

# Palo Alto Friends EL SALVADOR PROJECTS NEWS November, 2007

*Our Field Director, Robert Broz, writes from El Salvador:*

Many thanks to all the people I had a chance to see and meet on my recent trip to the U.S.! I would also like to invite groups in the U.S. that support us to contact our committee for a personal project update on my next trip, probably in 2009.

Since my return to El Salvador in early September, the country continues to suffer from the abuse and violence of the right-wing central government. The last outbreak occurred two weeks ago in Cutumay Camones, a suburb of Santa Ana. 500 police were called to this protest against the construction of a new land fill to be located only 700 meters from the drinking water source for about 8000 people. Without warning, tear gas, mace, and rubber bullets were used against the civilian population, and 15 people were badly injured, including one reporter. Our President, Antonio Saca, after supporting the manner in which the police reacted, apologized for the intense beating of one reporter, saying this was the work of a rogue officer.

On the positive side, the FMLN announced last month that Mauricio Funes had accepted the nomination for the presidential elections of 2009. Funes, a liberal journalist, has been mentioned in past elections but never nominated. Meanwhile, the ARENA party is suffering an internal dispute. Two rival party members may run in upcoming elections, which may favor the FMLN (left-wing) party in 2009.

Being involved with Friends' projects has brought me much personal and spiritual satisfaction, especially recently. In August, I attended Pacific Yearly Meeting, a Quaker gathering that I had never experienced as an adult. Being around so many Friends has left me in a very reflective and spiritual state of mind, and has influenced my participation as Field Director here in El Salvador.

We have some new areas of focus for our work. We are sponsoring four workshops to build low-cost, high-efficiency woodburning cook stoves in the four communities where we work. The first was held in Apulo. Even though it was a stormy Sunday morning, 20 men, women, and children attended! First, I showed how the stove I own works by making a large pot of coffee. We then constructed one stove, to be donated to the Association in Apulo. Then, with very little supervision the group built nine additional stoves. The stoves cost about \$5.50 each to



Wood cookstove workshop. Twig-sized wood goes in small hole at the base.

build. We provided the materials for one stove and the bricks for 9 others, while each participant provided the container in which the stove is built. Very satisfying!

In October we helped organize and partially financed our first AVP (Alternatives to Violence Program) workshop in Suchitoto. The workshop was coordinated by the Friends' Peace Teams, Frank Cummings (a Quaker who lives in Suchitoto), Sister Peggy together with the Art Center for Peace, and our local



An AVP Workshop exercise challenges participants!

committee. 19 participated, including myself, two members from our communities in Morazán, and one member from Apulo. Coming up soon are more sessions, one to prepare facilitators to give their own AVP workshops. My hopes are that this will be an ongoing project and that funds will be available to continue with AVP in the following years.

It brings me great pleasure to attend the graduation of our university students. On October 27, I attended the graduation of Jose Saúl Chicas Argueta. Saúl graduated from the Jesuit University (UCA) in Law, and he is the first student from the cooperative Sueños en Jocoaitique to graduate with a B.S. degree.

In September, our local committee composed of representatives of each community prepared the budget for 2008, after hearing requests from each member. We will continue to support junior high and high school students in El Gigante, Sueños, and Apulo, and will assist with the costs of librarians and teachers in El Barío. We also approved support for a communal bank in Apulo, training of local women from Suchitoto in production and marketing, and continued support for the art school in Perquín. The university student loan program will support 11 continuing students, and in 2008 we hope to provide support to 14 new students.



Jose Saúl Chicas Argueta at graduation.

With your continued support, we are able to continue our work!

With many warm feelings toward you,

—Robert Broz

Field Director, Palo Alto Friends Meeting "El Salvador Proects"

When Carmen endorsed a donation to the Walls of Hope Art School in Perquín, she reasoned that art education touches everyone, even those not academically inclined—and, here was yet another outstanding person doing work in El Salvador to partner with.

Trudy Reagan taught at the art school last summer, and learned that the way Claudia Bernardi, the founder, involves the community also promotes peace!

