

The Oaxaca Learning Center



Making a difference, one young person at a time!

Tutoring | Women's Group | English & Computer Skills | Counseling
Student Stipend Program | Designing The Future

www.tolc.org.mx

www.iicaprendizaje.org

Spring 2012

New TOLC Video



*Gary Titus, founder and
guiding light of
The Oaxaca Learning Center.*

A friend told us we should put a warning sign above the Center's front door: "CAUTION! Infectious environment!" Indeed, visitors who drop in often catch the bug—the Center's purposefulness, collegial camaraderie, and youthful energy. Frequently they offer their particular talents to help us. One such is Sylvia Hines from London, who passed through Oaxaca in 2006, visited the Center and volunteered here. When she left, she told Gary she'd be back one day to put her professional documentary-filmmaking experience at our service. This past December, return Sylvia did. Generously giving us the gift of her time and talents, she left the Center with an six-minute Internet piece that captures what she finds special here.

Says Sylvia: "What really strikes me is how strong the Center's ethos is. Everyone described it as a family, a place they felt cared about and looked after. I was particularly moved by how many Center workers said that because they had received help, they wanted to do the same for others in the future. If only the whole world worked on those principles!"

"What Sylvia has done for us will be really useful in our constant struggle for funding," Gary states emphatically. "One of our important tactics is to encourage our friends to bring our work to the attention of philanthropically minded individuals and groups in their communities. These may be large civic organizations, or churches and temples; or they may just be groups of concerned, humanitarian friends who get together over potluck suppers. Sylvia's piece, being so easily available, will be a wonderful new tool for our fundraising friends to use." Proudly, he adds: "We've been able to structure ourselves so that every single cent that comes our way goes directly to making academic and personal advancement possible for one more young person in Oaxaca. And here, small contributions can make *huge* differences in a student's life. Like the

difference between being able to continue in school and having to drop out."

Thanks to Center support, Gerardo Reyes didn't have to drop out. Still a Center regular, he is on his successful way through university. It is he who closes Sylvia's video: "Enjoy every moment of everything you do. Appreciate your skills and accept your imperfections.... Enjoy the gift of life and share it with others." Right on, Gerardo! And bravo, Sylvia, for capturing such a quintessential Center moment!

Sylvia is currently acting Chief Executive of a London-based non-profit called Media for Development, with a mandate to "reach and empower isolated communities." You have empowered us, Sylvia, and we are profoundly grateful!

To view Sylvia's video, click on this link:

<http://vimeo.com/40553509>

Meet Emanuel

In a bit of serendipity, Gary Titus and Emanuel Nolasco, a young college student, bumped into one another in June of 2008. Now, those who know him are aware of Gary's genius for identifying people with special talents. A conversation ensued, followed by Gary's suggestion that Emanuel consider tutoring students in math at the Center. What fate began, good fortune has continued; today Emanuel plays an important role in the work being accomplished here.

Born in Arriaga, Chiapas in early 1986, Emanuel was the youngest of three sons born to Epifanio Nolasco and Belladora Acosta. Fearing for the safety of his family in the Zapatista revolution, his father moved them to Oaxaca in 1994. They settled on a hillside on the outskirts of the city. Their home had no running water, sewer connection or electricity. Epifanio made ends meet by delivering drinking water to the homes in the neighborhood. Belladora worked in the home as a seamstress, making clothing. They were poor and lived simply, but the parents raised three fine young men! The eldest is now an officer in the Army, stationed in Veracruz. The second teaches high school students in Ocotlan. And Emanuel -- well, he is as charming a fellow as you could ever hope to meet.

A bright and engaging youngster, Emanuel followed in the footsteps of his older brothers, finishing high school (something few kids in his neighborhood managed). He had an aptitude for math, so pursued a college degree in engineering, which was one of the few courses of study he could afford. He worked part time in a bar and then a cinema to earn money for tuition. At first, he could only help out at the Center sporadically, as his academic and work schedules permitted. But the more he tutored other students, the more happy and fulfilled he felt. To quote his own words: "My heart tells me that I need to help at the Center. When you hear the problems of the

students -- familial, financial, academic -- you want to help them. When you are able to help, you feel better."

After completing his bachelor's degree, he continued to help at the Center, for the most part without compensation. Happily, last year one of our donors provided additional funds, so the Center was able to give him a monthly stipend for his services. The Center also arranged a scholarship for him to take English classes at the Cambridge

Academy. His enthusiasm for and involvement with the Center continued to grow. Finally, this past February, the staff nominated him to be the Coordinator of the English program when Lorenzo Bazán, the former coordinator, had to surrender the position to take on a full-time job teaching English to university students.

Now Emanuel is busy with his new responsibilities. With the Center itself growing, taking on more students and tutors and expanding into larger quarters, there is a lot to do. Emanuel would like to create a more uniform teaching program, with better continuity of instruction, more support for

the teachers, textbooks and workbooks for the students, and a method to gauge what students are learning. He is going to be one busy fellow, as next fall he hopes to pursue a master's degree in engineering, with a focus on renewable energy. In the meantime, he occupies himself with guitar and violin lessons, is learning French and sings in two adult choirs. No idle TV time for this fellow!



