



Fall Update

October 2005

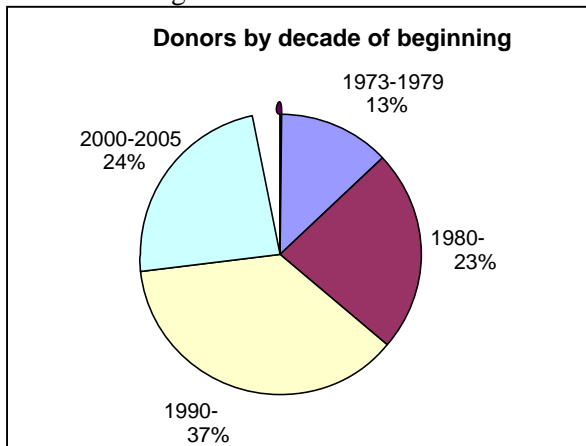
Guatemala Friends Scholarship/Loan Program (Progres)

Of Redwood Forest Friends Monthly Meeting and Guatemala Monthly Meeting

email: lacelle@conexion.com.gt website: <http://guatemalafriends.org>

A Tribute to our Donors

Although we have always had a policy to keep the identity of our supporters anonymous that does not mean that we do not value their amazingly faithful support. In a recent conversation with the director of another service project in Guatemala, I was told that the typical donor to the project lasted three years. I said that we have had many for decades. When searching our data base for when each donor first donated, we discovered the following facts about our current mailing list of donors.



13% began their support between 1973 and 1979.

23% began between 1980 and 1989.

37% began between 1990 and 1999.

24% began since 2000.

It is not surprising that many are like family and old friends and so we know quite a bit about them. Others have appeared, and stayed, even though we know very little about them. Based on the information we do have, we know that at least 62% are affiliated with the Religious Society of Friends and that at least 39% have had some direct experience with Guatemala.

Three of our current donors began in 1973 to support the very first student in the program and have remained with us for 33 years! These figures are very encouraging for us and are the main reason we have been able to increase enrolment in the program quite steadily over the years. Of course that is also dependent on our income and the reserves we maintain to see all current students to graduation even if the program had to close down. We have always relied on word-of-mouth and a few articles in magazines as our “publicity” and have not solicited

support in any direct advertising. It seems to work, thanks to all of you!

Student Conference – April 2005

For the second year the conference was held in the suburbs of Guatemala City, which reduces transportation costs for the larger number we now have from the northern areas. Its larger capacity really helped this year with our increased enrolment.

On Saturday afternoon, as the students arrived from various parts of the country, they received their monthly checks and were assigned to their rooms. After a dinner together in the dining hall, they all gathered for the talent show. As always it is full of surprises in that the students show talents we had not suspected and in a variety of ways: skits, songs, dances, poems, jokes and games.

After breakfast on Sunday, the conference convened under the theme of “Education in Guatemala and its Challenges.” Professor César Moreno, who has worked in the national ministry of education, opened the discussion with an historical analysis of the educational models that have been used in Guatemala and which have influenced current practices. He characterized them in terms such as: rote memorization, non-participative, discriminative, exclusive and repressive. Thereafter, he spoke of the main problems of the present system: lack of adequate infrastructure in the schools, inadequate teacher preparation, lack of parental support for education and also lack of support from their communities in general. At the end of his talk,



Group of discussion during our annual conference

Professor Moreno suggested some recommendations to be discussed in the small groups into which the students were divided. Finally, the spokespersons from each group presented the conclusions from those discussions. Their findings reflected how seriously the students considered the subject in general. That is certainly not surprising, since they are still within the system and are well aware of how it works...or does not work!

What we are learning about our former students.

As we reported last April, this year has seen a greatly expanded effort to learn more of our former students. In the past 15 years many towns have changed to street names and house numbers. Unless we had the new address, the mail carriers would not deliver by the former one. To make matters worse, we changed our office location in 1996. For both reasons, we lost contact with hundreds of former students.

