



Fall Update

October 2008

Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program (Progresar)

Of Redwood Forest Friends Monthly Meeting and Guatemala Monthly Meeting
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Another example of community service given by one of our students. *by Miguel Costop*

Our secondary school graduates of 2007 are the second group that has had a commitment to complete a community service project in their communities. Although some have had difficulties in completing this requirement, usually because their expertise was not applicable to village life, others have given excellent community service. One of these is Anaceta Mendoza Carrillo who graduated as a primary grades bilingual teacher last year. She lives in a remote village in the northern mountains. She volunteered in her village elementary school, helping a second grade teacher who has 50 students in one room. Anaceta focused on helping children with reading and writing, especially those with learning problems. At the end of these projects, we ask for a short report on the project. In most cases, these reports consist of two or three pages outlining what they did. The case of Anaceta was different in that she sent a highly professional report of 30 pages. Her report included general plans, weekly plans, community requests, letters and drawings by her students, photographs, as well as her conclusions and recommendations for the school and the community.

In spite of graduating from a school in a remote area, directed by the La Salle brothers, she demonstrates a very complete educational foundation, which pleases us very much. We are keeping her report to show to other students who are undertaking their community service project. We are very pleased with her accomplishments and are sure that she will be very successful in the future.



Anaceta (on the back) pictured with a group of her 50 students during her community service.

Finally, we offer a quotation from her conclusions: *I want to congratulate Progresar for including the*

idea that graduates have this obligation to complete a service for the community, because the remote villages really have many needs for which the government does not offer any support. As professionals, we have the obligation to give a gift of service to others. Only by means of education can we change the conditions of our families, communities and country.

Responses from Our Donors to our Financial Report. *by Miguel Costop and Loren Lacelle*

In our Spring Update we expressed our concerns of deficits we have had in recent years that caused us to reduce the number of students we are helping this year. As we said then, the best way to overcome the deficit is to increase income and thus assure the future of the program. Fortunately, we received messages of support from various donors. Some of them promised to increase the support they normally give, others have offered fundraising activities, and some who had not donated recently decided to donate again. Also, the number of donors who sponsor specific students has increased. Last year we had 16 sponsored students by 7 sponsors—either individuals or groups—and this year we have 21 students sponsored by 13 individuals or groups. Nevertheless, upon analyzing our first semester finances, we see that we still have much to do.

In our analysis of the first half of this year, we can see that we have this increase in sponsored students but also a decrease in donations for those without sponsors. That has us concerned. In general, we have reduced our expenses in the first semester but we did have to pay a large sum to employees which is required by law when we changed over to the new association status. That will not happen again, but it made a dent in our reserve funds at the moment. After that we received a very large donation, which was a great relief!

In the last 12 years, we have more than doubled the number of students helped annually, and we also greatly increased the average monthly amounts students receive. At the same time we have relied upon the same income sources—with the exception of adding income from the eight tour groups we have brought here. We welcome suggestions and ideas for other fundraising methods. Our income has always relied on individual and group donations, the sale of Guatemalan products, and now tour groups. We intend to also look into foundation grants, which many organizations rely upon but we have not considered before. It is possible that we have grown beyond the ability of our donor base to support so many students,

so it may be time to try other options. Or, we may decide to keep our numbers small. Any suggestions that any of you may have will be appreciated.

A Letter from a Sponsored Student to Her Sponsors

(This letter is translated literally in order to keep her charming flavor and style.)

July 29, 2008

Warm greetings, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, may he guide you and protect you always. May our Mother in Heaven cover you always with her pure hands.

The administration of Progresa has informed me that you have decided to be my sponsor during this school year. I would like to thank you deeply for helping me. This means a lot to me, because it will help me to concentrate more in my studies.

My complete name is Rosario Vicente Mendoza, I am 25 years old, and am from San Juan la Laguna, department of Sololá, which is the western part of Guatemala. I am the second daughter of a family of four. My father's name is José Vicente Choy, is 60 years old and works as a peasant for other people because we do not have our own land. He makes Q30 (\$3.95) per day and at times he cannot find work. Among all of us, we maintain the family expenses for food and other things. My mother is Petronila Mendoza Ujpan and she works as a domestic for other people and by this means is able to help support the family. The same is true of my oldest brother. No one is married and the brother does various kinds of jobs--for example, he cuts firewood, weeds fields, etc. He also helps support the family. None of my siblings are in school, because we cannot afford it.

I work in an evening middle school and earn Q500 (\$65.79) per month, teaching Spanish. What I earn is not enough to support my studies, because I must pay tuition, buy text books, rent a computer, pay my bus fares, rent internet time, rent encyclopedias, and pay for supplies. For these reasons, I need help to keep studying in order to achieve my dreams.

