

Palo Alto Friends EL SALVADOR PROJECTS May 2010

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20 Years! Celebration in El Salvador

Report and pictures by Jamie and Marion Newton

Bienvenidos a esta celebración del veinte aniversario

de los Proyectos El Salvador. Como siempre pasa en la vida, he recibido más que lo he dado... "Welcome to this celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the El Salvador Projects. As always happens in life, I have received more than I have given. I have learned that one can end poverty in less than a generation with little money, but with people determined to make the future different in a positive way...."



Carmen Broz

On a big projection screen, Carmen Broz welcomed everyone in a clear voice, with characteristic warmth and eloquence. At 86 and having once suffered a heart attack during a flight to El Salvador, Carmen felt unable to be present in person, so we videotaped her greeting in her home in Santa Rosa, California.

It brought a deeply emotional response from the more than 175 Salvadorans who watched silently with rapt attention in the high-ceilinged chapel of the Art Center for Peace in Suchitoto, site of the *conmemoración* – the gathering to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Quaker Projects in El Salvador. Participants had come from many parts of the country, from the four communities where



Participants in the capilla of the Art Center for Peace

our projects are currently most active (El Barío, Apulo, El Gigante, and Jocoaitique), and from villages with names that will be familiar only to very long-term supporters of the Projects: El Sitio, Amando López, La Canoa in the Bajo Lempa, El Presidio Liberado, Santa Anita, and many others.

We scheduled the event on Sunday, March 21, for the convenience of those also attending the historic 30th anniversary homage to Archbishop Romero in San Salvador, an hour from Suchitoto, on the previous day. Others boarded buses as early as 4:30 a.m. to travel long distances and arrive in time for a tamale breakfast. Filled nearly to capacity, the spacious chapel would have been overwhelmed had Robert Broz not insisted that each community limit its representation to those few who had been directly involved with the Projects – current and former students and their families, child care and health workers, and others whose skills and commitment to community improvement have been so important for so long.

Tita Broz, Robert's wife, led us through the ambitious full-day program with grace and contagious enthusiasm, releasing Robert to oversee the practical mechanics of the complex event. We were welcomed by Sister Peggy O'Neill, a former university professor with a doctorate in theology. She has served the people of Suchitoto since the worst days of the civil war and later founded the *Centro Arte para la Paz*, <http://capsuchitoto.org>, on the site of a Catholic school that had been shut down in 1980. Artistic creativity and peace initiatives now flourish here where this entire city was virtually abandoned in 1980 due to the intensity of the conflict. Governor Walter Naverrete of the Department (State) of Cuscatlán applauded the Projects' emphasis on education for the poor. His verbal commitment to a future of justice and equality was visually affirmed by his Archbishop Romero T-shirt.



Tita Broz, master of ceremonies

Most of the day was devoted to *testimonios*, personal testimonies by more than twenty people who had accepted an open invitation to share their memories and reflect on what the Projects have meant to them personally and to their communities. From speakers ranging from high school and university students to elderly people who remembered all too clearly the years of war and the severe conditions under which Carmen worked at the outset came powerful, unscripted statements made with deep feeling and the

unmistakable authenticity that flows from life-changing experiences. We heard stories of physicians' visits and establishment of child care centers where professional health care for women was unheard of and resources for nutrition and early education of children were meager among the poor. Parents barely able to read and write spoke with pride and wonder of their children who have graduated as teachers, nurses, pharmacists, or systems engineers. Community leaders described the emergence of hope and the dramatically motivating influence of resources for education and



Javier Galdamez, graduate

community initiatives. They expressed confidence in the community to steward these resources wisely. Students and graduates spoke movingly of their aspirations, of their determination to justify the opportunities the Projects have opened to them, and of their visions of the future that they will help to create.

Before the *conmemoración*, very few of the people we've worked with knew much about the scope of the Projects outside their own communities, so each

group was asked to prepare a display with photos and memorabilia to illustrate its own history. These carefully crafted posters covered a long wall outside the chapel, and throughout the day groups of participants could be seen moving slowly from one to the next, fascinated to learn about the work, past and present, in other parts of El Salvador.