In 2006, El Mozote commemorated the 25th anniversary of the massacre of nearly 900 people during the war. Claudia was invited to organize the painting of murals on the sides of the church. "I don't paint the murals, the community does. But first they have to come to an agreement about what it will include." She found it to be a community with many divisions, particularly between those who had lost family members and those who had come to this location that had been completely leveled to start anew. The themes they chose were to show the town before the war, plus hopes for the future. In the decision-making process, the community began to come together.

Perquín is also a very divided community, between the more elite ARENA party, which recently won the mayorship, and the FMLN, or peasant party. Yet, when the art school lost its meeting place, the ARENA mayor, who likes art, allowed them to meet in the portico of city hall. Mostly peasant children and adults attend the classes, and its numerous murals promote peace and justice. Now, another ARENA member has donated land for an ambitious educational complex. He informed Claudia that he wants to include the art school in his plans! She loves to offer something that both sides of the political spectrum are eager to participate in, bringing people together!

[www.wallsofhope.org](http://www.wallsofhope.org)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El\\_Mozote\\_massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Mozote_massacre)



Claudia Bernardi, art teacher, stands by one of the El Mozote murals with one of the young people who helped paint it and a visitor.

## It Began With Pupusas

Mariah Babin, Teen Trip participant



Mariah Babin of San Carlos, CA.

It began with pupusas, those cake-like tortillas that mysteriously have a filling. After much of the night in awkward positions in the desperate attempt for sleep, after waiting and waiting to be picked up from the airport, tentatively trying to begin conversations with people I was barely acquainted with in a country I didn't know much about, my love for pupusas and El Salvador

began instantaneously with my first bite. Maybe it was the hunger after a night on a turbulent plane, or maybe it was just excitement at what I viewed as my first REAL Salvadoran experience. Pupusas were my first introduction into the cuisine and culture of El Salvador.

Now, the trip really began. The group of six teenagers and five adults made our way to Suchitoto, seeing glimpses of the country that was to be our home for the next seven days. We came to Suchi, as it is affectionately called, exhausted but happy. The hostel was beautiful, with an open courtyard, which the rain poured into in sheets during the thunderous nights. Each of us was paired with a partner to share a room with a stool, a small wooden closet, and bunk beds. After exploring Suchi with its beautiful cobblestone streets and tall, picturesque *iglesia* in the town square, buying souvenirs (and a hat that would follow me everywhere no matter how many times I forgot it), we met in an outdoor adjoining courtyard for worship and to hear about why we were gathered and what we were setting out to do. This was also my first introduction to Quakerism, which I was to learn much more about. Roberto and Koky, our guides and friends, explained to us that on this whirlwind adventure we were here to learn about the culture of the country and to help with service projects. We learned more about Carmen Broz, from whose vision our entire trip stemmed, and whose son is in fact Roberto. What we weren't told, but would find out ourselves, is that we would meet amazing, historical people who would be some of the kindest

I've met anywhere in my entire life. Or that we would see some of the most radically different, remarkable sights of our lives. But I guess that was implied.

Over the course of the week we were immersed in a completely new and interesting culture. We visited a school, played games, spoke very broken but earnest Spanish, explained who we were and where we came from, stayed with families in El Barío for a night where we went on the most frightening high-speed ferris wheel rides of our lives. We laughed a lot, got sick at least once, moved all around the country, visited a war museum, heard speeches, met scholarship students, hiked, were shown stores where hammocks are made, learned about the different political parties. We were given the opportunity to listen to and meet Los Torogoces de Morazán, the amazing revolutionary band from the Civil War, boated on Lake Suchitlán, swam, worshipped, ate meals I have never heard of and mostly enjoyed. We met the feistiest Catholic nun I have ever encountered. According to her, love for El Salvador is like a low-grade herpes virus. Once you catch it, you may not see it for a long time, but you can guarantee it won't lie dormant forever. In the process, we learned more about each other.

We came on the trip as six very different teenagers, three of whom were already pals (Kaley, Avery, and Allison), three of whom had very briefly met (Alice, Cosmo, and myself). But by the time we left, after spending a week and learning about each other's lives, staying up late and sharing those deepest parts of ourselves, we left bonded by the intense experience of El Salvador, never to forget that time we spent together.

