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A Dream to Teach Comes True: Sebastiana

Sebastiana dreamed of being a teacher ever since she can remember. She always knew that she wanted to be like her teachers when she grew up. She had no idea that her dreams were going to come true.

When she was in sixth grade, representatives from Pura Vida came to her school looking for students to send to seventh grade and beyond. As one of the best students at her school, she was happy to be selected for a scholarship. Her father wasn't as happy. At that time many local parents didn't think girls should study, but should instead dedicate themselves to the home. Her father rejected the scholarship.

Sebastiana worked hard to convince him to accept the scholarship, and enlisted others to press her case. After weeks of constant pressure, her father relented. This was the beginning of Sebastiana's journey with Pura Vida and, according to her, the beginning of an important phase in her life.

As she progressed in her studies, she opted for the career track of Inter-cultural Primary Education Teacher. She eventually entered the Inter-cultural Bilingual School "Oxlajuj Tz'it'", where she learned more of the K'iche' language. This part of her education reinforced her ability to understand and speak K'iche', as well as focus on reading and writing in that language. She also learned strategies useful for teaching children. She felt that this part of her education helped her to function better in society.

In 2010, Sebastiana was able to enter university, thanks in great part to committed sponsors Lyle and Felicia SmithGraybeal who were able to continue supporting her at that level. She pursued a degree in High School Education with a specialty in Mathematics and Physics. Since classes were local, alongside her studies she was able to join the teaching staff at the John Wesley School. This gave her the chance



to gain experience while contributing to local educational needs. In 2017 she graduated with a Bachelor's degree.

Today Sebastiana teaches at two establishments: in the mornings at the National Experimental Institute of Basic Education in Chichicastenango, and in the afternoons at the John Wesley Evangelical Methodist School in Santa Cruz del Quiché. At the institute she is a professor of Mayan Culture and Language, Communication and Language, and Natural Sciences; at the John Wesley School she teaches Accounting.

“Blessings to each of those who contribute to the scholarship program. Your contributions are bearing fruit – many children and young people today are studying to be professionals and have better opportunities. Thank you very much, Pura Vida!”

With the time she has left on her schedule, Sebastiana is the Pura Vida community leader for Lemoa. She is in charge of administering the scholarship program in that community, as well running the annual milk distribution there. She also travels to tutor Pura Vida students as needed in our program communities.

After seeing Sebastiana's initial determination and success, Pura Vida actively recruited her siblings. Her brother and four sisters have taken part in the program. The older ones are now professionals with formal jobs.



Sebastiana's sponsors
Lyle and Felicia SmithGraybeal



Sebastiana (2nd from right) is on the faculty of John Wesley Evangelical Methodist School in Santa Cruz del Quiché.

Pura Vida is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with programs in Guatemala.

The mission of Pura Vida is to facilitate the sharing of resources with communities in Guatemala in a meaningful, respectful, and long term way. Our primary focus is on providing educational opportunities for children in rural villages through scholarships, tutoring, and support of local schools. We encourage others to work with us as we give our time, knowledge, and resources to help poor rural communities attain a standard of living in which their children can thrive.

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From the Executive Director

This year has seen Pura Vida move towards more stability and sustainability. We reached 400 students in our scholarship program, our all-time high. A record 39 of our students studied at the university level. Our Guatemala work trips are back to normal. In-person attendance at our recent Annual Gathering returned to pre-pandemic levels, and we crushed the fundraising goal for the event. It's been exciting to move towards a more stable future.

At the event we talked about why we are doing what we are doing, and specifically, why education? In my perspective, it has to do with stability and sustainability as well. There is general agreement in the development community that increased access to education correlates highly with:

- Better health
- Improved living conditions
- Greater food security
- Increased community involvement and leadership
- Greater civic engagement
- Greater capacity for critical thinking
- Less economic hardship
- Improved job prospects
- Later marriage and childbirth
- Fewer children
- Education prioritized for children

The interesting thing about these outcomes is that they are not engineered — they simply happen with more education. It turns out that a single point of leverage can cause a cascade of beneficial effects. That's why we're focused on education.



We also talked about what we expected to see in the future. This fall our photographer Jose Fares interviewed 10 of our more advanced students to see what Pura Vida has done in their lives. The resulting short videos reveal surprising ways in which they have made their mark on the world. I continue to be amazed how these youth define success for themselves.

We will be rolling out these videos with our e-newsletters each month (see below). I hope you will take a minute to see what our students have been up to, and what they are considering for the future. Who says stability can't be exciting?

Mark Ely,
Executive Director

Meet 10 “Dreams Come True” students

Ten students from Pura Vida's scholarship program shared how their dreams are becoming reality. Photographer Jose Fares interviewed students and captured their stories – in their own words – in videos. See the videos in upcoming Pura Vida's E-News - monthly emailed newsletters.



