

Palo Alto Friends Meeting El Salvador Projects

Letter from the Director

Robert Broz



*Robert Broz, director, with Oscar Ventura
See the story on page 6*

Dear Friends of the El Salvador
Projects -

I am always filled with gratitude as I begin a report to you, for it is your support that makes our work possible. Many of you have told us that you rely on my first-hand observations to understand the realities of life in El Salvador, so I will begin by reflecting on the unusual circumstances of the recent election process in El Salvador. Then I'll bring you up to date on our current work, highlighting several of our students and graduates.

Note from the Clerk

Dear Readers,
Welcome to our first newsletter of the year. It includes an up-to-date report of present life in El Salvador from our director, Robert Broz.

Robert's "on the ground" perspective of current issues is always a fascinating part of our committee meetings. We hear of everyday things like the weather or the recent elections. We catch up with past and present students, hear of the joys and frustrations of his work and the care and concern he brings to it. After a recent health scare, we were pleased to see him recover so quickly and so well.

Robert's continuing efforts to help and encourage Salvadoran youth ensure that your money is spent wisely on students in need. In this issue we follow up with some past students including Clelia, Bela, Jazmin, Ernesto, and Milton. Past and present, these students value the education your contributions have assured them.

We go to great effort and expense to send this newsletter out to let you know about the progress of the program. Therefore, we encourage you to share the newsletter with others. Who knows, one of them might decide to support the program, too!

It is such a pleasure to serve on this committee. We are privileged to see first hand how your help changes lives.

In Peace,
Claire Arnold
Clerk of El Salvador Projects Committee

~ Results of Salvadoran Elections ~

Elections were held on March 1st in El Salvador to elect mayors, city councils, National Assembly members, and – for the first time – 20 candidates to serve in the Central American Parliament. This election brought little of the animosity that was common some years ago.

Some changes in the voting process were confusing. Only one of the three paper ballots was similar to the ballots of past elections, with just a flag for each party. The other two ballots were poster size, with columns of names and photos of all candidates beneath the party flags.

This time a new process, “crossed” or “mixed” votes, allowed votes for candidates from more than one party. For the National Assembly, a person could vote for up to the total number of representatives in their department, and for the Central American Parliament (which were elected positions for the first time) they could vote for up to 20 candidates. If a ballot were mismarked in any way it would be nullified.

For the first time in my 20 years as a voter in El Salvador, it was much longer than the usual 2-3 days before official results were announced nearly four weeks after the elections. On the evening of March 27th the Supreme Electoral Tribune (TSE) announced the final results.

The composition of the National Assembly was essentially unchanged. The 2015 election results suggest a lack of confidence in the FMLN because the party was unable to gain a simple majority in the National Assembly.

Although voting was down compared to the 2012 elections, the results will make it vitally important for the two major parties to work together if El Salvador is to continue progressing as it has over the last six years. Now it is hard for political parties to simply oppose initiatives proposed by their opposition as was so common during prior administrations. Politicians have learned quickly that to improve the situation for all Salvadorans they have to work with those who in the past were considered their enemies.

Ballot for National Assembly seats in the department of San Salvador



Scholarship Program Update

After my last report I received several responses from supporters, some thanking me for my insight into El Salvador's many and complex problems and especially about the mass migration of minors to the US, and a few others wondering if our work is almost finished in El Salvador. I certainly did not mean to imply that we have done all that we can here. What I have learned from the past ten years working as Project Director for the programs that my mother, Carmen Broz, started back in 1989 is that without access to education, developing countries will never change and even with all the new programs that permit people from rural and low income families in El Salvador to continue their studies there will always be a need for programs like ours. Every year we receive many more applications for our university loans program than we are able to support, and this year we were able to accept only six new students into our program even though other well-qualified and needy students had applied.



Clelia Anabel Amaya Saenz

Let me illustrate how our program changes lives by introducing you to former students who are flourishing.

Clelia Anabel Amaya Saenz, from the cooperative of El Gigante in Perquín, Morazán, studied accounting at the National University in San Miguel. Clelia started in our program by receiving a small scholarship of about \$20/year to go to elementary school. She graduated from the National University in 2013 and received her official CPA seal in 2014. She is now working for FECANM, a federation of cooperatives in northern Morazan which the El Gigante Cooperative founded many years ago. She is in charge of marketing and commercialization of honey produced by members of the federation. She is also working *pro bono* for a small accounting firm on weekends to gain experience in her field. Clelia is one of three students from the El Gigante coop to study accounting. The dream of all three is to start their own firm in Morazán or San Miguel. The first of the three to graduate, Clelia will be followed by Erick Jeovany Guzman Vasquez, who is scheduled to finish his course work this year and graduate in 2016. The third and last to graduate from the group is Neydi Leticia Hernandez, now in her third year at the National University.

Clelia exemplifies the quality of young people we seek – socially minded and active at every level within the cooperative and community. Besides working full-time at the federation and a weekend job, Clelia and her husband have their own business, with 20 bee hives for honey and honey by-products. The initial ten hives were a wedding gift from her mother Silvia Saenz, a founder and active member of the El Gigante Coop.