We enjoyed traditional dances by a group of our own students from Morazán, and the program concluded

with invigorating music from two bands, *Heroes del Guazapa* (a local Suchitoto band) and *Los Torogoces*, a band from Morazán that originated in the mountains during the war years.

We can only hint at the richness and inspiration of the

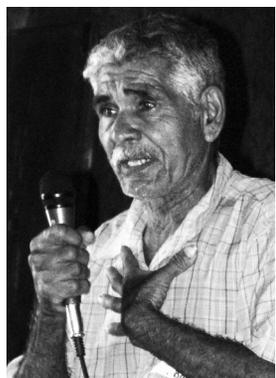
conmemoración here. Fortunately, Robert arranged for photo and video documentation by a team of young people



Silvia Sáenz, community leader



Ermelinda Fuentes, graduate



Valentin Landaverde, community leader

from the "*Consortio*," the media training project of the *Centro Arte*, to supplement our own pictures and videos. The main program was completely recorded, plus interviews with many participants and still photos. These include details of all of the wall displays from the communities and service groups represented. The Committee now has copies of the raw videos and photos, and the *Consortio* is producing a half-hour edited video with highlights of the event. After the *conmemoración*, the small Suchitoto Friends Worship Group hosted an unprogrammed Quaker meeting for worship. It included Jamie and Marion Newton and Bren Darrow from Palo Alto Meeting; from El Salvador, Robert and Tita Broz, Cristóbal Chicas, and Frank Cummings (Atlanta Friends Meeting in the U.S.); from Friends Peace Teams, Val Liveoak and Margaret Lechner; and from the Friends *Progresá* program that supports education in Guatemala, a delegation of four: Miguel Angel Costop, Jaime Torres, Meme Romero, and Flor Cotzojay.

Carmen Broz concluded her greeting to the gathering with these words (in Spanish): *Having taken advantage of this opportunity that was given to you, my hope is that you will be able to create as well an opportunity for other children and other communities. May God bless you. May you enjoy this celebration. I love you, and I thank you for your affection for me.* This experience strengthened our personal commitment to continue to provide educational opportunities that are so dramatically transforming the lives of families and whole communities in the poor rural areas of El Salvador. Through this newsletter, as well as the in-person reports on the Projects that we will offer as widely

as possible, we hope to strengthen the commitment that so many supporters of the El Salvador Projects have held for years, and to reach out to new supporters. It seems that each day brings news of more crises and desperate human needs around the world that touch us all. Yes, emergency aid is important when hurricanes, earthquakes, and other calamities hit... But the testimonies given with such sincerity at the *conmemoración* forcefully showed us that enduring changes require the sustained dedication and reliable resources, carefully managed, that the El Salvador Projects have provided for two decades. [Thank you for your part in making this possible!](#)



Hilda Casco de Broz making video

Grupo Danza de Morazán: university and high school students from El Gigante





Los Torogoces de Morazán music group singing songs of struggle.

Report of the Project Director

Late last year it was decided by our committee in Palo Alto to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of our work here in El Salvador. As a first effort, a 20-page booklet was sent to all on our donor mailing list. We also decided to celebrate locally. A large event was planned and held on Sunday, March 21st to coincide with the 30-year commemorative activities of Monseñor Romero's assassination (see report by Jamie and Marion Newton). As Project Director it was my responsibility to make arrangements for the event, much of which involved visits around the country to the many communities we have worked with over the years.

In many of the communities our support ended in the mid-1990s, some later, some earlier. I prepared myself for days filled with emotion, not knowing if people would remember my mother, our support, or even if projects we had supported would still be functioning. On one such visit we came to the building next to the small Catholic church in Apopa, looking for signs of what we knew as "Apopa Day Care Center", without seeing or hearing any of the familiar signs of children playing, just some elders sitting outside in wheel chairs. After explaining to a woman there, we were told that the day care center had closed many years ago and now the center was used as a retirement home. The priest we knew had been moved to another parish and only one elderly woman remembered the day care center and Carmen. I began to wonder if this would happen in other projects.

