of financial gain during their terms in office. Current FMLN Vice-President Oscar Ortiz was accused of having had business ties in a local land development company since the early 2000's with Salvadoran drug lord José Adán Salazar Umaña, alias Chepe Diablo, who was named years ago by the U.S. as the leader of El Salvador's Taxis drug cartel.

The dramatic news of allegations against Ortiz nearly made Salvadorans forget about Francisco Flores of the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance, President from 1999-2004, who was under house arrest for embezzling millions of dollars of a donation from Taiwan. Flores's reported illness and death soon after being admitted to a private hospital is suspected by many of being a well-orchestrated trick to get him out of the country. They ask why no autopsy was performed and why the family held a low-profile,

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closed casket burial. Even in social media networks like Facebook, photos of the Flores family celebrating in the US were published shortly after the funeral. The now-famous *Panama Papers* reveal tax evasion by most of El Salvador's larger companies as well.

Although currently we see few news reports like those of early 2015, when literally thousands of minors fled El Salvador and Honduras to escape the intense violence caused by gangs, the situation has hardly improved. Both countries are still listed as the most violent countries in the world where there is no war going on. In 2015 El Salvador surpassed Honduras in violent deaths per capita, and now leads the world in that grisly statistic.

I can foresee no quick fix for this complex situation, of course. Some of the newer programs at both local and central government levels may lead to long-term improvements, but even these can involve drastic tactics that impact the general population. No longer willing to negotiate with the leaders of internationally recognized organized crime groups, the government has combined police and military efforts to disable the high commands of the gangs. A recent initiative involved working with cell phone companies to block signals at the prisons, an imprecise process that usually causes residents of surrounding areas to lose their phone service. With many gang leaders operating from prison and a low-paid prison guard receiving up to \$3000 per illegal phone introduced to the prison, little more could be done. Just days

before the signal blocking was implemented, a cell phone with \$20,000 in credit was decommissioned from one inmate. This was possible, apparently, because a new way to send money using cell phones was implemented by two of the larger telecommunication companies. It is assumed that these new ways to send money are now used to transfer illicit funds to the kingpins in prison.

As I write this report, a newly trained battalion of soldiers is scheduled to be on the streets by late April. These 600 elite soldiers will join 400 police attempting to catch gang members as they flee from one gang-ridden area to another just before a police operation, a practice that has been common for years and raises the suspicion that gangs have infiltrated the police and military. This new unit is very controversial, compared by right-wing politicians and the local press in many cases to abuse of police and military forces in the 1970s and 1980s, but now controlled by the FMLN rather than by the military dictatorships of the past.



Mayor Rivera of Suchitoto with a parish program student

As I said earlier, Salvadorans are drastically affected by the country's worsening economy. The U.S. State Department and many other foreign government websites list El Salvador as the most violent country in the world, with travel advisories that discourage travel to El Salvador because of the high level of violence and several dangerous mosquito-transmitted viruses. The result is an enormous decline in private travelers, as well as solidarity, religious, and educational delegations. Tourism, which had been considered until 2015 one of the fastest growing components of El Salvador's economy, is now withering.

In just two groups I work with in addition to the El Salvador Projects of Palo Alto, I have seen more than 20 delegations cancel trips planned for 2016, causing non-profit organizations in both El Salvador and the U.S. to re-evaluate current budgets, reduce projected spending, let staff go, and in one case even close the local offices. If we combine this with the loss of income to small communities where project money is spent, and additional services like food services and transportation are taken into account, the lost income enters into every aspect of the local economy, motivating Salvadorans both young and old to consider taking the dangerous trip to the north in search of the American Dream that more than three million Salvadorans already live.

On a much brighter side, some positive programs are in place around the country – better street lighting, full school days, sports and arts programs, vocational training programs, scholarships, seed and fertilizer programs to insure a decent production this season and income for the poor *campesinos* who continue to produce the majority of our local grains on small parcels of land. How different their lives are from those of the large sugar cane and coffee producers who form part of the wealthiest upper-class of Salvadoran society!