Until last year we did not have the time or personnel to deal with the situation. This year we budgeted even more for that effort and will continue to do so next year. So far 204 visits to the last known



Manuel Romero, member of our committee, during one of the visits to graduates.

addresses have been made and that has resulted in 101 direct meetings with the former students and many new addresses and telephone numbers for the



The house and family of María Elida Martín, a former student who graduated as vocational nurse.

other 103. We greatly expanded our computer data base to include 34 fields of information, and as each bit of information comes in by personal contact or any other way, it is added to the file.

At this point, some of what we know is that over the past 33 years:

60% of our students have been men

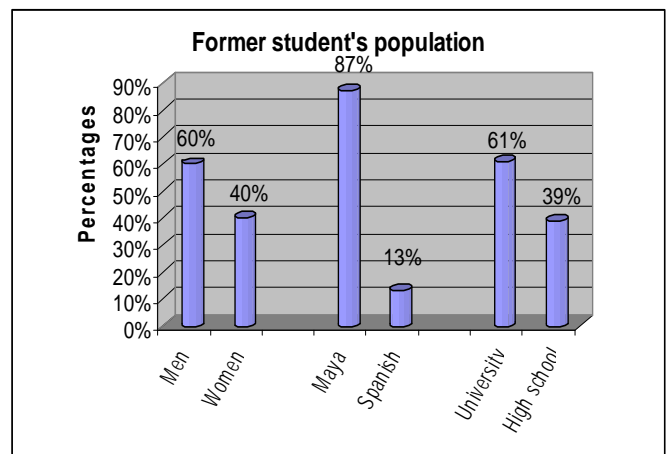
40% have been women

87% have been indigenous, almost all Maya

13% have identified with the Spanish culture

61% studied at the university level while with us.

39% studied at a technical high school.



As additional information comes in, these percentages as well as other data will change. For example, we find some cases where we had thought they graduated but now found that they had not. This is especially true at the university level where there are usually other requirements after completing course work that determine whether or not the degree is granted. Years ago we did not follow through with what happened during that period of time. For some time now, we have been keeping track of their

progress in internships, thesis projects and writing, etc., but for all the ones whose addresses from the past no longer worked, and even a few more recent ones, we had a lot to learn. It is not uncommon to find students who took three, four or even five more years to complete their requirements after finishing all classes. This is especially true in private universities who dream up more and more ways to require tuition payments after all classes were passed. More and more we are also helping the ones who cannot earn money while finishing up, so they are not left in limbo.

We are learning of many who went on to additional degrees and many who have changed careers. We now know where they work *and how they contribute to their communities*—a major goal of our program. By this time next year, we expect to be able to report more complete facts and figures.

Some Stories from Relocated Former Students.



It took four-wheel drive to arrive at the home of **María Julia Atz Balam**, who completed a teaching degree while in our program in 1994-95. We learned that after that she had graduated with the equivalent of a master's in social work and is currently completing a special course in Mayan Political Issues. Her area was hit hard in the civil war, during which she lost her husband, her son's father. All through these busy years, she has taught school and worked in local development projects, including the founding of a middle school in their community. In the last elections she was a candidate for Congress from the URNG—the party with the name of the former guerrillas in the civil war.

María Cortez Gonzáles also came from a rural community and was able to qualify as a nurse's aide after one year in our program in 2000. Since then she has been able to work in her profession in a health clinic and support her child. She too was glad to have contact with us again and wants to repay her loan so that someone else can have the advantage that she received.



An unfortunate example:

Mario Mucía started studying pharmacy in 1989. His particular career choice was far more demanding than he expected, since it was really preparation as a laboratory scientist. While he came from a poor peasant family, the other students were at least middle class. He tried both to commute to the capital for classes and do his farming chores at the same time, but the strain was too much so he dropped out. He was very glad to have contact with us again and came to the office to repay his loan, saying that even though he had failed in his goal, he felt it had been a valuable experience. We forgave half of his loan and thanked him for his integrity and loyalty.