This year I am studying the fourth semester of social work in the University of Mariano Gálvez, in the department of Sololá. When going to school, I must catch a boat to cross the lake and then take a bus to reach the university. Sometimes I must go twice a week in order to attend study groups, and every semester there are more expenses. I leave home at 6 a.m. to reach the university at 8. I leave at 5 p.m. and arrive home at 7. All of this requires strength, will, spirit and help in order to keep going.

I really feel happy to be in the fourth semester, but at times I keep thinking about all the increases in costs in every sense of the word. My academic results are good, because I have worked hard but still need help from others. My great dream is to finish my studies and then practice my acquired profession in order to be useful for society, my family, and for other needy

persons, because it is important to share with others that which one has in life.

I am most grateful to you for helping me to achieve my dreams.

Sincerely, Rosario Vicente Mendoza



Left to right: Rosario's mother, sister and niece, Rosario and her father.

Visit to the Peace Corps. by Miguel Costop

In July I had the opportunity to participate in some discussions with some Peace Corps volunteers. The purpose was to acquaint volunteers with information about scholarship programs which they could pass on to poor students in the communities where they work. One of the coordinators of the event was Gonzalo Ball Ajú, who is a doctor and a graduate of our program. With me there were representatives from the national trade school program, who explained how that program trains students for various trades. There were also representatives of governmental scholarship programs—one of which was at the secondary level and the other for scholarships for study in other countries.

It was a good experience for me to share information about projects and perhaps be able to send applicants to other projects when we can not accept them in ours. After the event we have received three applications from students who were referred to us from those attending that event. In the past we have been somewhat isolated from other programs, and we think that it is necessary to spend more effort in knowing about those who are pursuing the same objectives that we are. It is also possible that we can learn things from others that we can use for our own benefit, such as in the areas of administration, recovery of loans, etc. In fact, if any of our readers of this Update know of scholarship programs for study both inside and outside of Guatemala, we could give our students more options for other educational opportunities.

The First Eight Months of the New Government. *by Miguel Costop*

In January the government of President Alvaro Colom began, which he calls "social democracy," and which would work for the neediest social classes and try to reduce the gap between the rich and poor. It was this philosophy that gave him his victory, since it was in the rural areas and among the poorest where he achieved the presidency. To reinforce this concept, the government created the slogan "time for solidarity" on a graphic of four hands of different colors which represent the four peoples who coexist in Guatemala: Mayas, Ladinos (of the Spanish culture), Garifunas (of African descent) and Xinca (of Toltec descent). In spite of some deficiencies, it appears that the government is moving in that direction. It has implemented programs like "My family is progressing," which gives economic help for families to send their children to school and for pregnant women to get maternity care in health centers. The government has identified the poorest communities and started production projects, micro-credit opportunities, and other benefits in them. One of the most controversial actions has been the creation of the Council of Social Cohesion, which combines the ministries of health, education, energy and mines. And also the secretariats of Food Security and Social Works of the Wife of the President are both under the direction of the president's wife, Sandra Torres de Colom. The government says that this allows for greater efficiency in developing social services and can produce more concrete results. However, others see this as dangerous for two reasons: first, it gives one person, the first lady, the right to decide what, how, when and where the funds are invested; second, because the first lady is not a public servant, there is no official oversight of her actions, in spite of the fact that it amounts to 19% of the national budget. Since the election campaign, she has not been very popular and many believe that she is making the decisions and not the president. What is obvious is that she has taken a stronger role than other first ladies and her influence is stronger than others before her.

Another negative has been that this government has promised too much. It spoke of a very comprehensive plan that offered solutions for most problems. Included in it was its famous Plan of 100 Days, in which it promised to correct serious problems such as insecurity, health, and unemployment in only 100 days. When that period was over, little or nothing had been done. The government justified that fact by claiming there were not enough funds left over from the previous government. In the Congress, the internal conflicts of the ruling party have not allowed a harmonious relationship between it and the executive branch, and since the ruling party has a plurality but not a majority there, it is not getting the legislative support it expected. An important external problem that has weakened the new government is the

international price of oil, which has caused rising prices that especially affect the poor. There has been a wave of murders of bus drivers, which the government claims is an attempt to disestablish the government. And as always, there have been protest marches against the government by bus drivers and also landless peasants demanding land redistribution. According to Nisgua, an organization concerned with land distribution, although two-thirds of the population is rural, 90% of farms are too small to support a family, and 2% of farms cover 65% of arable land, giving Guatemala the most unequal distribution of land in the Western Hemisphere. It should be remembered that it was exactly this issue that triggered the overthrow of democratic rule in 1954—with the help of the CIA—and set off the civil war, which finally ended in 1996.

