



Progres a

The Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program

www.guatemalafriends.org

Update - October 2012



Our conference theme of “Oxlajuj Bak’tun”

This year the principal theme of our annual conference was an explanation of Oxlajuj Bak’tun or the end of the Mayan calendar. Our invited speaker was Lina Barrios who is a recognized Guatemalan anthropologist who has conducted multiple investigations of both ancient Mayan culture and the current situation in Mayan villages. She has received various acknowledgements at both the national and international level for her work. She explained that the Mayans had several different calendars which had different purposes and that the “Choltun” or long calendar as it is called was only one of

these. This calendar was divided into lengthy periods called Bak’tunes, the last of which, the 13th Bak’tun, will finish on December 21st of this year. In her conclusion, Lina explained that the end of 13 Bak’tun does not have an apocalyptic significance. If it had a special meanings for the ancient Mayans it was that it represents the end of an era or cycle and it would be an appropriate time to meditate on the direction humanity is headed. At the very least it is a time of privilege and space to analyze the good and the bad we have done and examine our relationship with mother nature and the universe in general as well as providing an opportunity to correct any errors we have made.

Selecting Students for 2013

As we do each year, we opened the selection process for 2013 in August and will close it on November 15th. As I write this article we have already had interviews with 40 applicants and we still have a month to go. Many young people in the rural areas need our help. Recent research findings show that less than 3% of all Guatemalans study at the university level. For students like ours who for the most part come from rural poverty the numbers are much lower, way below 1%. In the last years we have averaged 80 applicants each year but have only been able to accept between 25 and 40 depending on the number who have graduated and the total of our donations. As we mentioned in the last Update, this year we had to lower the number of students we could accept. The following table summarizes the data for the last 5 years.

YEAR	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008
Number of Students	97	106	108	109	114

It is very difficult for us to turn down students who clearly need our help in order to continue studying but due to our financial situation we have been forced to do so. This year we may need to cut again. We know that the fiscal situation in the US is still difficult, but we must turn to you, our loyal donors for more help. Could you sponsor a student either as an individual or by putting together a group of your friends or colleagues? Would you remember us in your will? If you have a birthday or other celebration coming up could you ask for donations

to Progresa in lieu of gifts? Are you in a position to sponsor a fund raiser in your home? Another Guatemalan project we know of has had great success with selling bead jewelry shortly before the Christmas season. It is too late for this year but might you consider holding a "bead party" next year? Maybe you have some ideas of your own. If so please contact us and no matter what you can or can't do to increase our donor base in the future, please know that we greatly appreciate the support you have shown us.

The political situation in Guatemala

It has been nine months since the current government was installed. In July the Prensa Libre, one of the major newspapers in the country, did a national survey in order to learn what the citizenry thought about the new administration after six months. One of their major findings was that 69% of those polled thought that the president, Otto Perez Molina, was doing a good job. In comparison only 31.5% of Guatemalans thought that the past president, Alvaro Colom, was doing a good job after six months. The survey indicates that the principle concern of the citizens is security although they recognized that this was an area in which the government has worked hard to improve. When asked



what was the least positive area of government, 19% responded that it was the economy. One change will have a direct impact on Progresa students, namely the requirements for a primary school teaching degree. Primary teachers must now complete three years of secondary school education. In the future this degree will require five years, two in secondary school and three at the university level. Current teachers will also need to take two more years of classes in order to maintain their certification. Needless to say there has been a lot of opposition to this change, especially from students and teachers who feel it will make it more difficult for them to earn a teaching degree and thus have a chance to get a better paying job. Although we recognize the difficulties, we think increasing the education requirement for teachers is a good idea because the current teacher preparation is very poor and is not adequate to the needs of primary school students.

Help needed

Now that we have many students with individual sponsors we need help translating all of the student letters and reports we provide. If your Spanish is strong and you would be interested in helping us with this task please write us at progresas3@gmail.com for more information.

Community Service Projects

Rubidia Matías Ramírez entered the program in 2009 and has proven to be an excellent student. She hopes to graduate as a professional nurse in the middle of 2013. This is the third community service project she has completed. Last year she worked with children on a "Healthy Mouth" project. She worked with a local organization which donated tooth brushes and tooth paste to the children who completed the workshop.



Rubidia began this year's project, "Promoting Adolescent Health", in July and finished at the end of September. She worked in conjunction with the government health center with a group of 40 students meeting with them on weekends and discussing themes such as: physical development, mental health, nutrition, sexually transmitted diseases, accidents and first aid. In order to make the sessions more impactful she divided the larger student group into smaller groups of 10 and met with them in their home communities of Pueblo Nuevo and

San Pablo, Ixcán. Both of these rural communities were gravely affected by the 36 years of civil war in this country.

