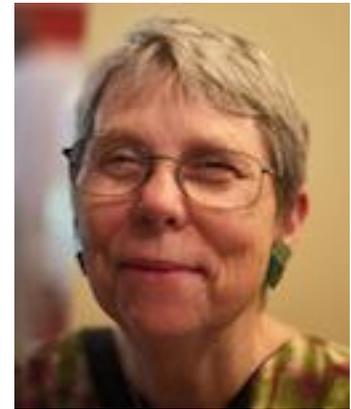


Nov 2016

# Palo Alto Friends Meeting El Salvador Projects



## Note from the Clerk

I have been on this Committee a long, long time, and I have seen how the projects have flourished, grown and matured. As you know, Carmen started her projects in 1989. She would come back to Palo Alto to give a progress report. She first started a nursery school for families of marginalized people, and just kept expanding her work as she learned about more needs. Finally, after two or three years, she said "You know, I'm awfully lonely down here. I still really need to have the feeling of continual connection with the Palo Alto Meeting." Thus, the Palo Alto El Salvador Projects Committee was formed.

At one time she was not only supporting education projects, but also sending doctors to remote communities and often accompanying the doctors. She decided it was too much, and she should concentrate on education. This meant kindergarten and the early grades. The teachers were educating themselves, and were often just a few grades ahead of their students. But they had strong values, values that should guide the country, and they sought to impart them to their students. Their idealism was inspiring.

As the years passed, the government began supporting schools. Our teachers studied and obtained teaching credentials. Our high school graduates wanted to go on to the university. I was present in Palo Alto in 1999 when Carmen came and proposed scholarships for higher education, and one person in the audience, Norman Furlong, spoke up to be the first to sponsor a student. We have long since learned how to run such a program, and we are lucky to have her son, Robert Broz, in Suchitoto to carry on her work. Robert is an able organizer with terrific rapport with the students. He has set up committees of local people who make important decisions with him, notably regarding selection of applicants for loans. Graduates from the program now help to manage it. There is broad recognition and support in the entire area for our efforts, which were reinforced by an Atlanta Friend, Frank Cummings, who had an education project of his own in El Salvador.

Since Frank's passing last year, people from the community are organizing to carry on his work. Another group, *Santa Cruz al Salvador*, based in Santa Cruz, California, sponsors a group of university students who share the house in San Salvador where most of our student loan recipients live. The local diocese in Suchitoto collects scholarship money for a few students as well. The "University Fair" that Robert and Frank started eleven years ago in Suchitoto continues, with outreach and coordination by a committee of students we support. The *Centro Arte Para La Paz* in Suchitoto adds to the cultural richness of the region. Readers, this colonial town is definitely worth a visit!

Recognizing the benefits to all programs of sharing experiences and approaches, Robert is communicating with the directors of Quaker programs in Mexico and Guatemala as well as the Quaker community and Friends school in MonteVerde, Costa Rica. You may recall that the Quaker scholarship program in Guatemala, established years before Carmen began the El Salvador Projects, inspired Carmen and influenced her ideas on how to implement our university education program in 1999.

Many of the graduates who were educated with the assistance of loans your donations made possible are already contributing to improvements in the quality of life of Salvadorans. Their successes attract other well-qualified young people to our program. Your continued generosity will enable us to help many of them complete their education and continue this tradition of serving the community as they raise their families out of poverty.

## Director's Report: Robert Broz

It has been a long year with many ups and downs, both for me and for El Salvador, yet this is the time of year when I feel the most rewarded, cherished, and blessed. The first harvest is in, a sign of a normal rainy season after sporadic rains led to failed crops in much of El Salvador in both 2014 and 2015. My family and I were invited to enjoy the first harvest with friends in the village of Santa Anita, where my mother and I worked in the early years of the El Salvador Projects, with the ritual of sharing the tender fresh corn and some sweet dishes prepared from it. We were served large bowls of steamy hot *atole*, a thick and sweetened corn drink, accompanied by ears of boiled corn and the traditional *tortas*, something like a corn fritter. Enjoying the first harvest with my humble friends from rural Suchitoto is an indicator that the majority of the Salvadoran people will consider 2016 a good year – but only if the rains hold out for the second crop, which will be harvested in November and December.

