



El Maestro en Casa, Inc.
ADULT OUTREACH EDUCATION
Ciudad Cívica, Intibucá, Honduras
501 (c)(3) Public Charity EIN 26-3900669
<http://lencaeducation.org>

13 January, 2012

Dear Friends and Generous Supporters,

After another spectacular Christmas with my family, and continual entertainment by my grandchildren, I'm once again packing my bags, preparing myself for another return to La Esperanza and another school year. As usual, we ended the 2011 school year with a bang, graduating 10 students from 6th grade, 50 from 9th grade, and 13 from high school, in a celebration held, as usual, the Saturday before Thanksgiving (so I can get home to my family). One of our high school graduates, Orvin Garcia, is the son of former El Maestro en Casa students. His mom and dad both began with us in the 3rd grade. Mom went as far as 8th grade before succumbing to the demands of family, but dad was able to finally graduate high school, after a few starts and stops, and has expanded his family farm into a successful agricultural cooperative. One of Orvin's sisters just finished her 1st year of high school with us, and his other sister will begin this year. A cousin was one of our 6th grade grads. Oh, and mom will finally be returning to us this year!



Orvin, his parents, 2 sisters and grandmother

Our achievements came, as always, against a backdrop of a deteriorating public education system, with continual teacher strikes and empty promises of reform. And now Honduras has reached a new first as homicide capital of the world. Increasing crime, exacerbated by the wounding of a Peace Corps volunteer, has resulted in Peace Corps terminating their projects, at least for the moment, in Honduras. We've always enjoyed the support of individual volunteers in our high school classes, and we'll be particularly sorry to say goodbye to Nicki and Nolan Sandberg, the young couple who have contributed so much to our program, not least of which is the extraordinary map of the world our 8th grade students painted under their expert design and supervision, and which forms the backdrop for some of our photos here. Although La Esperanza is still considered one of the safest places in the country, volunteers can no longer travel with adequate safety, so all have to leave by the middle of this month. We are hoping that this situation will change soon and we'll once again be able to count volunteers among our high school teachers.



Nicki and Nolan with high school graduates

But lots of good things occurred in 2011 that bode well for an even better 2012. Toward the end of the year Cup for Education (www.cupforeducation.org) renewed its sponsorship of one of our teachers, and included funds to repair our



Roof repair—in the rain!

leaking roofs so that we can eventually build another roof-top greenhouse (and our students no longer need umbrellas in the classroom). The director will even be paying us a visit in March! We also became the official guest house for pregnant women from the villages who are waiting to have their babies in the hospital and have nowhere to stay in La Esperanza. The hospital actually has a guest house, but it is so filthy and decrepit that a community group has finally raised the funds to rebuild it (before the roof caves in and kills someone). Our dormitories were chosen as their temporary quarters because we're close to the hospital, and our bathrooms work. Of course we love helping the women, but we also love the much-needed extra income.

We've also attracted some non-Peace Corps volunteers. One amazing woman in Canada, Wendy Elliott, stumbled upon us by way of our website (thank you Laurie!) and is now our volunteer fund-raiser. In just a few short months she set up a motorcycle campaign on our website (<http://lencaeducation.org/support-us/moto-for-education/>) which in turn connected us to Motorcycle Vermont, resulting in an excellent article you really should check out (<http://motorcycle-vermont.com/front-page-feature/motorcycles-for-education/>). She's also developed a proposal to improve and expand our computer lab, including internet connection, which we desperately need, and we're putting the finishing touches on a remedial materials project to reduce our drop-out rate. As I keep emphasizing, one of our biggest problems is the poor preparation our students have when they enter our program, and one of our biggest challenges is how to maintain our standards while maintaining our students. This project should alleviate many of our concerns.

However, from my perspective her best idea was to create a social enterprise which could generate enough income to sustain our program and deliver me from the constant headache of looking for funding. We do generate reliable income from renting out our facility, but it's not nearly enough to pay salaries. For the last several years we've experimented with various possibilities, such as our student store and snack room, and our roof-top greenhouse looked really promising. The problem, however, always comes down to lack of time, personnel and expertise needed to be truly successful. So I've applied to a Swiss organization to send us a business expert to determine the viability of expanding our greenhouse project, or suggest other possibilities, and to show us how to set up a business that will provide enough income to employ a manager (one of our graduates) and at the same time support our program. This would include a small loan to get started. Ideally, in the future we will provide employment for more of our graduates and serve as a model for their own start-ups. I really believe this is the direction we must take. The world economic situation has diminished the availability of both grants and private donations, and we definitely need to become self-sustaining, at least as much as possible. So, I'm hopeful.



Ladies in waiting—with their midwife

Meanwhile, some other volunteers are actually joining me in La Esperanza. One very adventurous soul, Sherry Crawford, will spend 2 months with me, and she somehow convinced her horticulturist friend to spend 2 weeks. And not to be outdone by these strong Vermont women, a young Marine Corps officer will also pay us a brief visit; all this, plus Cup for Education and hopefully a business volunteer, in February and March. Did I mention that we'll also still be registering students and starting the new school year during those months? The idea of volunteers has been in the back of my mind for years, but it took Wendy Elliott creating a new volunteer page on my website to get things rolling. Now I'm receiving applications weekly!

So, although I'm always a bit sad leaving my grandkids, I really am looking forward to the New Year and all it will bring us. Remember, though, all these proposals are just that, proposals, and if some or all are successful, it will still be some time before the actual funds arrive. Meanwhile, we still don't have even one reliable motorcycle, and we can't reach our remote village groups without at least 2. And we certainly would welcome a sponsorship for another teacher. I encourage you to visit the support page on our website (<http://lencaeducation.org/support-us/>), and tell your friends!

As always, my profound thanks to you all—we couldn't run our program without you.

SUSAN