

From the Plantation to the University
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In México, in the state of Campeche, they meet a group of eight Guatemalan teachers, who also fled to Mexico because of the violence. This group trained a team of education promoters who would then have the task of giving classes to 3.500 Guatemalan refugee Children.

They also met Randall Shea, a north American citizen who was working with Witness for Peace, which provided international accompaniment to the refugees in Mexico. When they came back in 1994 to the village, Shea came with them and settled in the community.

Shea was also the first director of the middle school in the village. When 31 ninth graders finished their middle school in 1997, Shea took advantage of his contacts in the United States and Canada to seek out scholarships funding. Also in 1997, a group of village students that completed their middle school in Mexico and later obtained scholarships in high school in Guatemala, was already looking ahead with the goal of entering the University in 1998 and they did. Among them was Edwin Canil who said that they had so much en-

First Meeting with Partner Family
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We heard about the family's experience during the internal armed conflict in the 1980's. Andrea said that when the soldiers came her family stood in the doorway and watched them approach. Andrea's mother asked if they should run, but her father replied calmly, "We have committed no crime so we have no reason to run." Martin's experience in Santa María Tzejá was much different. They were forced to run and hide in their farming parcels in the dense forest. When

Upcoming Events

The Benefit Yard Sale

Saturday May 16 9 - 3

Home of Dave & Caryl Johnson at 505 Great Plain Ave.

Be sure to help out our annual yard sale by

- * Contributing items for sale
- * Time volunteering
- * Both!

Contact Brenda for information, or to enlist.
781—449—5696

thusiasm that they didn't even care that they had no money or scholarships. Later, they got the confirmation that their scholarship will continue.

With the support coordinate by Shea, by Father Luis Gurriarán and solidarity groups like the Church of Needham, 231 middle schools graduates from Santa María Tzejá over the years had received high school scholarships, with 202 going to graduate. An additional 110 youth who didn't receive scholarships also graduated. In addition, 82 young woman and men have gone on to study at the University level and 18 had graduated.

About Regina Perez : Regina grew up in our partner village of Santa Maria Tzeja, Guatemala, and returns to the village frequently. She is a graduate of the SMT school system and has pursued a career in journalism. She works for La Hora in Guatemala City (<http://lahora.gt>). Regina is active with AESMAC, the group of young professionals who have emerged from our partner village.

Many visitors on delegations have met Regina. She is easy to get to know because she is fluent in English. We are honored to have her contribute to this edition.

an army patrol discovered them, Martin didn't even have time to put on his boots. Both of his parents were captured, taken away, and tortured by the army.

Andrea then brought out chicken for the three of us to eat, as the conversation began about her kids. Her son Alejandro is applying for a scholarship so he can continue his education at the high school level. On our way out we stopped for pictures with the family and one family picture, as they didn't have any photos of the whole family.

Partner Family September Social



The Partner Family Social Event held in September 2014 was a terrific opportunity for those of us involved in this partnership to network and have fun. Add in to the ambiance some tasty wine sampling the along with a sumptuous

spread of food, concluded by s'mores around the fire pit, and it was a complete event! Come join us this fall as we celebrate this partnership together. Details to follow.



From the Plantation to the University

By Regina Perez, Journalist, Guatemala City and citizen of SMT



During the 1960's, none of the small scale farmers who in 1970 founded Santa María Tzejá, in the Ixcán jungle, could have imagined that their children would be able to finish their primary school studies and one day make it to the University. Every year, they, like hundreds of Mayan indigenous from the Quiché region, pressured by the economic situation and the lack of land, traveled every year to Guatemala's South Coast plantation to work harvesting cotton, sugar cane and coffee, earning wages that barely covered their basic necessities. Now, 40 years later, the children of these "peasants colonizers" not only were able to attend primary school but also have gone on

to graduate from high school and more than 80 have studied or are studying at the university level.

This success was only possible due to many reasons. In 1970, more than hundred small-scale farmers, with the help of Spanish priest, Luis Gurriarán, entered into the Ixcán Jungle and founded Santa María Tzejá. That same year they built a school and had their first classes.

Unfortunately, all what they had accomplished during 12 years were interrupted with the Guatemalan army's incursion in the village, in February of 1982. The community members fled to the mountains and stay there for months until they realized they couldn't survive, so they took the decision to flee to Mexico.

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First Meeting With My Partner Family by Will Meehan



(Will is a sophomore at Needham High School, on his first trip to the village.)

Randall Shea, Fred Moder and I arrived at the Ortiz property an hour before dinner for my first visit with my new partner family. We were immediately greeted by a swarm of kids, some belonging to the family, some from the neighboring houses. We were invited inside and served a delicious orange beverage.

We were told that Martin, the father, was in another village working but would be back in the next few days. His wife, Andrea told us that she was from a village in the Highlands and desperately wanted to go back to visit her family, but with kids it was just too complicated to do so.

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What we learned from the Guatemala Human Rights Law Office

By Fred Moder

Meeting with Santiago Choc and Teresa Soto, of the Guatemala Human Rights Law Office (GHRLO) Feb 2015

The February delegation to Santa Maria Tzeja (SMT) had the pleasure of meeting with two young professionals who graduated from middle school in the Mexican refugee camp, just before the return of the people to Santa Maria Tzeja in 1994. Teresa Soto is from SMT, while Santiago Choc came from a neighboring village, but attended the middle school alongside the children from SMT. This schooling was led by SMT's Randall Shea, who went on to serve as the first principal of SMT's middle school, or Basico. We heard how their vision and determination to do something important in life, combined with some key opportunities and support, led Santiago and Teresa to where they are today.

