



Our Year in Review

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September 2020 - December 2021

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If They're Willing, We're Willing

**We welcome
Yesenia Floridalma Cuz
Pom to the FBTB team!**



As a graduate from Centro Educativo Privado Talita Kumi, twenty-year-old Yesenia is back in her hometown, Caserío Seacacar Abajo. When she was younger there was no middle school in her village. So, when Yessi finished sixth grade, her parents sent her to Cobán to continue her education. Only five percent of Mayan girls earn a high school diploma. With a focus on finance and administration, she has the skills and determination to organize and open our newest library. Yessi speaks and writes both Spanish and Q'eqchí, her home language. Biblioteca Seacacar's young readers will feel right at home with Yessi. After all, she is their neighbor; she is one of them.

Promoting literacy from afar was never the plan. From 2007 to 2019 we traveled yearly to Central America to create and grow a dozen village libraries. We worked face to face with partners, laughed with children, and listened to them read. We witnessed their challenges and celebrated their successes. Today the pandemic dictates that we operate through our Nicaraguan and Guatemalan liaisons, and it is working. Despite this year's big challenges, and our many concerns, FBTB and the communities we work with continue to persevere and grow.

In our newsletters, we hope to share photos of libraries filled with children and adults reading, playing games, and enjoying the resources you have generously provided. But in 2020-21 the difficulties multiplied. While Covid-19 mercilessly infected people worldwide, our readers faced even more hurdles. Within one week, two Category -5 hurricanes swept



Liaison Indira, helping families to higher ground

through both countries, affecting everyone. Images of massive flooding arrived in our inboxes. We worried about the survival of our friends--and those modest but very effective libraries.

Relief came with news from our partners that no one in any of the communities had died, and that only a few books got wet. Thankfully, Mother Nature spared our libraries. And residents, braving wind and rain, moved quickly to save lives and property.

In Malacatoya, Nicaragua, flooding endangered families in the poorest neighborhoods. A

rescue team, including FBTB liaisons Indira Morales and Frank López, waded through chest-high waters to help mothers carrying babies to the church located at the town's highest elevation.

Meanwhile, in Seacacar, Guatemala, villagers ran to the schools to rescue resources. They placed hundreds of books in waterproof plastic tubs and hauled them up the hill to the shelter of their church.

When founder Maggie Covill heard this story, she said, *Kim, Central America will never be an ideal place to create libraries, but if they're willing, we're willing.*

If They're Willing, We're Willing

Progress in Challenging Times

Indira Morales Medrano, Liaison Nicaragua



Biblioteca El Pantanal

Thanks to FBTB and its supporters, six small libraries located in the poorest of neighborhoods surrounding Granada serve their communities. This beautiful project benefits youth from low-income families. Parents tell me that their children study with more enthusiasm and earn better grades in school, and teachers claim that before the pandemic attendance improved.

Currently schools offer in-person classes only three times a week to minimize contagion. In my most recent visit to the schools, the teachers stressed the importance of having these materials to meet the required Nicaraguan academic standards. Teachers can plan lessons, facilitating instruction, and students can do their own research. In these communities, not so many years ago, there were few books or educational materials from which to learn. The parents are overjoyed with the ongoing support FBTB offers. Thank you all.



Biblioteca Frankfurt, La Laguna

Ramiro Tacaj, Aaqakar Association Representative, Seacacar, Guatemala

Very soon the Seacacar community will be operating the first public library in the area. All people (children, youth, and even adults) will be welcome and have access to its books and resources.



Welcome to Seacacar's public library, almost ready for readers!

The Seacacar library construction is ninety percent finished. The doors have been hung and the walls painted inside and out. We need to transport the bookshelves and cabinets, built by a carpenter in El Estor, to the village. For the RACHEL digital library system to function, we will install another solar panel, and update software on two laptops and eight Chromebooks.

We thank From Books to Brilliance for the support they provide to our community. This library will offer opportunity to our Mayan Q'eqchi' people, especially the young people of the Sauce River basin, to prepare for a better future.

In a very personal way, I appreciate all the support you provide to my Guatemalan brothers and sisters. You are people with

big hearts who assist the indigenous people of Guatemala especially. Only through education can we overcome the poverty that exists here.

The Rios Fund,
Rotary eClub of
the SW USA,
and Rotary
District 5495



continue to collaborate with FBTB to create access to books and information in Seacacar. Children will soon be enjoying the resources now available in their community. We invite you all to come for a visit. The kids will be proud to show you around and read you a story in their very own library!