### Woman cooking atole, a corn-based beverage



Even more important than the good harvest is this: crime rates have dropped sharply, and fewer cases of the Zika and Chikungunya viruses have been reported in 2016. Unfortunately, these developments have been largely ignored by the country's mainstream media, dominated by the ultra-right of El Salvador, and by most of the international press, which emphasize high murder rates and mass immigration, Middle East conflicts, and of course the startling events in U.S. politics.

A pattern of reporting that I mentioned in my last report continues, with political corruption leading the news of the day and little coverage of the drop in violent crime or the continued crack-down on gangs by the police. From social media and reports in some of our small liberal newspapers and TV stations, we learn of continued attacks on the FMLN presidency and central government by the right-wing ARENA party in an apparent attempt to destabilize the government. At the time of this writing the ARENA party is opposing any new government debt, causing a cash flow problem within government agencies at every level, even though it is common knowledge that 76% of El Salvador's debt was acquired during the previous 20 years of ARENA administration, and much of this money was poorly used or was funneled illegally into party members' private bank accounts. More recent evidence of embezzlement in the administration of former right-wing President Tony Saca has also been made public, and even though there is proof that over twenty million dollars was diverted into personal accounts of Saca and his cabinet there has been very little coverage by the Salvadoran media.

Just as there is little reporting of the news that El Salvador is no longer the most violent of the world's countries that are not at war, little attention has been given to a recent report that after a 70% drop in crime the capital city, San Salvador, is no longer among the ten most violent cities in the world. This striking achievement resulted primarily from investments by the current Mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele, who installed thousands of efficient LED street lights throughout the city, even in the poorest neighborhoods, after his election in 2015.



Mayor of San Salvador, Nayib Bukele

**... San Salvador, is no longer among the ten most violent cities in the world.**

(continued)

Bukele also invested city funds to restore several city parks and build new city markets for street vendors, opened art and music programs for youth, and even operates a municipal scholarship program for university students! Even news that Bukele is being snubbed by his own party, the FMLN, is not covered in the media, because the ultra-right sees him as a huge potential threat for the 2019 presidential elections, even if he were to run as an independent. Due to risks from increased violence and frightening announcements by the US state department that El Salvador had become the most violent country in the world – yes, this did make the local and international news! – El Salvador suffered terribly in 2014, 2015, and even in the beginning of 2016, as the Peace Corp withdrew its volunteers, travelers and solidarity groups canceled travel plans, the economy declined, travel warnings intensified, and reports of tropical diseases proliferated.

I found it difficult to compose my past reports during this time of turmoil, but our work in education continued, and through it all – droughts, floods and even plagues – our supporters and I have received the fruits of the harvest. In the end the seeds we plant sprout, and with continued nourishment they grow and flower to produce the blessed fruit. The seeds I refer to are the youth of rural El Salvador whom we have supported now for 25 years, and the fruits are the productive, community-oriented adults these children grow into.

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On October 8 my wife and I were invited to a graduation party for one of our loan recipients. When we arrived we found that this was not the very common gathering of family and friends, but a celebration for the entire community that included the “Celebración de La Palabra,” celebration of the scriptures, offered by the leader of the Catholic community of the small village of Celina Ramos, which is very close to El Barío where our work started in 1989. I have known Don Orellana, the pastoral leader, for years, and we once provided financial support to him when he was working with a group of young musicians and needed funds for musical instruments. Don Pintín, the father of two of our former scholarship students, Juana and Susana, aided Orellana with the religious activities. When the ceremony ended Ricardo Joel, the graduate, took the microphone to address the community. With some emotional moments and tears he thanked me and the programs I represent, honored my good friend Frank Cummings who also supported and mentored him some years before, then thanked his parents and siblings, including his older sister whom we supported many years ago, and his younger brother who entered our program in 2016.