Teresa told us she has few memories of her childhood, but one that stands out was of her first day of school, held in a cattle pasture in the refugee camp in Mexico. In 1994 her family returned to SMT from Mexico. She feared a lack of opportunity would push her to seek work in the US. A friend then told her about a high school called 'San Pedro Carcha' in Alta Verapaz which was an indigenous institution. "This was a huge test for me, because I didn't speak any Mayan language".

Santiago described how Randall brought him and several other middle school graduates to the capital, Guatemala City, to look for a high school. "He worked tirelessly to find opportunities for us, knocked on doors. I thank him from the depths of my heart." What they found was the Santiago Institute, a high school founded by the LaSalle Brothers of the Catholic Church, with the mission of educating indigenous Mayan boys to become teachers and go back to serve their communities. "We were taught values and ethics. The school formed me as a person. I learned punctuality and responsibility." Randall was there to help again when they graduated in 1997, pursuing law studies at the Univer-

sity of San Carlos in the capital. "We see Randall as our brother and our friend".

Santiago began his law studies in 1998 and finally graduated in 2011. Then a combination of serendipity and personal initiative brought him to his current job. His class was talking about a case litigated by Edgar Pérez, who was a leading figure bringing forward cases on behalf of war victims. Santiago asked his classmates, found that one knew Mr. Perez, and got the courage to call him. It happened that a new case (the massacre of Panzos) required someone fluent in Kek Chi, his native language and Santiago was hired.

Teresa also works at GHRLO, and is still completing her law degree, while raising 5 children. Both she and Santiago inspired us with their stories of hard work, their leadership based on important social values that were integral to their education, and their gratitude for the opportunities and help they had.

Questions: Is anyone interested in political office? It has to happen little by little. Changes can happen when people are in decision-making positions, such as mayor. I am interested, but for now want to gain more experience as a lawyer.

Reflections on your journey, and modern vs traditional life? (Santiago) "When we left home our slogan was after school is done we're going home. Maybe we won't go back to SMT, but I think I'm still helping her in the city. (Teresa) "We live in two worlds. We vacation in Santa Maria Tzeja. My kids think of themselves as from SMT."

How safe do you feel? "We didn't think of the consequences when we faced the defendant (President Rios Montt). We were followed during the trial, and there was a media campaign to discredit us as legal hit men, assassins. But my history told me the cases were real, and I was motivated by being the voice of the victims". (Teresa)

Liberating Education in Santa Maria Tzeja

By Clark Taylor

Delegates from our Congregational Church in Needham are often amazed when they visit the primary and the middle schools in Santa María Tzejá, our partner village. They experience not only the lively activity in the classrooms--where children are typically seated in groups of four, which makes it easy to shift into discussing a topic the teacher has posed for them--but also the vitality of the minds of the students who

seem to have confidence in their own voices to speak up with a response or a question.

The education they receive can appropriately be called "liberating education" in the way that it liberates their minds and spirits to pursue a question. Liberating education in SMT has a big goal, which is to prepare students to be active citizens as they emerge from schooling who are committed to making a better world.

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Fund Raisers

By Alan Clayton Matthews

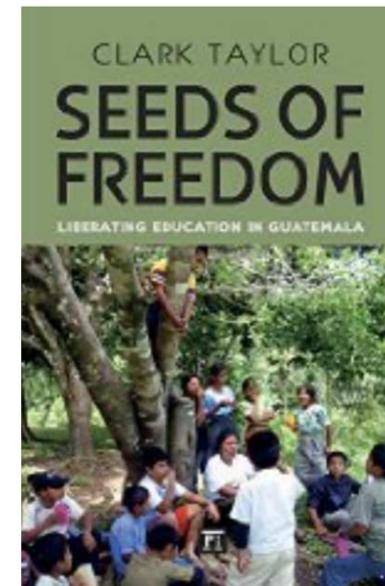
The Guatemala Partnership "works" by raising funds for education and community projects in Santa María Tzejá, but how do we raise these funds? The Partnership sponsors several fundraisers throughout the year. They change from time to time, but usually are the following:

- ◆ A spring concert fundraiser, usually in March. This year we had a very successful "**Not Your Average Talent Concert**," that involved many talented performers from our church community, under the direction of **Cici Hunt**, who is a gifted musical organizer and long time partner family. The event also includes a silent auction of goods brought back from Guatemala by our delegations.
- ◆ A "Serv-a-thon" community-service fundraiser, usually on a Saturday morning in April. Volunteers ask for sponsors and do maintenance and cleanup work around the community and the Church. In recent years this has also involved work at the Needham Community Farm.
- ◆ A yard sale, usually in May. This is one of the biggest yard sales in Needham, now in its 25th year, and the annual event attracts hundreds of shoppers from around the community and beyond.

We also seek individuals and families to sponsor a scholarship to support students in the village who want to get a high-school education, since high school is not publicly-provided in Guatemala and there is no high school in the village. The partnership supports 5 new scholarships per



Heather and Kirby Salerno perform at NYATC



Liberating Education Cont'd from Page 2

There the goal is to have them motivated to work with others in the elimination of oppression in their society so that everyone can be more free to live their lives in peace.

Those interested in learning more are invited to read Clark Taylor's book, *Seeds of Freedom: Liberating Education in Guatemala*, which is a case study of empowering education in our partner village of Santa María Tzejá in the four-plus decades since it was first settled in 1970.

The book has two implications for English-speaking readers in the U.S. and elsewhere. The first is this: the story of schooling in the village stands as testimony that education that liberates--in the sense of giving its students the confidence, knowledge, skills and determination to demand human rights for themselves and others as they emerge into adulthood--exists somewhere in the world. And second, the book offers signposts to teachers at all levels that point the way to becoming liberating educators. Keep in mind, also, that we can all be liberating educators with our children, friends, work colleagues and others.