Gonzalo Ball was located after many years without contact. We knew that he had graduated from medical school in our program in 1989-91. Since then he has also received a degree in public health here and completed a course in hospital administration at Johns Hopkins in the U.S. At present he is the supervisor medical students in their final year in the national university. At the same time he helps maintain a low-cost medical clinic in his home town in the department of Chimaltenango and has participated in various public health groups. He was happy to learn that our program has grown greatly since his time with us.

The most important thing for us to know is if our goals to help improve conditions in rural communities are being achieved. Without follow up in later years, we cannot possibly know the results. We also need to know what we could have done better and change our policies accordingly.

In Loving Memory of Victor Pérez Pablo 1978-2005

In 2001 Victor came to us from a refugee community in the Ixcán area. He had just graduated from a Catholic boarding school in Alta Verapaz and wanted to apply to a university to study political science. His story was typical of many refugees. During the civil war his family's area was hit with much violence between the army and the insurgents, so the family fled to



Mexico. There his primary education was completed in a refugee camp. As with many others in our program, we found that the refugees were academically better prepared than those who had stayed in Guatemalan rural schools. His secondary grades were excellent and we gladly accepted him into our program. We were not disappointed. His grades at the university level were always well above average and he was very active in school organizations.

At times his courage made us a bit nervous, as in the case when a notorious general visited one of his classes. Victor asked the general some very uncomfortable questions about his part in the scorched-earth policy of the early 1980s that massacred the rural population and destroyed local resources. In later years, when the general was in the graduation line at Harvard University (paid for by the U.S. government) he was served with a court order to appear for war crimes against victims who are now U.S. citizens. The general immediately left the U.S., never to return. He retired from the army and was recently killed by an attack of Africanized bees.

Such forthrightness was typical of Victor and it is a good sign of the times here that he risked putting a general on the spot. In the not-so-distant past, such an event would have been unimaginable.

It was with great sadness and dismay that we recently received three phone calls in a row from Victor's friends telling us that his body had been found in a street in Guatemala City, apparently the victim of a mugging. Criminal violence is the sign of these times. A different kind of violence but with many victims nevertheless. Polls here show that criminal violence is the number one concern of the majority of Guatemalans.

We suffer this loss along with his family and friends and we know that this society has lost someone who might have made an important difference.

Our Tours in 2006

In March of 2006 the annual conference of Friends in North and South America will be held in Guatemala. The Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, asked us, Progresa, to offer tours here before and after the conference. Attendance at the conference is not required to

participate in the tours, but we arranged the dates to fit the schedule of the conference for those who may wish to do both the conference and a tour.

The shorter tour before the conference will have an arrival date of Saturday, March 11, 2006. This one is similar to half of the second one and includes visiting sites in the Antigua area plus a trip to the Maya archeological site of Iximché in Tecpán, Chimaltenango. It ends on Wednesday, the 15th with transportation to the conference in Chiquimula—for those who need it. The cost is \$400 including all meals, lodging and in country transportation. For those also attending the conference, add \$40 for transportation to and from Chiquimula.

The longer tour is similar to many of our previous tours and includes a trip to Lake Atitlán and the western area around Quetzaltenango. It begins on Sunday afternoon March 19th and ends on Monday the 27th with transportation to the airport. The cost of the longer tour is \$800, but also \$40 more to include transportation to and from the conference in Chiquimula for those attending it. As in the past, the tours visit some of the more

interesting sites and includes the opportunity to visit the homes and workplaces of some of our students and graduates.

Anyone interested in either of these tours can contact us by e-mail at lacelle@conexion.com.gt in order to receive a complete itinerary and other information. Guatemala Friends Monthly Meeting is arranging transportation to and from the conference in Chiquimula for those not on one of the tours. It is also offering a one day walking tour of Antigua for those who have an extra day between arrival time and the conference. For information about either contact Kitty Brown at karenbrown@conexion.com.gt, or Martha Dugan at mardugan@earthlink.net



Members of our 2005 tour interacting with the family of a student in Aldea Xajaxac, Sololá.

**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**