Belarmino Argueta

I recently spoke with **Belarmino Argueta**, whom I had not seen for many years. He was initially supported with a small scholarship of \$125/year to study 7th-9th grade, and then a high school scholarship of \$250/year for uniforms and transportation. Bela, as he is known today, was one of the first generation

to graduate from high school, something his parents and grandparents did not achieve due to the civil war and poverty of the past generations in rural El Salvador. Bela attended the national police academy, and has worked as a policeman ever since. When told about a recent meeting at the El Gigante Cooperative, he asked for a day off and came by to thank my mother, Palo Alto Friends Meeting and me for the support he received so many years before. Bela graduated from high school in 2001, two years after we started our university student loan program. He remembers fondly the Saturday classes he and the other high school scholarship students taught to middle and elementary school children like Clelia, tutoring them in math, reading, and writing.

**DONORS VISIT
EL BARÍO**



First grade class, El Barío

A positive note for me personally is that often clients who hire me for tours here in El Salvador come with a desire to give back. They are inspired as they learn about my activities in education and social development in El Salvador. This year has been exceptional. Since January, four of my clients have brought down small donations of school supplies for me to distribute at local schools.

Jazmin Mercedes Claros Amaya finished her studies in nursing in 2014 and graduated earlier this year. She has not yet been able to find a position as a nurse, but with her husband and mother she is helping her younger sister Idalia pay the costs of university. Idalia is studying a new program in Ports and Customs, to supply the demand for workers that the new commercial port in the Golf of Fonseca will create once it starts to receive cargo ships and cruise liners in the coming years.

Jazmin, sister Idalia, and twin daughters





Ernesto Moya and family (Grandmother, little brother, mother and older sister), Feb 2015

Ernesto Moya, from the village of El Barío, is continuing his studies after completing the three-year technical degree in agronomy at the National School of Agriculture (ENA). He is now studying a full degree in agricultural engineering at the University Monseñor Oscar Arnulfo Romero in Chalatenango, with our support. He will need to study for two years as well as prepare and defend a thesis. If all goes well, he will graduate in 2017. Here is a recent photo of Ernesto and his family in their patio in El Barío, some five kilometers from Suchitoto.

Student Meets Sponsor



Milton Palma meets his sponsor, Arlene Schaupp

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Milton Palma, a second-year medical student from the rural part of Suchitoto, was able to meet Arlene Schaupp, one of his sponsors, as she visited El Salvador on a delegation of the South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC), with which she has been active for over 30 years. SBSC is a US-based solidarity group that was

founded in the 1980s to aid Salvadoran refugees fleeing El Salvador's civil war. We all enjoyed a wonderful lunch as Milton's sponsor learned about Milton and his family, shared photos of her own family, and talked about her involvement in El Salvador and her 31 visits to the country since 1988.

Positive Changes Making a Difference in El Salvador



MegaTec, Ilobasco

Courtesy of Wikimapia.org

The Millennium Challenge corporation scholarships have been provided by the Ministry of Education since 2013. The Millennium Challenge provides some 1500 partial scholarships each year for students to attend the two-year MegaTec vocational schools. Similarly, social development programs once available only in FMLN municipalities and funded by ALBA Petroleum, are now nationwide and provide loans, technical and marketing assistance, and scholarships. Such programs, as well as the many small programs like our own, are quickly changing El Salvador, as education at all levels is increasingly seen as a major component of social and economic development and as a way to better the future for Salvadoran youth.

A Visitor From the Past

At a lunch with Arlene Schaupp, I found out that Oscar Ventura was visiting as part of a South Bay Sanctuary Covenant (SBSC) delegation. Oscar went the US in 1988 as a Salvadoran refugee, supported by Palo Alto Friends Meeting, which was a member of the SBSC. He was staying a few days after the rest of the delegation left to see old friends and family. This was Oscar's first visit to El Salvador since he left in 1988. When I knew Oscar in 1989-1994 he rarely spoke of El Salvador. I knew only that he was originally from San Miguel and had been detained by the army for a long period. In our short visit I learned much about Oscar's past, including his involvement in one of the first workers (obrerros) movements in 1971. I hope that in my future visits to the U.S. Oscar will join me to speak about El Salvador and our work.

I will close this report by thanking you once again for your continuing generous support of the El Salvador Projects. Because of your gifts, young people, whose barely literate elders struggled to survive, are able to gain an education, lift their families from poverty, and serve their communities as teachers, health care professionals, owners of small businesses. They hold the promise of a better future for El Salvador. I feel your dedication every day as I work to fulfill the vision that we share.

Your financial support matters

The El Salvador Projects are funded entirely by contributions from people like you – people whose ideals and sense of connection to the whole human family survive even hard times. In the past few years declining contributions to the El Salvador Projects have reduced our ability to help as many students as we would like. With rising prices for basic commodities making it even harder for poor families to manage, we would like to help more young people lift their families from poverty.

Our newsletters tell you how well your contributions to the El Salvador Projects are managed. In consultation with a committee of representatives from the communities the Projects serve, our Field Director makes sure that every dollar goes to meet the greatest needs in each community and to support the most dedicated students. Your dollars are “leveraged” in El Salvador, where about \$1250 supports a college student for a year with a frugal budget (including about \$250 for shared housing). Students pledge to repay what they have received either in cash, by using their skills in approved community service (such as teaching), or by supporting another student.

Robert Broz’s report in this newsletter includes encouraging observations of progress in El Salvador, but the needs that led Palo Alto Friends Meeting to support Carmen Broz’s initiative to create the Quaker Projects in El Salvador persist. Poverty is widespread.

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

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.





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