The last experience of our trip to El Salvador was learning to make the pupusas that had first brought us together. We learned to pat the dough into a flat circle, dab bits of various fillings in the middle, to seal the edges, and lastly to fry it. We were clumsy, and were good-naturedly laughed at for our efforts. The last real memory of the whole group together is sitting in Roberto's house, talking and laughing, and eating the food that brought us together. And that is how I will forever remember my first trip to El Salvador.

## Welcoming the Stranger

Barbara Babin, teen group leader

We took our second group of teens to El Salvador this summer, another unforgettable experience. Last year's service learning trip was such a success that we tried it again. There were six young people—three from California and three from Washington, five girls and one guy—all eager to immerse themselves in another language, culture, and political context to experience daily life in a developing country.

Through daily worship-sharing and discussions about what Quakers believe, the group explored how the Spirit is working in their lives and reflected on their experiences each day. Through the three half-day service projects, meals and interactive sessions in the community halls, a visit to the agricultural co-operatives, and an overnight stay in local homes, the group learned about the daily lives in the communities that we visited and made friends with our hosts. The young people asked many questions about the current political situation (especially as a few weeks before our arrival in Suchitoto there had been a nonviolent protest resulting in many arrests) and gained historical perspective about the civil war by listening to the stories of ex-combatants.

The group was eager to work hard and they lifted rocks, mixed concrete, and dug out weeds uncomplainingly in sweltering temperatures. We hope that our work was helpful to the communities, though we spent so little time in each one. I have been thinking about how my own service is often inspired by Matthew 25:35 "for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me."

We are so grateful to the people of El Barrio, El Gigante, Jocoaitique, and Apulo. We were strangers and you welcomed us as though we were long lost family.

## El Salvador Teen Service-Learning Trips<sup>4</sup> for July 2008

Complete information will be posted at <http://www.pafmelsalvadorprojects.org/teentrips.html> in late December.

Participants will be able to choose to make their trip one, two, or three weeks long.

### Week 1

July 5\*-13

Intensive language program in Suchitoto, with opportunities for cultural exchange and excursions to El Barío and San Salvador. Accommodations in hostel.

### Week 2

July 12\*-20

Intensive service opportunity in one of the communities, project and location to be determined in December 2007. Home-stays.

### Week 3

July 19\*-27

Varied service and learning experiences in the Suchitoto area and closest communities. Accommodations in hostel and possibly one night home-stay.

\*Flights leaving the San Francisco Bay Area on Saturday evening will arrive in San Salvador on Sunday morning

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## Club Leo

The wonderful librarian at Selby Lane School in Redwood City, CA gave us a huge discount on books for El Salvador during the school's annual book fair. A PTA fund-raiser, the fair orders books in Spanish and English. We were able to purchase over \$300 worth of books for \$100, and during the summer trip we distributed them in El Barrio, El Gigante, Jocoaitique, and Apulo. Watch for announcements of the book fair in our Spring newsletter.



So eager is this woman to try the glasses that she hasn't yet taken the tag off!

## A letter from the Clerk, Trudy Reagan

Though you may be someone who has been following these projects for a long time, I think their accomplishments over time are very impressive when you see them together.

I knew Carmen Broz in 1989 when she retired to her native country, El Salvador, to be of service. The war was still raging, which affected the day care center and nursery school she was just starting with Norma Guirola de Herrera. During a fierce city-wide battle in San Salvador, Norma was captured and killed! Carmen's sons advised her to come home for a spell. She returned as soon as she could, to create her school for very young children of poor, marginalized women in San Salvador.

In Palo Alto, our Friends Meeting recognized that some help was needed for Carmen stateside. Over time we formed a support committee to handle donations, do accounts, and to forward funds and supplies to El Salvador. When Carmen was in this country, we helped her with speaking engagements.

She multiplied her efforts by working with community leaders already doing education work. For instance, in El Barío, a community she already knew, "popular teachers" were teaching children, they themselves learning as they went. With her help, the school expanded. In 1998, Carmen and her son Robert wrote a grant proposal to a Spanish NGO, which then gave materials to build a better school in El Barío. The community did the construction.

In 1998, children she had first taught to read were graduating from high school, and her dream became to send the very brightest on to higher education in San Salvador.