In the private sector, too, determined efforts continue for a new El Salvador with a positive future. Since the September 2015 death of my mother Carmen Broz, founder of our Projects and our university student loan program in El Salvador, and more recently the death of my good friend Frank Cummings, an attendee of Atlanta Friends Meeting and founder of two other local scholarship programs, I have seen positive changes. Within the municipality of Suchitoto Frank was my "accomplice in Education," as I used to say, for the last ten years. Frank and I worked for years to unite several educational programs and now, in 2016, we are moving very quickly to do just that in honor of his work.

We now hold monthly student meetings with around 90 university students supported by our own El Salvador Projects, the programs of Frank Cummings, and Santa Lucia Parrish – all of which I oversee – a scholarship program new in 2016 managed by a local non-profit called CORDES, and with the benefit of financial support from the City of Suchitoto. At our meeting in April when we asked for volunteers to form a new committee of scholarship students, nine stepped forward in just five minutes! The new committee met on April 10th to start work on planning this year's University Fair, a task that Frank and I had done alone for the past nine years. As I write this report, students from the new committee will be visiting the six schools in Suchitoto that offer high school (*secundaria*) to promote the upcoming Fair, the several financial aid programs, and the opening of the entrance process at the National University to the 2016 graduating high school students in Suchitoto. The committee will also be responsible for all logistics of the Fair, and with some guidance will help with the selection of scholarship students for the different programs in 2017.



Student Meeting, March

A dream Frank and I shared is to one day have the programs not only managed by ex-beneficiaries, but even supported financially by the professionals we have helped to gain a college education. We are on the path!

You will probably not be surprised when I say that the months since our last newsletter have been a period of mourning and intense emotion for me. In addition to my own mother's death and the death of my dear friend Frank, my work has involved situations of a kind that are all too common in El Salvador. I think the case that continues to be most unsettling to me is that of Erika, a young woman from a small, remote village in the rural northeast part of Suchitoto who started in our program in 2015. Erika contacted me late last year, telling me she would be unable to continue her studies in modern languages in 2016. Initially she said only that her decision was for personal reasons, but as I questioned her she told me her mother had given birth, had complications, and was admitted to the hospital. As the only daughter, Erika decided to drop out of school to bring up her new little sister. When I realized that this was the only realistic option for Erika and her family I cried, as I am now while writing this report, knowing there is little that I or our program can do to help. I have told Erika that we will help her in the future if she decides to go back to school, but as her mother continues to deal with serious health issues she does not see this as a possible future.

Rosa Isabel was last on my list for new student candidates in 2016, but when Erika told me she would not be continuing her studies, we opened her spot for young Rosa Isabel. This late and final addition of Rosa Isabel to our list of new students in 2016 felt so right, and it brought a feeling of light and peace in this work that at times can be difficult.

My work as Project Director has always involved difficult situations, and although this case was more severe and personally emotional than many others over the past eleven years, I always find peace and joy knowing our programs have made a difference and will continue to make El Salvador a better country. I see an example in one of our new students, Rosa Isabel, who is in her first year of medicine at the Salvadoran University Alberto Masferrer (USAM). Rosa Isabel is the oldest daughter of one of our past students, Rosa Orellana, who studied and is now a licensed teacher working at one of the rural schools in Suchitoto. Rosa Isabel tried to enter the National University where the medical program is one of the hardest to get into. When she did not make the cut she was still determined to follow her dream and study medicine. She also opted to join our coed student house in San Salvador, where 22 students from five different programs live. One of our continuing students in the house is a third-year student of medicine, and Rosa has already used this in-house resource for tutoring in this first year. Rosa Isabel was last on my list for new student candidates in 2016, but when Erika told me she would not be continuing her studies, we opened her spot for young Rosa Isabel. This late and final addition of Rosa Isabel to our list of new students in 2016 felt so right, and it brought a feeling of light and peace in this work that at times can be difficult.

I say goodbye once again, thanking those of you who made recent donations to keep alive my mother's legacy, those who continue to support students, and those who for the past 27 years have helped us to make El Salvador and the world a better and more just place for the less fortunate.