Jesús Aniceto Velázquez comes from the municipality of Tacana, San Marcos located in the far western part of the country 323 kilometers from the capital. He recently finished his community service project which he titled "My Community is Green". He gave workshops in his community for both young people and adults which focused on protecting and improving the environment. Along with members of the community he created a nursery of 4,000 trees which will now be replanted on a piece of land owned by the community. The major purpose of the workshop was to increase awareness of the appropriate use of water and the need to moderate the cutting of trees. He also discussed the preservation of soil and other natural sources while at the same time using these resources to generate income.



One of our Graduates

Faustina Sis Simón, a graduate of our program, comes from Caserio Chuatacaj 2 outside of San José Poaquil, Chimaltenango. She received our help in 2004 in order to complete the last year of her teaching degree. On July 13th of this year she came to our office in order to repay her debt and to thank us for the financial support that we gave her in her time of need. Since her graduation she has worked at a variety of jobs. She is currently working as a "teacher by contract" (an insecure and poorly paid teaching post) while she waits for a "fixed position" (a better paid and more reliable position).

With her meager earnings she has been able to help two of her siblings begin their studies to become teachers as well. She seems to clearly understand that education is the best option for the development of her family and her community. Faustina and her mother are both working as volunteers with a group of women in their community who are learning to read and write. The women in this self-improvement group are generally older and the mothers of families who didn't have the opportunity to study when they were younger. In this way she hopes to facilitate the development of her community.

A special and productive journey



In the month of August, I had the opportunity to travel to the United States thanks to an invitation and support from the Latin American Concerns Committee of Pacific Yearly Meeting to participate in their Annual Session. As you may know, the scholarship program is under the care of two monthly meetings (Guatemala and Redwood Forest) that are members of Pacific Yearly Meeting. The entire journey was a wonderful experience. I had the opportunity to meet with many of our faithful donors. I was also able explain to many new friends our work, challenges and needs. There were many outpourings of care, friendship and support that I received during my three week journey. I would love to share all that happened in the Update but will need to limit my experiences to some of the most memorable. During my stay in California, I made presentations to four Quaker meetings: Strawberry Creek (Berkeley), San Francisco, Sacramento and Redwood Forest (Santa Rosa). A member of Guatemala Meeting now living in San Francisco, Margaret Bean, hosted a dinner reception in her home and invited friends and neighbors. The largest event was held at Friends House, a Quaker retirement community, in Santa Rosa. In the past Redwood Forest Meeting has held an "omelet breakfast", in order to raise funds to sponsor 1 or 2 students. This year Redwood Forest and Friends House worked together on a Simple Supper and received more that \$2000 in donations.

This was enough to sponsor a medical student for an entire year with the remainder going to the general fund. At Pacific Yearly Meeting, I spoke in a plenary session and conducted an Interest Group on behalf of the scholarship program. At all of these events, Guatemalan crafts were sold to benefit the program. Jane Snyder (clerk, FWCC Section of the Americas) and her husband Joe have been long time donors to Progresa and regular participants in The Teaching English Experiences. On their way home from a conference in San Diego they picked me up in Santa Rosa and took me on an unforgettable, picturesque ride through giant redwoods to the dramatic Oregon coast. Crater Lake left the most significant impression on me as I was reminded of the beauty of our natural world and the greatness of God. We then visited Eugene, Oregon and met in the home of Tom (clerk of NorthWest YM) and Vickie Stave. Members of Eugene Friends Church (NWYM) and Eugene Monthly Meeting (NPYM) were in attendance for refreshments and to learn about the program. We then traveled to Portland where events were arranged at Reedwood Friends Church (NWYM) and Multnomah Friends Meeting (NPYM). In total, there were 10 events in two states which included three yearly meetings. Through the presentations and the sale of Guatemalan textiles, there was a much needed boost to the scholarship program finances. It was encouraging to see the enthusiasm for the scholarship program expressed by those in attendance. In summary, I believe this was a wonderful experience in which I learned many things. I want to express my profound appreciation to all who were involved in my visit: those who offered hospitality, arranged or attended events, purchased textiles and contributed in what ever way. We are only three employees at Progresa and Guatemala Monthly Meeting is a small. Thanks to the efforts of many, I returned home encouraged and rejuvenated to continue the work and do my best for the program. Thanks again to all those who made my visit truly special and successful. Sincerely, Miguel Angel Costop.

Please consider making a donation to the Scholarship Program

Donations are made to: Redwood Forest Friends Meeting

Attn: Guatemala Scholarship Loan Program

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