Tita, Robert's wife



## Palo Alto Friends Meeting *El Salvador Projects*

Hearing Ricardo speak brought many things into clarity for me. I remembered my mother's guidance for student selection, which we still follow today: "The family must see the importance of education for their children, showing them both emotional and financial support." This was very evident in Ricardo's family, and in the Pintín family as well. Before this celebration, I had not realized that these two families were from the same small, very communally oriented village. Speaking to his peers, as well as to the younger children present, Ricardo said, "As you can see, anything is possible. This, my dream, was only support of the programs available to youth from Suchitoto. Don't let anything stop you! Don't let anyone tell you it can't be done!"

Ricardo's father then spoke proudly to the first of his children to graduate with a B.A., and to the whole community, thanking everyone for supporting his son in his struggle. I could see how truly united this small community of 30 families is, something we may lose over time, especially in larger villages like El Barío, which was repopulated in 1986 by 60 families with fewer than 200 people but today has grown to a village of over 300 families with close to 800 people. El Barío still works hard to maintain a sense of community, but as it continues to grow I have seen the solidarity I experienced in Celina Ramos diminish, so that today many no longer participate in community activities like Ricardo Joel's graduation party.

I was asked to speak, but I felt humbled by those who had spoken before. Of course, I congratulated Ricardo, but then I felt led to speak about the sense of community and family. I congratulated the entire community, mentioning the Pintín family, five of them now professionals, of whom only the two oldest sisters studied with support from Palo Alto's programs before graduating in 2001. Virginia, the last of the siblings, will graduate next year, fully supported by her own family – a remarkable achievement!

I also mentioned Ricardo's older sister, Noemi, who is in the process of defending her thesis in accounting, despite being delayed in her studies by personal problems in the past and, more recently, a husband and newborn baby. She was as proud as the rest of the family, seeing her younger brother graduate even if he was ahead of her. Their younger brother, Fredys, is new in our program although he is in his third year of studies in International Relations. Fredys stays in our student house, where he was elected as president of the committee that oversees the house. I reiterated what Ricardo had said, in an attempt to motivate more youth and their families to continue their studies and follow their dreams.

Ricardo Joel  
speaking to the  
community



## Palo Alto Friends Meeting *El Salvador Projects*

To make the event even more rewarding, Ricardo came and sat with us to tell me about his new job. It looks like he will be working with the city government of Soyapango, one of the greater San Salvador municipalities.

He did not go into details about the type of work, but he did say he will be starting in January and that it is an official job, not related to any specifically funded project. The difference is that work on municipal projects is generally short-term, ending with the completion of the project, and official jobs are permanent. Ricardo also said that he hopes to start repaying his student loan soon so that we can support more students in the future. I told him that I hope he can continue to stay active in his community, especially with mentoring and motivating the youth. Like many of our students, Ricardo, his family, and his community surpass my expectations, and I am sure he will play an active role in El Salvador's improving future.

While I was at the graduation party for Ricardo I received unexpected news of another example of how our projects bear fruit. I posted a photo of the celebration to my Facebook account, and almost instantly a message came from another of our loan recipients, Mirna Yamilet, informing me that she had successfully defended her thesis that very morning and that she hoped that I will be at her graduation in March of 2017.



diploma



Mirna Yamilet in a garden

I will tell you all about Mirna in a future newsletter, but here I would like to share a recent photo of her in the patio of her mother's rural home. As the years pass, I begin to see patterns in life and work in El Salvador, stages that start and finish, people who come and go, activities that open and close.

