



# Fall Update

October 2006

## Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program (Progesa)

Of Redwood Forest Friends Monthly Meeting and Guatemala Monthly Meeting

email: [progesar@hughes.net](mailto:progesar@hughes.net) website: <http://guatemalafriends.org>

### A Happy Event.

We are glad to share with you the news that last September 29<sup>th</sup>. Jaime Torres Lemus, our current bookkeeper and member of our administrative committee, graduated as a business administrator. Jaime was helped by our program for 3 years to get his technical degree and then he continued on his own to complete the “licenciatura” which is a 5 to 6 year university degree. All of us feel we share in his achievement, since he has worked with us in the program for about 9 years. Congratulations to Jaime and his family!!



Loren Lacelle and Jaime Torres on the day of the graduation.

### Time to Say Farewell, by Loren Lacelle

This may be my last contribution to an Update for the scholarship program--though time will tell. Earlier this year I had a minor stroke that left my vision impaired and it was a warning, telling me that my usefulness to the program may now be more of a liability than an asset. I am in process of putting “my house in order” here in preparation for being most of the time with my family and friends in California, starting this month. I hope, however, to be here again next late spring and summer.

This is not an easy decision for me to make after 16 years here, since this feels like home to me now. Fortunately, I am also returning home, which eases the pain considerably. Recently, I received a notice from the mayor to appear at a neighborhood

meeting to discuss the paving of our street. It was the first time I had seen all my neighbors in one place at one time and it pained me to think that it might also be the last time. But the amazing thing to me was the friendly and agreeable nature of all concerned. The group of 50 or 60 homeowners decided unanimously--just like Quakers—to approve the paving and the assessment for each household. My main thought was: How far we have come! I remembered the tragic history of this community, divided by civil war, political rivalry, the 50/50 ethnic division between Mayas and Ladinos, the massacres and battles that took place here. Now I could see no trace of that tragic past.

At the end of the meeting we all lined up to sign the official minute book of the town clerk, either by name and identity number or by finger print for those who are not literate. Never before had I felt such a deep bond with my neighbors, yet it was bittersweet because I knew I was not likely to have that chance again.

I have been organizing my files that go back fifteen years to when I first became involved with the program. Just the Updates alone are voluminous and how much they too have changed! The student rosters on one page then now take more than two in much smaller print. The budget reports from the early 1990s show figures that seem incredibly small compared to today’s numbers. All of this is thanks to our faithful donors who have made it all possible.

I must also give great credit to our amazing staff, which has worked for years to make a program that is ever more efficient and effective. I will greatly miss working with them on a regular basis, because they have been an inspiration for me-- and lots of fun too! I am also confident that they will continue to show the same dedication and competence in the future.

### Thank you, Loren,

by Miguel Angel Costop, current program director.

I met Loren in 1992 when I was applying to enter the program and I was only 16 years old. As many of our students, I was coming from a typical

rural family with many dreams but without real chances to attain them. During the following years, Loren became a very important person in my life. He gave me the chances I needed to reach my goals. He taught me English, computers, and later gave me the opportunity to continue on to university, where I became a business administrator. He also invited me to be part of the new administrative committee of our program and this page will not be enough to describe all the wonderful experiences I have had from being part of this project. In short, meeting Loren and this program has been one of the biggest blessings in my life and changed it forever. As my Mom has told me a couple of times: "Loren is like your second father"... and these words reflect exactly the way I feel about him. Now we will miss him a lot because we know we won't have that marvelous friend here every day. For all of these and more, I can only say THANK YOU LOREN for all the wonderful things you brought to our lives and may God always bless you.

### **First Semester 2006 Report**

We began the year with 138 students. During the first semester, we lost 3 interns, whom we help for only 3 months and 6 new students who dropped out for various reasons. That left 129. In the second semester we picked up 2 more, for a total of 131 at present. Of the students in the first semester, 45% were women and 55% men. 70% attended private institutions and 30% public. The largest careers were 26% in elementary bilingual education, 12% in law, 9% in secondary education, 6% each in economics, medicine, agriculture, and urban elementary education. Other careers had less than 6%. By level, we had 50% in secondary, 11% for technical degrees (half of a university degree) and 39% for the equivalent of a B.A and M.A. combined.