In Peace,

Robert Broz

Reflections on Carman's Memorial Service

By Kay Anderson

It was a warm spring day at the large Palo Alto Church where Carmen Broz's Memorial Service was held. I walked into a room already full of people and the sharing was beginning. It would be a service in Quaker style, and as I glanced around I recognized lots of Friends from all around the Bay Area.

I found a seat and soon felt ready to listen and as one loving, tender remembrance rolled over me, full of tears and sometimes laughs and times of silence in between. I remembered Carmen at Meeting, Carmen at home, Carmen in El Salvador, at Friends House. Her sweet and wise words. And everyone was sharing a "she-once-said" or "a time I called her" or "a view from the trip to the mountain top near San Salvador with her." It got warmer and warmer...

I began to feel restless. I felt slightly spacey and confused, the words became harder to recognize. I carefully got up and went to the ladies room. I walked the halls and peeked in the rooms, but finally went back in and as I sat down, I felt an intense but lightly enveloping sense of love; Carmen's overwhelming presence, her devotion and grace and assurance that she was here with us, now, and anytime we remember her deep kindness and generosity.



Carmen Broz 2006



"It is necessary to give to the youth, the kids of today, a society, an environment, the conditions where one is able to develop fully the vocation that God has given..."

(St. Oscar Romero, homily of May 7th, 1978)

Committee Member Paul Engstrom

By Trudy Reagan

One of our committee members, Paul Engstrom, in his 90s. Still in good health, he has moved to Portland, Oregon to live near a son. Like Robert Broz in El Salvador and several other members, he will attend committee meetings by Skype.

He has led such an adventurous life! Born into an isolated Minnesota Swedish farming family, he watched as his three brothers were drafted into World War II. When he himself was drafted, the Army considered that his mother was a widow, and her other sons were away fighting, so Paul was assigned to a location in the states guarding enemy POWs. Italians were the first group, who taught him some Italian. Later, when he went to El Salvador, he could get by without knowing Spanish.

The G.I. Bill enabled him to come to the University of California at Berkeley and study social work, a



profession perfect for his outgoing, compassionate personality and his curiosity. After he became a family man, he took his three children out of school so the family could travel the world. For instance, he had a social work job in England; and they helped for a few months on a Kibbutz. He traveled in China solo when that first became possible, without knowing Chinese. He and his wife car-camped behind the Iron Curtain in the USSR. In both places curious people surrounded these Westerners.

In 1988, he joined a five-member delegation to visit El Salvador and the refugee camp in Honduras. Then, he and Trudy Reagan went on to Nicaragua to visit Carmen Broz in Leon. In Managua, they encountered hyperinflation and drastic shortage of buses. It was Paul who negotiated a ride for the two of them in a pickup truck to Leon. Without an address, how would they find Carmen? The local kids knew her! Carmen took them to Sandinista government offices, a clean water project she started, and some goodbye parties with high-intensity salsa music because her work there was just coming to a close. While Trudy caught a plane home from Costa Rica, Paul came home through Central America and Mexico by bus.

Drawing of Paul Engstrom by Trudy Reagan

He returned twice before the war ended with Pastors for Peace carrying relief supplies. The first trip, soldiers tried to turn them back at the border of El Salvador. They camped there for two weeks, staring down the authorities until they let them in.



These are just a few of the adventures Paul embarked upon.

How We Got Involved

By Joan Peters
Boulder, Colorado Friends Meeting

Back when Carmen was in the beginning stages of planning her projects in El Salvador, the then clerk of our Boulder, Colorado Friends Meeting met her at a Quaker gathering in the US. He was impressed with her vision and invited her to come to Boulder following the gathering to talk with a group of us. With great passion, Carmen shared with us the history and current situation in El Salvador and the importance she saw of creating opportunities for their youth.

I had been in El Salvador on study trips in 1986 and 1987 and was glad to hear Carmen present a plan that I was certain would make a meaningful change there. I enlisted the support of our Meeting's Peace & Social Justice Committee, of which I was a member. Since then, a number of our Meeting's members and attenders have contributed yearly to the Projects. In recent years, we have provided loans to qualified students from poor communities to go on to higher education. We've enjoyed our communications with "our" students, hearing their personal stories and seeing photos of them. We know that they will make a difference in their communities and in their country.