*Emanuel Nolasco,
the Center's newly appointed
English Language Coordinator*

I spent a few months teaching French and English at the Learning Center. I had a wonderful student, whose name is Emanuel. The boy is bright, kind and always smiling - and he learns languages very fast. I can say that he is one of the best students I ever had.

I wish him the best of luck in life!

- Michel Plante



Some of our English teachers, tutors and intercambio people meet at the Center.

English Language Program

The Learning Center has offered English language classes for a number of years. Over time, the program has expanded in size and scope, and now is comprised of three parts: group classes, individual tutoring and intercambios.

We are pleased to currently have six instructors who teach a total of 50 students in a classroom setting. Most of the classes meet for 90 minutes three times per week. There is also one Saturday class that runs for four hours. Our volunteer teachers are fluent in both Spanish and English, and most have professional experience in teaching English as a second language.

In addition to the group classes, the Center has seven tutors who meet individually with students once or twice a week on a schedule that fits the students' needs. These exchanges usually run for 60 to 90 minutes each. Like the class instructors, our English tutors offer their services on a voluntary basis. There are presently 24 students receiving individualized tutoring.

Lastly, our native students and gringo visitors have a chance to practice their English/Spanish

skills in a series of intercambios (informal one-on-one discussions where the pair spend half the time speaking in one language, then switch to the other). Many of these sessions take place at the Center, but others meet at a time and place chosen by the participants.

As the newly-appointed coordinator of the English program, Emanuel has several goals. The most important task is to assure continuity in the program, both as to course content and student involvement. Two of our dedicated tutors, Dave and Kathy Wells, are developing a curriculum for the entire program, which will specify teaching objectives, course materials and testing procedures. These will help improve the quality of the program overall. The Center has also received a grant from the Oaxaca Lending Library Foundation to provide some basic textbook materials for our teachers and students.

We are proud of the students who give up their free time to take part in the English program and all the volunteer instructors who make it happen!

Coaching To Bring Out The Personal Best

In addition to our tutoring, the Learning Center's approach to supporting our students focuses on mentoring through one-on-one conversations, group discussions (such as those in the women's and gender equity group) and an ongoing dialogue with each participant about their personal future -- further studies, career objectives, individual goals, etc. -- what we call "designing the future".

In February, the Learning Center had a unique opportunity to enhance our mentoring skills. Richard Michaels, a co-author of *Coaching for Transformation: Igniting Personal and Social Change* and guest at our B&B in 2011 and 2012, generously offered to give two afternoon workshops to our Director and five program Coordinators to "test" the coaching methodology and techniques for their relevance to our program. As Richard explained, "Coaching is a form of dialogue that maximizes human potential. It does so by expanding how we listen, ask questions, and a host of other skills and processes that help bring out self-awareness, creativity, enhanced communication abilities, and new behaviors in people."

The sessions generated enormous enthusiasm. The group quickly experienced, enjoyed, and was able to apply the new depth they found in communication with each other by using basic coaching techniques. They could see the coaching techniques would allow them to help students think more creatively about their own interests, special talents and potential in "designing their future" rather than being "oriented" or "advised".

Sonia Bautista, speaking on behalf of the team that attended the sessions, felt that, "After having this experience, things have changed. Personally, I experienced a transformation in myself and my ability to help others. I believe that those who attended also share that feeling. In the future our Interventions with the students will be more fruitful and the techniques of coaching will allow us to help them move to a new awareness of themselves and their capabilities."

For Richard, "As a coach and trainer, the group was a joy to work with. It was the first time I worked through a translator. However, the enthusiasm of the coordinators needed no translation. I am delighted that the coordinators of The Oaxaca Learning Center experienced coaching as a whole new perspective on mentoring stu-

dents. They saw how they could apply this way of thinking and communicating with the students. They saw a step further and recognized how this could spawn a new culture, deepening the already close-knit learning community at the center. Sonia and her team are adopting what they have learned and - as she enthusiastically says - "We are ready to take the next step -- more intensive training in coaching."

The Friends of the Oaxaca learning Center, our non-profit corporation, will work with Sonia and the coordinators to develop a proposal requesting funding so that we can deepen coaching skills in our staff and extend the training to tutors and volunteers. A three-year program would accomplish that and allow several selected staff members to qualify as certified trainers. Then we could offer our expertise to other organizations and professionals in Oaxaca.

We are asking you, our friends and supporters, to let us know if you have contacts with foundations or individuals who would be interested in funding this program. Please contact Fay Henderson at henderson.fay@gmail.com if you know of such a group or person. Thanks for your help!

Space Available!



Our Bed & Breakfast here at the Learning Center has lots of openings through the spring and summer of 2012.

If you or people you know are planning to visit Oaxaca, please consider staying with us!

100% of the proceeds from the B&B are used to further the work of the Learning Center.

Information about and reservations for the B&B can be had at www.tolc.org.mx.

