



El Maestro en Casa, Inc.

ADULT OUTREACH EDUCATION
Ciudad Cívica, Intibucá, Honduras
501 (c)(3) Public Charity EIN 26-3900669

June 23, 2010

Dear Friends and Generous Supporters,

I'm back among you once more, taking full advantage of our early Vermont summer to putter in my perennial garden, and, of course, play with my completely amazing grandchildren. I left Honduras at the start of an earlier than normal rainy season, but a political climate that has return to normal. With the inauguration of the newly elected president in Jan., we've returned to business as usual, which for Honduras means massive unemployment and extreme poverty in the countryside. Oh well, it appears some things never change. But there is hope on the horizon. Our students are discussing the causes and consequences of last year's overthrow of the government and beginning to wonder how they can implement the changes their political "representatives" refuse to even acknowledge. I say "beginning" because it will be a long, slow process. Their parents and village elders mostly remain silent and accepting, but the murmurs of the younger generation have begun.

On the education front, I think we made some real progress. Registration is at an all-time high of 460, thanks to 2 new groups. One group is in a community where a missionary has worked for the past few years, and this year she invited us to present our program. We were able to reach out to some surrounding villages and form a group of 25 7th graders, of all ages. The other group was begun by the Catholic Church in Jesus de Otoro, a town 1/2 hour from us. They were able to register 70 7th graders from several mountain villages and have loaned us their new parish house for our weekly classes. Local teachers eagerly volunteered their time to give extra classes on Saturdays, but after 2 Saturdays they stopped showing up (as we figured they would), which at first discouraged the students, since our program is more difficult than the public schools and they could certainly use the extra help. But our two educators, Arturo and Bertha, who work with the group, were able to convince the students that we will never forsake them, and that the students themselves need to take responsibility for their own education and continue studying, despite the sacrifices. So far we've only lost 3 or 4 from the group, which is in deed a credit to Arturo and Bertha. And fortunately there's frequent bus service between Jesus de Otoro and La Esperanza, since the motorcycle they use for transportation is often out of commission.

We've also been able to bring to fruition some items on my wish list. In my last letter I mentioned that Bertha, my administrator and educator, gave birth to a baby boy in the local hospital, an experience so unnerving to me that I began mentally to organize a workshop for pregnant woman to educate them on the birth experience, and hopefully to prevent or alleviate some of the problems Bertha experienced from the unenlightened care she received. Well, Robynn Leidig, a remarkable Peace Corps health volunteer, took my extremely vague ideas and organized them into two 2 1/2 - day workshops, complete with dynamic activities, materials list, and even a complete menu of nutritious meals. Not only that, she found the funds we needed to do it! Our participants included pregnant women, health volunteers and nursing students from the school that is renting our facility. Our goal was two-fold: to educate women about their bodies, empowering them to make educated decisions about their reproductive life; and also to sensitize the nursing students to the physical and emotional needs of their women patients, whatever their economic, social or ethnic background. Our agenda included a discussion of traditional beliefs and practices surrounding pregnancy and birth, nutrition, fetal and maternal changes during the trimesters of pregnancy, common complaints and discomforts, pre-natal care and birth planning, HIV transmission and testing, normal labor and delivery, complications and danger signs, post-partum care, breast feeding and newborn care. The highlight of the workshops was a guided tour of the labor and delivery room at the local hospital by the head nurse. We were able to include in the tour some nurses who showed up from a visiting US brigade. Their eyes grew very large as we meandered through beds filled with groaning women in labor and Robynn and I translated the head nurse's

explanation of normal procedures. No family members or friends are allowed to accompany the women once they are admitted to the labor room. When the baby begins to crown, the woman gets out of bed and walks across the hall to the delivery room, where she may or may not be attended by a doctor, depending on the day's traffic. After the baby is born and the appropriate tests and vaccines have been administered, she waits until there's someone available to roll her to the huge ward where she'll spend the next 12 hours if there are no complications. The department of health has long been encouraging village women to come to the hospital to have their babies, and many do. But there are still many who are afraid of the hospital because of the impersonal and sometimes degrading attention they receive. Thus, the idea for our workshop. When I return to Honduras in Sept., we hope to continue the workshops, with the help of a Japanese midwife from JICA, a Japanese service organization, and hopefully the Peace Corps volunteer who replaces Robynn.