On another trip to San Salvador, my spirits lightened after a visit to "El Centro Hogar," a day care center that is now run by the Nuevo Amanecer Association. This center started with a group of children that my mother Carmen had in her home. Here we found that four other day

care centers that we supported in the early 90s were still functioning in the lower Lempa river area currently administrated by the Association. We were also given the names and phone numbers of many support people and groups that worked with Carmen in the early years. In later visits I was impressed and moved by the people we found. In the community of Nueva Esperanza an old friend, Pilar, told how Carmen arranged for medical treatment for their three-year-old child, now 18. In the day care center of Amado Lopez, Maria Mercedes recalled how Carmen scolded her on a visit to the center where she found toys we had donated on a shelf wrapped in plastic, just as new as the day they were bought. When Carmen asked why the toys were out of reach of the children, Maria said that they did not want them to be ruined. Carmen angrily told her that the toys were for the children, and that they were to be used daily and that if they broke we would provide more.



Maria Mercedes

At the day care center in El Presidio Liberado the young woman in charge of the center looked only 20 years old. When I asked if she knew about my mother or our projects, she said that she did not remember personally but knew all about Carmen, as her mother was one of the first women to work at the center. She had talked frequently about my mother as she was growing up. As you all can imagine the entire experience was overwhelming, yet I personally feel that it has inspired me to do my best as Project Director to rebuild ties to the many communities and people we have worked with over the last 20 years.

Currently, I would like to mention that this year we are supporting 23 university students, more than we have ever taken on in one year. Initially, our local committee approved support for 18 students, but we found that the five additional applications were from students that we have supported since elementary school. A special request was made to our committee members in Palo Alto as we felt it would be unjust to tell these students that we could not support them in their

university studies due to our financial limitations, after years of motivating them to stay in school. The request was approved, even though we will digging into our limited reserves. So if any of you would like to help us support these students, I would be more than happy to send a short biography of each to see if we can match students with particular donors or groups!

I know you are interested to hear a little about current events in El Salvador:

President Mauricio Funes has been receiving strong criticism from members of his own party. In two recent public appearances Funes stated that although he was elected as the candidate for the FMLN, now as President elect of El Salvador, he represents all Salvadorans. These statements were made after being questioned about differences of opinions between the President and leaders of the FMLN. My close friends in the FMLN say that the internal conflicts within the party are being overemphasized by the press in efforts to increase the conflict between Funes and the FMLN party leaders and cause public discontent.

Also in the news locally, discrepancies have been discovered in the distribution of agricultural packages of seed and fertilizers that historically have been handed out by the central government. Now under the management of the Funes administration it was found that over 300,000 of the 600,000-plus past beneficiaries do not cultivate basic grains. Some do not even have land! Here in Suchitoto, public school principals, postal workers and ARENA party leaders were on the list used for the agricultural package distribution for the past decade. Under the Funes administration, local committees in each municipality have been formed from members of all political parties in an effort to revise the list. The agricultural production project's goal was to aid the poorest and increase the production of basic grain crops in El Salvador, but for years it was considered an ARENA party tactic to buy votes. This is the first time that lists of beneficiaries have been made public. Under the Funes administration it is just one of many examples of changes that are being implemented in an effort to show how and where public funds are being invested.

Warm greetings to you all!

—**Robert Broz Moran**,



President Mauricio Funes, right, addresses the crowd

Honoring Archbishop Romero

by Jamie and Marion Newton

Known during his lifetime as the voice of the Salvadoran poor, since he was gunned down while celebrating mass on March 24, 1980, Archbishop Oscar Romero has been honored annually in San Salvador with a rally, a procession to the national cathedral, and an all-night vigil. These events of homage had special meaning in this 30th year since the assassination, since it is the first year when the presidency of El Salvador has been held by the FMLN, the party that represents the popular movement for social and economic democracy. The three of us from Palo Alto Friends Meeting – Jamie and Marion Newton and Bren Darrow – arrived at the rally with our Salvadoran friends and met members of the South Bay Sanctuary Covenant delegation. We were surprised and pleased when Salvadoran President Mauricio Funes strode onto the stage with his wife and gave a moving extemporaneous speech in which he pledged that his administration would be guided by the Archbishop's vision of a society with guarantees of equal rights for all and an end to poverty. As Robert Broz's article in this newsletter explains, such a pledge is difficult to implement in El Salvador as it is in the United States, due to powerful and well-funded interest groups determined to preserve the dominance of a small elite. Nevertheless, as the procession to the cathedral moved through the streets its numbers swelled far beyond any we have seen in previous years, lending visible support to the hopeful reports of optimism and extraordinary effort that we've heard from our friends in rural El Salvador.