Big Dreams And Hard Work

For many young people, access to education is no big deal. It's simply an expected part of their lives. But for others, it is a dream of fairy tale proportions -- a dream worth pursuing, even if that means long years spent toiling for meager pay and traveling great distances to find educational resources. Rosa Elena Vásquez had that dream growing up in Bajos de Chila, an obscure little town not many miles from the coastal resort of Puerto Escondido. She shared it with her younger brother, Wilberth.



Rosa Elena Vásquez bravely left home in search of an education.

Two of seven children in a family of subsistence farmers, both have achieved success in their university studies in the city of Oaxaca. Both have had a long - and, yes, life-changing - association with the Oaxaca Learning Center.

After finishing primary school, Rosa had to help her mother sell fruits and vegetables in Bajos de Chila. For several years they made and sold the corn-gruel drink atole to supplement the family's meager income. Then her mother started making tamales - delicious creations made with sweet corn, black beans, chepiles, raisins or pineapples - which Rosa helped sell. Meanwhile, Rosa managed to study computer science part-time and finally, in her late teens, to complete her high school studies at a school for adults in Puerto Escondido. She had begun learning English because, as she recalls thinking to herself at the time, "English is an important subject."

In 2005, Rosa came to the city of Oaxaca for the first time and enrolled in the Foreign Languages program of the state university. She participated in intercambio activities at the Center for a number of years, perfecting her English as she traded Spanish lessons for help in English from visitors to the Center.

"Rosa was a very responsible and focused student, with clear goals," recalled Sonia Bautista, the director of the Learning Center. "She came to Oaxaca to study on her own, really without any help or support."

After Rosa's first semester, her younger brother joined her in the city to finish his high school studies. Wilberth decided to study dentistry, as there are no dentists in his home town. He ranked first among all incoming freshman on the entrance exam for the state university's dental program! He had already been coming to the Learning Center for help in his studies, again following the lead of his sister.

For Wilberth, the Learning Center's original attraction was free access to computers and the internet. Later he took advantage of the tutoring: "I was so happy to find people who could help me get ahead in my studies." And still later, because he wanted to give back to the Center for all that it had helped him, Wilberth became a tutor here. His outstanding academic achievement and dedication have gained Wilberth financial aid through the Learning Center from his first semester in dental school.

Today Rosa is an English teacher in a high school in the Mixteca Alta region of Oaxaca and Wilberth is in his final semester of dental school. Rosa and Wilberth's dream of an education has come true through dedication and effort.

Everyone who works at the Center and contributes to its efforts can be proud of their success!



Wilberth followed his older sister to the Oaxaca Learning Center.

Students Receive Financial Aid From The Oaxaca Learning Center

The Oaxaca Learning Center's program of financial aid to outstanding and deserving students is currently helping fourteen students -- six young women and eight young men. One fellow is in junior high and another is in high school. The other twelve are studying at the university level.

Known as the *Grupo de Apoyo a Estudiantes* in Spanish, the program also provides tutoring support, English lessons and psychological counseling to the students.

The financial aid they receive is the direct result of contributions to the Learning Center from our friends and the actions of individuals who choose to sponsor a student. Most of the financial aid students are from small towns scattered across the state of Oaxaca. All are from families of limited resources. Without the financial aid, the students would be unable to stay in school or would have to work long hours to support themselves and pay their tuition expenses, which could seriously undermine their success in school.

The Oaxaca Learning Center is pleased to be able to assist these young scholars:

Andrés Cruz Hernández	<i>third year of junior high</i>
David Osorio Sánchez	<i>second year of high school</i>
Elizabeth Martínez González	<i>eighth semester, accounting</i>
María García Gallegos	<i>sixth semester bilingual primary education</i>
Angelina Mesinas Hernández	<i>fourth semester, accounting</i>
Anel Sánchez Cortés	<i>sixth semester, communications</i>
Estefanía Martínez Ramírez	<i>second semester, foreign relations</i>
Patricia Robles Contreras	<i>fifth quarter, food technology</i>
Wilberth Vásquez Ramírez	<i>ninth semester, dentistry</i>
Efraín Pérez Hernández	<i>sixth semester, nursing</i>
Marcelino Martínez Ramírez	<i>graduate, business administration</i>
Omar Rito Cortés	<i>sixth semester, civil engineering</i>
Gerardo David Reyes Rivera	<i>fourth semester, language teaching, specialty in English</i>
Jesús Manuel Velasco Hernández	<i>fourth semester, chemical engineering</i>

Please don't forget to order your copy of ¡Salud! while supplies last. This collection of healthful and easy-to-make Mexican vegetarian recipes can be purchased through PayPal for \$17.95, plus shipping. One hundred percent of the proceeds go to support the work of the Oaxaca Learning Center. ¡Buen provecho!

Puréed Carrot Soup With Orange Juice

Ingredients

12 medium carrots, peeled and cooked until soft
1 quart fresh orange juice
1 small onion, finely chopped
2 tablespoons butter

Preparation

In a saucepan, sauté onion in butter for 5 minutes, using low heat.
Purée carrots with orange juice in blender.
Pour juice into saucepan and heat for 3 minutes over low heat.
Garnish with yogurt and parsley.
Soup may be served hot or cold.

Ordering a copy of our cookbook is quick and easy! Just click on the PayPal link below:

https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=YTTYK2W4VZRGN