"Sending peasants to college would be like teaching slaves<sup>5</sup> in the Old South to read!" she said, and she found sponsors for them. Thus, our student aid project was born, where ideally, students after graduation pay back the loans by service to the community or by helping others to attend. In this way also, several popular teachers obtained their teaching credentials. Since 1999 we have graduated 50 students.

As well, capable leaders from groups in other parts of the country inspired her to grant small scholarships for K-12 school tuition, uniforms and supplies. One area was in rugged Morazán province. Just following the Peace Accords in 1992, she provided pediatric services until she got to know the community and the children, then she funded their education.

In 1999, I visited Carmen and the projects and saw the postwar optimism and rebuilding! Shortly before, she and the University of Central America had organized the first ever AVP (Alternatives to Violence) workshop in El Salvador. Later, Lynn Mitchell and I visited around New Year's in 2001. We had no sooner gotten back when a massive earthquake hit El Salvador, the first of two big ones! Special fundraising helped a community called Nuevo Jerusalén to rebuild.

In 1999, Carmen was already preparing a transition to a time when she could no longer be there. Finding someone to actually direct the operations in-country was tough. Ultimately, her son Robert, working in El Salvador as an agronomist for another Quaker group, proved to be the best candidate!

Since then, Robert has established remarkable rapport with the communities and the college-age students. With his community development and agronomy background, he has been able to see ways to extend the scope of the projects, again by working with people already doing good things. The project to teach how to build cheap, efficient and environmentally-friendly wood cook stoves is but one example.

Over the years, cultural exchange with the projects has immeasurably enriched our Meeting with knowledge of the realities of the developing world, and the intelligence! the kindness! the resilience! of the people there. Most recently,



Two of the five buildings of the El Barío comprehensive K-12 school.

college student Bren Darrow went in 2005 and 2006, and helped start the AGE (Adults, Glasses, and Education) project, and Barbara Babin took teen groups down in 2006 and 2007. I myself spent three weeks there, two of them with the Walls of Hope Art School, our newest partnership ([www.wallsofhope.org](http://www.wallsofhope.org)). We hope we inspire other groups to find a Third World community to partner with.

I was, however, discouraged to find the political situation less than healthy. When El Salvador adopted the dollar as its currency in 1999, and later, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the losers were peasant farmers. The super rich in the ARENA (right wing) party are pushing their globalization agenda harder, and are beginning to use the demonizing label, "terrorists" on those who oppose it.

So many peasants grow corn, only to be driven out of business by imported (and subsidized) American corn, then decide emigration is the answer. This has hollowed out communities. (However, money these emigrés send home is very welcome)!



Quique, a community leader in El Gigante, stands in the macadamia nut nursery of 5,000 seedlings.

I was proud to see how our Morazán community leaders in El Gigante and Sueños en Jocoaitique are dealing with globalization. They are calculating what they can grow as a possible export crop: macademia nuts. They raise bees, which will make macademia honey. This is still in the early stages, but the bees are already finding other flowers, and the honey business is prospering!

I was talking to Carmen the other day, and she told me again, "Poverty can be ended rapidly with very little money by educating each child." On December 15th, Carmen will celebrate her 85th birthday. Happy Birthday, Carmen!

—Trudy Reagan



The *iglesia* and town square at Suchitoto



Sebastian, founder of Los Torogoces de Morazán band, and Rigo, teacher at Walls of Hope Art School, Perquín. Sketches by Trudy Reagan.



Tita, Roberto's wife, cooks the pupusas that the kids made. Photos by Trudy

**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-deductable.



**OTHER WAYS YOU CAN HELP:**

Please send **eyeglass donations** for Project AGE to  
James Newton, 1007 Almanor Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025

We can use old laptops! Please send **laptop donations** to  
"PAFM-ES" - %Paul Engstrom", 655 Washington, Los Altos, CA 94022 (Clearly mark **"PAFM-ES"** on the package)  
These will be used in the computer lab at the El Barío high school.

**Laptop requirements:** 1) Pentium 3( 700mhertz or faster) or newer with  
at least 128 mb memory and hard drives of 2gb or larger.  
2) no Macs as we have a hard time finding software in Spanish  
3) They can have cracked screens, bad mouse pads or keyboards and dead batteries  
as we can use external accessories and will have access to electrical outlets.

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