One sector that hoped for improvements is health, since the new vice-president is a renowned surgeon. Until the present time, there is little improvement there. The same is true of education, in which the only improvement teachers have seen is the reduction of temporary teaching positions and increase of permanent ones.

More recently, the president of Congress had to resign because of missing funds under his control, causing even greater dissatisfaction with the current administration. It is difficult to evaluate the government in this short period of time, but it is certain that its performance has been clouded by the many problems confronting it and its inability to cope with them.

Another former student: Silvia Patricia Hurtarte. *by Meme Romero*

Silvia's case is one of those we do not run into every day. In May 2007 as part of our visits to former students, we visited the department of Suchitepéquez by the Pacific Coast. At that time we had an old address for her, which turned out to be a boarding house for professionals or students, but no one knew of her, so we gave up. Back in the office, we found an old address for her family. We sent our newsletter to her old address, and as a result she came to our annual student conference this year.

Meeting Silvia was a great experience and we really enjoyed our conversation. She is a very cheerful lady and I am very sure that she is also a great professional. At the conference she told us all about her life. She attended the National University and graduated as a chemical engineer in 1991. After graduating, she worked at a branch of the national university in the city of Mazatenango until 1997 and then she supported her sister in the university. In 1988 she got married and moved to El Salvador, where she worked in a plant for milk products. While there she also studied a specialization in foods. She has been back in Guatemala since 2003. She has a master degree in higher education and a specialization in microbiology of food.

At the end, she expressed her thankfulness for our program, which she believes made it possible for her to achieve her dreams.



Silvia (on the right) participating in a group discussion with current students during our 2008 annual conference.

One of Our Graduate's Work with War Crimes Cases.- by Loren Lacelle

Flor América Mux Curruchiche studied law with our help from 1997 to 2001. I contacted her two years ago to do some legal work for me and was able then to learn more about what she has been doing since getting her law degree. She has been working with a group of survivors of a massacre in Baja Verapaz during the civil war and returned to her home in Comalapa, Chimaltenango on weekends. While there she can help clients from her own community. Since it is quite near our office, it has been convenient to stop by here between her two jobs.

During her visits here, she sometimes told us of her two jobs, in private practice she helps mostly women involved with domestic violence. Away from home, she deals with the aftermath of the violence of the civil war. In the latter, her group represents the survivors of a massacre in which Rabinal villagers were killed by the army and civil patrols. We learned that they were unable to bring charges against the army, but they have been able to keep the case open against the civil patrols. These civil patrols were community members who were forced by the army to help control or punish local villagers in the conflict between the army and the guerrillas. The army often suspected locals to be aiding and abetting the guerrillas, which was often not the case at all. The villagers were caught between two warring factions and could be punished by either side. Most common, however, was that the punishment came from the army and its local civil patrol. The punishment often resulted in the massacre of entire villages—men, women and children.

We asked Flor if she was in any danger because of her involvement with the case. She said that it was indeed a difficult situation, because those involved

with the past events want it to be left alone and forgotten.

Even twelve years after the peace accords were signed, the struggle is not over.

Our 9th Tour: February 21 - March 1, 2009

Again we are offering our 8-day tour, which begins in Antigua on a Saturday evening, visits some areas in town. It is during Lent, so it will be possible to see at least one of the famous processions of that season. On Monday the group goes west, stopping in our office and several sites along the way to Lake Atitlán. After two nights at the lake, which includes a boat trip across the lake, the group continues westward to Quetzaltenango and visits the hot springs and other sites of the area. At the end of the week, the group returns to Antigua for the last two days. On Sunday we arrange transportation to the airport for those leaving at that time, just as we do upon the Saturday arrivals. During these travels, we will arrange for the group to meet in the homes of current or former students in order to get a much closer view of the daily lives of Guatemalans.

For more information about the tour, visit our website at <http://www.guatemalafriends.org>

Response to Our Proposed English Language Classes for Some of Our Students.

We were pleased to receive quite a few replies from English language teachers to come down here for a week of intensive classes with some students. It is projected for December 2009, so there is plenty of time to plan such an ambitious project. If there are any others with teaching English as a second language experience, please let us know. It will need very careful planning to pull this all together.

Request for Email addresses.

In order to make our communication more efficient with you, we would like to have email addresses for all our donors. For example, when somebody makes a donation we like to send a "thank you letter" from Guatemala with some fresh information of what is going on here. But because of the distance and a slow local mail service these letters may arrive weeks or even months after the donation is made. If you agree, please send us a short email with your name to: progresar@hughes.net or lacelle@conexion.com.gt

Many thanks to our faithful donors who make all this possible.

**All contributions are made to:
Redwood Forest Friends Meeting and are
mailed to: Guatemala Scholarship Program,
PO Box 1831 Santa Rosa, CA 95402**