South Bay Sanctuary Covenant Hosts Us

by Jamie and Marion Newton

Palo Alto Friends Meeting is among the communities of faith that united to form the South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC) to help Salvadoran refugees and to work for peace and justice during the war years. Since then, SBSC has remained an interdenominational resource to Central American immigrants in the Palo Alto area and has worked effectively with the rural poor in El Salvador, with some members of Palo Alto Meeting very active in SBSC since its inception. In March of 2010, SBSC took an unusually large Bay Area delegation (nearly 30 people!) to El Salvador.

A dinner meeting was held between our two groups at the *El Torogoz* guest house in San Salvador, hosted by SBSC. We were guests along with Robert Broz, Frank Cummings (a member of the Atlanta Friends Meeting who lives in Suchitoto, where he has organized a municipal higher education scholarship program), one of our university graduates, and several of our students. We shared highlights of the *conmemoración* that took place two days before, and our student loan recipients described their life circumstances, programs of study, and aspirations. SBSC is currently considering a new emphasis on education in the Lower Lempa region, and we look forward optimistically to developing a closer partnership with this local organization of kindred spirits.



Viewing the wall displays at the *conmemoración*



Conmemoración lunch in the Centro Arte para la Paz



Robert Broz, university students, and one graduate share experiences with South Bay Sanctuary Covenant



This year's university students in San Miguel, in the student house.

Most pictures in this issue are by the Newtons

Clerk Trudy Reagan writes:

On an airplane returning from El Salvador in 1999, I sat by another woman also named Trudy, from a Texas NGO. She described destitute villages she had visited, where school children met under the trees, and all had to bring their own chairs. "That's how we began in El Barío," I thought. "I'm so grateful for our school building, crowded, hot and noisy though it is!"

Robert and Carmen had found an architect for a new one, had applied for and gotten a grant for materials from a Spanish NGO. During my visit, I had just witnessed the townspeople organizing the volunteers who would build it.

Also, 1999 was the first year we had high school graduates, who had bused to Suchitoto for instruction. Such able children inspired Carmen to secure, for the first time, funds for our students to attend college.

Eleven years later, and how the projects have flourished! New buildings with large classrooms enabled El Barío to offer a full K-12 curriculum, serving 380 students. Robert Broz moved to Suchitoto and took the helm, and became a creative force there as well as in the projects. Frank Cummings teamed up with him, spreading the idea to *campesino* children that they, too, could have a professional career.

Robert's effort to form a local committee involving the far-flung communities was very difficult at first, but he persisted. Today, the 20th Anniversary has made every community, past and present, conscious of what their collective efforts have wrought, for themselves and their country.

We have the humbling responsibility to not falter in enabling the hopes of so many! In particular, we want the children coming up to have assurance that if they have good grades, they too can have a chance to develop professional skills to be positive forces in their country. As Robert reminds us in his letters, there are still many negative forces at play.

Though we ask \$1000 per year to send a student on to higher education, it actually costs a few hundred more, which students and families raise. Among our donors, there are many who have sent just what they could afford to this, and became joint sponsors of a student. Several Friends Meetings, like Boulder, CO, and churches have formed groups of members to adopt a student.

We now have 58 graduates! They are either giving back to their communities, or giving help to another student to attend. Do consider being a sponsor yourself!

Warmly, **Trudy Reagan,**

Clerk of Palo Alto Friends El Salvador Projects



Bachillerato (high school) class at the El Barío School, 2009



YES! I WANT TO OFFER ACCESS TO EDUCATION AT ALL LEVELS IN EL SALVADOR!

Mail to: Palo Alto Friends Meeting - El Salvador Projects, 957 Colorado, Palo Alto, CA 94303

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY - STATE - ZIP _____

AMOUNT ENCLOSED _____

Contribution checks should be made to:

"PAFM - E.S. Projects" (Stands for Palo Alto Friends Meeting - El Salvador Projects)

This will be used for **General Programs**, unless you specify in the memo line

"College Loans" or another preference. *Your contribution is tax-deductible.*