Books for two elementary schools, Seacacar Abajo and Seacacar Arriba



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Sabine Gandler, Austrian Guatemalan Institute (IAG) Instructor, Volunteer with IAG's Amigos Program for Santo Tomás la Unión, Guatemala

Conditions at the Austriaco Maxeño improved dramatically in 2021. This primary school finally has permanent access to water through a contract with the local community. Desks, chairs, doors, and leaking roofs were repaired, and under the supervision of colleague Markus Hainz, a protective wall was built around the school grounds.

Since Covid struck, students learn from worksheets distributed by teachers



Lorenzo Sop García with teachers and tablets

Sadly, school founder Lorenzo Sop García recently lost a sister, a brother-in-law, and his mother to the pandemic. But Lorenzo states that these school improvements keep him going at this time. I am convinced that he and his teachers, who have been working for years on a voluntary basis, will continue to make this school a better place for the kids. He thanked my friends and ex-colleagues from the Region of Tirol, the Amigos Association at the Austrian Guatemalan Institute, and me, for making this possible. We thank you!

Ana Toj, Instructor, Jun Toj, Rabinal, Guatemala



When the pandemic began and instruction ceased in Guatemala, our Jun Toj bilingual school community acted quickly. The board of directors, administrators, and teachers designed a home-schooling plan for pre-school and primary-level students. With educational resources provided by FBTB, teachers put together individualized learning packets for the children under their care. The teachers distribute them weekly by bicycle and correct the pupils' work from the previous week. Both parents and students are delighted with this teaching and learning strategy.



Volunteers Sabine Gandler and Markus Hainz with Centro Educativo Austriaco Maxeño teacher



RMD Are these acronyms already rolling off your tongue? A qualified charitable distribution (QCD) can be a very tax-effective way to support a cause. A check is sent directly from an IRA to a charity, allowing the donor to exclude the amount from taxable income. **QCD**
 And FBTB would be forever grateful!

If They're Willing, We're Willing

At Home in the USA

Director Debbie Gonzales ensures that FBTB supports reading programs in the USA. She creates partnerships with proven organizations that promote literacy locally. For years we received thousands of lightly used books through student-led book drives at Albuquerque's Sandia Prep and James Monroe Middle School. Those donations went to local children's organizations, homeless shelters, and Native American preschools. This year FBTB volunteered with Read To Me ABQ Network, encouraging early childhood literacy. A reliable book source for twenty years, Read To Me! also provides bilingual books in English, Spanish,



and Swahili and in several tribal languages spoken across New Mexico.



In honor of Al and Peggy Owens, FBTB received a donation to have furniture built locally for the Santo Tomás la Unión and Seacacar libraries. Bookshelves are nowhere to be found in these remote villages. The Guatemalan carpenters thanked us for the business!

Going Forward

Central Americans always struggle with nature's storms. Hurricanes hit and volcanoes erupt. Tropical heat, humidity, and rains are ever present. Countless people live in huts with dirt floors and no running water or electricity. Maggie is right. These villages are not *ideal* for library creation. Then again, FBTB supporters, these are the communities that need our help the most. And *if they're willing, we're willing*.

As we look back on 2021, we are inspired by the courage and perseverance of our Nicaraguan and Guatemalan friends. During two hurricanes they saved babies and protected books. When the pandemic forced schools to close, instructors rode their bikes to students. When Covid-19 prevented us from traveling, our liaisons stepped forward to maintain and grow FBTB libraries.




We say goodbye to FBTB enthusiast and close friend Albert Thomas Owens. Son Ted describes his father as *an accidental Zen master who lived life by never fretting about the past or worrying about the future.*

March 1926—April 2021

Al was preceded in death by his wife, Margaretha (Peggy) Dahmen. Al and Peggy strongly believed in this mission to create village libraries and played an important role in FBTB's founding. They were extraordinary people who supported their friends however they could. We were fortunate to know them.

We now look to 2022 with even more confidence that FBTB's mission will continue despite hurricanes or pandemics. Access to books and information changes lives. We thank you all, our From Books to Brilliance *family*, for your words of encouragement and your trust in this organization. Wishing you the best during this holiday season and the year to come!

We say *buen viaje* to Argentine author and FBTB director Rita Wirkala, PhD. A long-time resident of Seattle, Rita will now be writing in Spain. Many thanks, Rita!



FBTB liaison Emanuel Carrera worked diligently to promote literacy in Seacacar. He recently began a career in retail. We wish him success.