## Palo Alto Friends Meeting *El Salvador Projects*

It is evident to me that I would not be in El Salvador if I were not the son of Carmen Moran Broz, born in El Salvador in 1923. Her life of giving and helping others was commemorated in El Salvador just days after she died on September 17<sup>th</sup>, then again in Palo Alto, California on December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2015, in a celebration of her life with many friends and family present. One of my mother's last wishes was to be entombed in the family crypt in the cemetery of Sonsonate, where her mother

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Padre Rogelio Poncel

I brought her ashes back to El Salvador in December. My wife, Tita, suggested we wait to have her remains entombed so that her Catholic friends could commemorate her life in a tradition known as "Cabo de Año," a Catholic mass which is celebrated exactly one year to the day of a person's passing, so on Saturday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, we held a mass here at the Art Center for Peace in Suchitoto. The ceremony was done by a well-known Catholic Priest Rogelio Poncel, from the parish in Torola, Morazán. Father Rogelio has been active with the communities we work with in Morazán since the 1980s. Originally from Belgium, Padre Rogelio was nearly defrocked in the 1980s for defying the Salvadoran Catholic church, and leaving his assigned church to go into the mountains as a pastor to the guerilla rebels from Morazán. This was his way to follow Monseñor Oscar Romero's conviction that church is for everyone, including the poor of rural El Salvador who needed

religious support from the church in a time when many could not attend in the cities because of the persecution of the military government and paramilitary groups during the 12 years of civil war.

It was a challenge to get the word out about the commemorative mass for Carmen, but through a network of friends we sent invitations out to all of the people and communities we have worked with through the years, as well as to close friends and family who knew Carmen or worked directly with her in the early 1990s. Close to one hundred people came from around El Salvador. Many shared their testimonies of how they knew Carmen or how their communities were benefited by her work. This event helped me find a final closure to my mother's life and death, and showed once again how important our work in El Salvador continues to be. Carmen's ashes are now buried. She has departed this world, but she will never be forgotten by her family, friends, and those she worked with throughout her life of service to others, a life inspired by her mentors, the Quaker philosopher Douglas Steere at Haverford College, and Dorothy Day, with whom Carmen spent a year in New York at the Catholic Worker house. As I close this report, I am so aware that it was my mother, Carmen, who showed me that we all need to give back to this world we live in, and imparted her conviction that just how, when, and where we do this should be part of each individual's personal leading. My leading is to continue Carmen's mission of service to the poor of rural El Salvador, a vocation that has shaped and enriched my life, made possible by your generous support for more than a quarter century.

In Peace, and with gratitude – Robert Broz

**Please... por favor...  
Your donations  
sustain the El  
Salvador Projects!**

Project Director Robert Broz quoted Ricardo Joel, who urged younger people of his small rural village attending the celebration of his graduation from the university: *As you can see, anything is possible. This, my dream, was only possible because of my hard work and desire, the continued and full support and love of my family, as well as the financial support of the programs available to youth from Suchitoto. Don't let anything stop you! Don't let anyone tell you it can't be done!*

Ricardo Joel exemplifies the harvest – a new vision of life in El Salvador, vibrant with energy and confidence arising from the experience of success despite great odds. The seeds of hope are there, awaiting the vital nourishment that comes from a small community of donors dedicated to supporting education for young people from impoverished families.

Does this really matter – educating a dozen or two bright young *campesino* kids year after year – in a small Central American country struggling to overcome violent crime, political corruption, and a long history of severe economic inequality? We believe each of those determined kids is individually important, and we know the good that comes from their achievements ripples out to benefit many others. In this newsletter and previous reports, Robert Broz has described families in which children educated with your donations use their earnings to educate their younger brothers and sisters, or their cousins. The principal of the El Barío School, Guadalupe Casco, was a *maestra popular* just after the settlement of the civil war, studying a grade or two beyond her students. She became a certified teacher with support from the El Salvador Projects, and her leadership has helped to educate a new generation from that rural region.

**Your donations are used with great care, and they go a long way!**

If you have not contributed recently, or if you can add to what you've already given, please be assured that even a small donation helps a great deal. (Larger donations are most welcome, of course!) You may be glad to know that The Palo Alto Friends Meeting is a nonprofit organization, so contributions to PAFM – E.S. Projects are fully tax deductible.

**Thank you so much for doing all you can!**

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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## November 2016 Newsletter

## Page

### What's Inside:

- Note from the Clerk 1
- Director's Letter 2
- Your Financial Support Matters 8

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Address Corrections Requested