***Aid given to students.*** The total aid to students (without sponsors) for the first semester was \$58,396, or \$467 as the average per student. The monthly average of that amount was \$93. The total aid to students with sponsors for the first semester was \$9,583, or \$737 as the average per students. Their monthly average was \$147 each. The reason for this difference is that sponsors are allowed to determine the amount of aid received, which in some cases is higher than we normally give.

50 home visits were made to new students during the first semester, and at the same time 53 visits were

made to former students. The socio-economic studies done on these visits concluded that 3 were classified as extreme poverty, 26 as very poor, 55 as poor, 18 "stable", and 1 middle class of a total 103.

Contacts to former students in the first semester numbered 58 in five departments of the country, 31 were found and 27 were not. Repayments of loans declined by 35% in the first semester of this year as compared to last year. We believe it may be because this year we have not made much effort to re-contact the earlier ones and the impact of the first visit fades fast. That has recently been addressed by follow up contact by phone and mail to many previously contacted.

### **The Free Trade Agreement: Subject of our Annual Student Conference**

This year's conference for current and former students of the program took place on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> of April this year. Our theme this year was the free trade agreement between the U.S. and Guatemala, which was about to be decided by the Guatemalan Congress.

As in past years, the first day was devoted to check deliveries to all students in the afternoon, followed by dinner and then the student talent show. This year we did not ask that their contributions be prepared in advance. Instead we divided them into small groups by drawing lots for either songs, jokes, poems, dances or comedy acts. That way they were joined with students they did not know. Even though it was improvised, it demonstrated many talents, and, more importantly they got to know each other better.



One of the groups of discussion during the conference.

At the session on the following morning, we had two experts on the subject of the free trade

agreement, who offered a wide explanation of what a free trade agreement is, the history of the earlier agreements and of this one, and the possible effects of it on this country. After their speeches, the students divided into groups to discuss three different questions—one for each group. The following are the general results of those groups.

1. At present Guatemala faces enormous disadvantages in relation to the U.S., since the agreements tend to favor the country to the north. If the political, economic and social conditions were similar, then they could be more beneficial to Guatemala.
2. The only real beneficiaries in Guatemala are the owners of large businesses who are able to compete with the United States.
3. The most affected would be the poorest classes, mostly peasants who practice survival agriculture and uneducated workers.
4. Among the immediate probable effects would be the closing of many local small businesses and thereby the loss of thousands of jobs.
5. The volume of imports would be much more than that of exports.
6. There could be a long range loss of cultural values and national identity due to the influence of style and consumerism.
7. There is the risk of large scale exploitation of natural resources by international businesses.
8. There could be monopolization of services by North American corporations.

Among the actions to be taken, the students suggested the following:

1. To inform the population of the content and effects of the treaty.
2. Elevate the educational level and the quality of our technology.
3. Maintain our identity and cultural values.
4. Organize and work together with local authorities to mitigate the negative effects of the treaty.

### Two stories from the same rural town

By Meme Romero



**German Anastacio Camposeco Díaz**, came to us in 1994 from Jacaltenango a village in the outskirts of the Cuchumatanes the highest mountains in Guatemala, close to the Mexican border.

Jacaltenango, according to what we have seen, is one of the most educated towns in the area,

in spite of being a coffee plantation area, most of its economy comes from emigrants to the United states.

German went to school and was supported to study secondary education in linguistics, then he finished his master's degree on his own in 2001. At first he worked as an elementary teacher in a village four hours from home but eventually he got transferred to his home town, where he teaches in the mornings.. Then he got involved in his community, helped to start a secondary school and also started a program to help poor students from rural communities.. First, they bring them down to the middle school in Jacaltenango where he volunteers in the afternoons. After that they support them to finish high school in Huehuetenango. In order to do that they send them to a boardinghouse (Casa Miller) and pay for their education at the La Salle Jesuit school. There is no doubt that teachers like German are very concerned about education in rural areas, even though he does not get paid for his time teaching at the middle school, he is very happy helping his community.