I am thankful that Carmen came along at the right time with grand ideas that will be the legacy of this great woman.

Rosa with her sponsor, Paul March, 2016





Robert, Rosa, Yancy, and Paul M. in front of a map of El Salvador, 2016

~ How We Got Involved ~

By Linda Dunn
Inland Valley Friends Meeting

By 1980 Michael (Mike) and I had been members of Inland Valley Friends Meeting in Riverside for about ten years along with our four children. We first learned about the war in El Salvador through Carmen's presentation at Pacific Yearly Meeting and our local Amnesty International group. At that time I was a UC Riverside student and a member of the UC Riverside Graduate Student Council that declared the entire campus a Sanctuary. We never heard from the administration so accepted their silence as support! We housed a woman and her two children from El Salvador near campus and organized her speaking engagements for various classes and encouraged others in the UC system to follow suit. Thus UCR was the first – but not the last – to declare Sanctuary.

Around the same time our Quaker Meeting joined other religious groups across the nation in declaring Sanctuary and our home was designated the "safe house". We enlisted Carmen as a speaker to help with our outreach.

Once we were successful in getting an article about one of Carmen's talks along with her photo in the Riverside newspaper. The day after her talk I drove Carmen to the Ontario airport to catch her flight home. I parked the car and accompanied her into the airport. The requirements for ID we experience today were just then being initiated. Thus it was a surprise when the airline staff person at the counter asked for her photo ID. Carmen searched her purse and her pockets but no ID was to be found. I had the newspaper article with me and gave it to Carmen to show to the airline person. He took some time considering it – smiled and handed it back along with her ticket. This is only one of many experiences with Carmen that brings back very special memories.

Your financial support matters

Imagine the contrast... When so many teens are induced or coerced into violent, predatory gangs, a loan that is very modest by U.S. standards enables a determined student to live in a safe house with other students, and gain an education that qualifies him or her for professional service that can lift a family from poverty while benefiting the community. Young people who might otherwise see no options other than to attempt the dangerous, shadowy journey from El Salvador to the U.S. border or yield to the pressure of local gangs have an opportunity to remain with their families in El Salvador and do their part to build a better future – through the programs your contributions support.

As Robert's report shows, El Salvador is struggling to emerge from a long tradition of political corruption, as well as to improve social and economic conditions despite widespread violence and public health crises that impact the poor most severely. Many of the young people who are helped by our loans to graduate from the university are better educated than most of the country's current leaders. We look forward to a time when their skills and strong commitment to community well-being will be reflected in improvements at the regional and national levels.

A passage from one of our previous newsletters bears repeating. Our students, we wrote, *...will teach Salvadoran children, provide nursing and pharmaceutical services, represent families as lawyers, interpret Salvadoran life as artists, shape the future of education in rural areas as school principals... and more. Our graduates are doing all of these things today, improving the quality of life in El Salvador. Each of our student loans totals less than the cost of a single year at a public university in the U.S., and about one-tenth of what it costs to keep a person in prison for one year. The contributions we have received through the years from every individual, Friends meeting, church, and other group on our mailing list have enabled us to continue this program.*

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 _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

- \$25 \$50 \$75 \$100 \$250 \$500 \$1000 other _____
- Check here if you want your gift to support a college student.
(Please specify on your check memo line "College Loans.")

Donations under \$250 will normally be used for General Programs, and donations of \$250 or more will be used for university student loans (unless you state another preference).

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

HOW TO DONATE READING GLASSES AND LAPTOP COMPUTERS:

We need reading glasses (any magnification) to expand life opportunities for elderly people and others with visual impairments. For student use, we need laptop computers (Windows PC with Pentium 4 CPU or better – in working order except that a defective keyboard or display is acceptable). Please send glasses and laptops to: David Hinson (Tel. 650-857-0232), 3298 Ramona, Palo Alto, CA 94306.

Dave Hinson is also the one to contact if you want to receive your newsletter by email at davidphinson@yahoo.com



May 2016 Newsletter

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