Another whimsical idea was made real by Ayano Naruoka, an extremely talented artist and volunteer with JICA. I've always envied the wonderful arts programs my grandchildren enjoy in our local school, but how to include art in a distance learning program, especially given our financial constraints? My dream was to offer weaving classes, which would reinforce Lenca culture and at the same time encourage artistic expression. Then one day I met Ayano. She taught weaving in Japan and is teaching it at a trade school in La Esperanza as her service assignment, and she was thrilled at the idea of starting a weaving class on Sundays for a few of our students. JICA even provided the funds for basic materials, and a couple of weeks before I left to come home, we began our first weaving classes, with 7 women and 1 man (and assorted children). In the first class the students built their own frame loom, and in the second they began weaving their first practice piece. We're using normal yarn for the warp, but the weft is sheets the students tore into strips. For their next project, the students will dye the sheets with flowers, vegetable skins and all sorts of natural materials. The course will be 9 classes, but those who want to continue can set up a schedule of advanced classes with Ayano. Meanwhile, Bertha, who is participating in this first course, will teach another beginning course. Hopefully the more interested students will begin to produce weavings that we can sell to visiting brigades from the US, generating income for the students as well as a small bit for our program.

A third project, which has been on the back burner for a couple of years, was finally ignited, this time thanks to Mark Paquette, another Peace Corps volunteer who's been teaching our high school math and physics courses. Mark wrote a proposal for the Peace Corps website and we were able to get enough donations to buy the materials to build a greenhouse on top of one of our roofs. Using a pyramid system, we're planting strawberries to sell through a cooperative, generating about \$2,000 of income for our program (we hope!). The idea originated with David Euceda, a local Honduran farmer who has studied sustainable agriculture in the US. For years David has been successfully planting strawberries and other crops using greenhouses, and since we have very little land at our center, I thought a green house on our flat roof seemed like a feasible idea. But now, thanks to Mark, we have the funds to actually build it. Before I left to come home, David gave the first workshop to a group of 10 students who will run the project for a year, supervised by David and Mark (and hopefully Mark's replacement). All of our students will observe and learn about the project, with the hope that some of them will use this method for a kitchen garden at home. The pyramid arrangement of the planting boxes in the greenhouse allows for more plants, and the controlled soil, humidity and temperature gives more yield per plant. I just received an email from Bertha that the construction has in deed begun. Normally strawberries are not grown in the rainy season (right now) because of the damage and diseases the rain brings, but hopefully the protection of the greenhouse will allow for a successful crop. At least the greenhouse is covering the roof over our office and computer lab, which normally leaks in the rainy season. I've discovered that almost all flat roofs in Honduras leak, because of sloppy mixing of cement and sloppy construction, yet most construction continues to have flat roofs (???) . At least we've found a productive solution to ours! I'm hoping to build one or two more greenhouses, on our other leaky roofs, if this one proves successful.

And last, but definitely not least, we have a new official website, because of another serendipitous meeting, this time with Laurie Cameron. Laurie and I met when her son was looking for a mini Peace Corps type experience, and I arranged for him to volunteer in one of our communities. Turns out Laurie has created

some incredible websites and very generously volunteered her valuable time and talent to do ours. So do check it out: www.maestroencasaintibuca.org

So, it's been a good year so far. However, one major problem remains: funding for our operational budget. It's ironic that we so easily obtained funding for three side projects, but I still can't pay my staff, on whom the entire program depends! We also desperately need to buy a new motorcycle, to the tune of \$4,000. I just got word that the older of our two motorcycles has just permanently died (it's died before but we've been able to resurrect it). This is particularly difficult for Tuesdays and Wednesdays, when we have to visit 2 groups on each day, on opposite sides of Intibucá. All fund raising ideas are welcome! I'll be home until Sept. 1, so give me a call or email.

As always, I'm supremely grateful for your generous support, and I wish you all as glorious a summer as I plan to have.

Susan
xsusanstone@yahoo.es

Photos from our maternal health workshops:



Two students, Iris (pregnant) and Rosa, discussing beliefs and traditions



A creative interpretation of the reproductive system



Iris practicing breast feeding



Making green tortillas (nutrition lesson)



Our trip to the maternity ward



Robynn and Leslie (nursing student) explaining the reproductive process

Photos from our weaving classes:



Ayano (standing in back) helping her students



Cutting up sheets, with the help of assorted children



Let the weaving begin!!

Photos from the greenhouse project



Construction begins on our roof (new Supreme Court building in background)



Planting boxes in pyramid formation



High school students filling the planter boxes with top soil and cow manure that all our students brought during the year



Ready for planting!