**Edbin Elias Díaz Hernández**, like German, came to us from Jacaltenango in 1987, he went to study medicine at CUNOROC a branch of a national university of San Carlos in Quetzaltenango, the second largest city in Guatemala. After he graduated in 1995 he saw the need for local doctors in his community and decided to go back to his home town and establish his own clinic.



After all those years, Doctor Díaz has been tending people from this especially rural area with little access to medical attention. He takes patients at a very low price of \$2.00 per visit and also provides a low price for medicine. And he communicates with them in his and their native language. We also had the opportunity to see one more project that he has in mind. In the last year, he has been building a three-storey house that eventually will become a hospital. He also said that his project is to start a surgery room in the area for common surgeries such as appendicitis, cesareans etc. for poor people who can not afford to pay a private hospital in town or going to a national hospital because of the distance. He then said that, in order to do that he will be looking for volunteer doctors to carry out his plan. We were very happy to hear what Doctor Díaz had to say, and it keeps motivating us to support students like him who bring

some sort of relief for needy people in rural areas—one of the original and most important goals.

### **A Story about a home visit.**

By Meme Romero

In the department of Alta Verapaz is found the Q'eqchi', which is one of the largest Maya ethnic groups. Because of its topography, this department has had difficult access. Even though in recent years the infrastructure has improved greatly, there are rural communities that are still cut off from the rest of the country.

In July Jaime and I went as a team of our staff to the municipality of San Pedro Carchá to visit the homes of new students there, including the home of Amalia Mucú Caal, an elementary teaching student. To our surprise we found that now about half of the road from Carchá to Lanquín was now paved, which made the trip a bit more comfortable and faster, until we got to the entrance of the village to be visited. Arriving at a crossroads always creates some uncertainty because of the rough terrain and bad state of the road, which looked like a mule path.



Amalia's father, sister and mother in front of their house.

In spite of it all, we decided to take a chance on the steep downward slope, just hoping that it would not rain and cause the mule path to become a mudslide! However, after ten minutes we gave up, fearing the worst about how to get out again, and realized it would be better to walk. In fifteen minutes we arrived in the center of the village. It was easier and safer to walk than to drive. But this was only the beginning. We then tried to locate the family by asking questions everywhere, but not with much success because most of the people did not speak Spanish. Then we found someone who gave us some directions.

At first everything seemed like any other little walk through the bushes, but after a while in the humid climate, Jaime and I began to ask ourselves if we were going in the right direction, taking into account the fact that the more we climbed the further we were into the hills and fields of corn, coffee and cardamom. After twenty minutes or more and a couple of attempts to find the family, we found some Q'eqchi' teenagers that could speak Spanish and had an idea of where we could find the house. But in order to do that we would have to climb the last summit, where we could yell the father's name. He yelled back but in Q'eqchi', which we could not understand. Then we decided to climb up, but in order to do that we had to crawl through the combination of coffee and cardamom trees planted close together, without having any path to follow. Then Amalia's sister came to find us and she led us to the house. Finding the sister was a great relief!

Since Amalia was away at school, the sister was able to translate the interview between us and her parents. The family's life-style was among the most simple we have seen, living on what they produce and without even the most basic services.

### **Our Tour for 2007**

Our eighth tour is now planned for March 3 to 11, 2007. Again this will be in the scenic and historical central highlands and give an opportunity to experience Guatemala in an intimate and personal way that few tours can offer. Our tours are lead by members of the staff of the scholarship program. As many of you know, this year we had unusually big groups, but that was only because of the FWCC conference held here in Guatemala. Next year our tour is limited again to only ten participants which gives us the opportunity to give closer attention to our visitors. For more information, the fastest and most reliable way is at our e-mail addresses: [progresar@hughes.net](mailto:progresar@hughes.net) or [lacelle@conexion.com.gt](mailto:lacelle@conexion.com.gt). You can also get more information and a taste of our tours visiting our website:

<http://www.progresa.guatemalafriends.org/tour.htm>

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make all this possible.**

**All contributions are made to:  
Redwood Forest Friends Meeting and are  
mailed to: Guatemala Scholarship Program,  
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