Alexandra



Beverly



Candy



Elmer



Evelyn



Lucia



Lucrecia



Rosaura



William



Yesica

Creating a brighter future for children in Guatemala

Laura Richards Retires from Board



After many years of service, Laura Richards is retiring from her board and volunteer duties. Laura has been involved with Pura Vida since 2005, first as a work trip team member, then a Pura Vida trip leader, trip coordinator, board member, and most recently as Director of Sponsor/Donor Relations. She has been a member of the board of directors since 2014.

In addition to her presence on the board, she also served as practically a full-time volunteer staff member. Alongside her husband, Mike, and oftentimes their children, Laura has logged over 25 trips to Guatemala, most of them as trip leader.

In 2011, Laura and Mike established and provided initial funding for the HOPE Endowment Fund, a permanent endowment providing scholarships to promising Pura Vida students studying at the University level. To date, the HOPE Scholarship Fund has supported 18 students. (HOPE stands for Helping Others by Providing Education.)

In 2019, Laura worked with Pura Vida's staff in Guatemala to create the Skills for Success program for Pura Vida scholarship students. This program provides training in a variety of skills that will increase our students' ability to succeed in school and their chosen vocation after graduation.

Laura invested countless hours as a volunteer and board member, making an immeasurable, long-term impact on numerous lives in Guatemala through her work with Pura Vida. We are thankful for her years of service helping us create a brighter future for children in Guatemala.

Sponsor Profile: Ray Miller

Ray Miller discovered Pura Vida in 2007 when his church in Fort Collins was gathering a team to go to Guatemala for a work trip. He decided to accept the invitation to join the team and it turned out to be "one of the best decisions I have made" according to him. He fell in love with the people and the country.



Following that, he spent six weeks teaching English at the John Wesley School. The next year, he returned and taught English for the entire term. Two years later, he returned to teach most of another school year.

Ray began sponsoring students with Pura Vida in 2007, beginning with three children.

Two years later, he went back to Guatemala in support of a medical and dental mission. In 2009, Ray studied in Xela with a six-week immersion in Spanish. Although he didn't become completely fluent, it definitely helped get him ready for more time in Guatemala.

He has been a sponsor ever since. A year ago one of his students completed graduate school. Ray is proud to have been a part of that accomplishment. As Ray closes in on 90 years of life, he still does what he can to support Pura Vida, "a ministry I believe in."

* Over the years, Ray Miller has sponsored 21 students with Pura Vida, which puts him in our top tier of student sponsors. He lives in Lone Tree, Colorado with his two pet cats, Tuxy and Ginger.

2025 Guatemala Trip Schedule



"Travel with a purpose"

is a good way to describe what our international work trips are all about. The emphasis of these trips is on developing and maintaining relationships with local communities and sharing our time and resources with our partners in Guatemala.

January 21 - 30, 2025:

First UMC Loveland Guatemala Work Trip (trip full)

March 3 - 11, 2025:

St. Luke's UMC Guatemala Work Trip (trip full)

May 23 - June 1, 2025:

Guatemala English Camp (open for applications)

June 14 - 22, 2025:

First Presbyterian Salida Youth + Newnan Presbyterian Guatemala Work Trip (trip pending confirmation)





Pura Vida
PO Box 843
Salida, CO 81201

Provide a scholarship
to make dreams
a reality.



Help create brighter futures for the children in Guatemala

Pura Vida scholarships made Sebastiana's childhood dream of being a teacher come true.



Age 13



Age 18



Age 20



Age 22



Age 23



Age 26

Here are some ways you can help us maintain and expand our programs:

SPONSOR A STUDENT –

The average student in rural Guatemala drops out of school by the time they reach 3rd grade. Your sponsorship can help them get to high school and beyond. Make a dream come true – sponsor the education of a student in Guatemala.

[puravida.org/education]

TRAVEL TO GUATEMALA WITH US –

“Travel with a purpose” is a good way to describe what our international work trips are all about. Our emphasis is on developing and maintaining relationships with local communities and sharing our time and resources with our partners in Guatemala. Team experiences include building homes for families in need, teaching English to local students, and seeing first-hand the work we are doing in Guatemala. [puravida.org/trips]

DONATE ONLINE –

Support our Unsponsored Student Fund, which lets us keep more students in school while looking for sponsors. You can make a secure donation online at the link below.

[puravida.org/donate]

LEGACY GIVING –

Help sustain our work in Guatemala far into the future by making a contribution through your IRA RMDs, wills, securities, and life insurance. [puravida.org/legacy]

ENDOWMENT CONTRIBUTIONS –

Do you want to make a really long-term investment? Our Legacy Endowment will one day give us flexibility to improve our programs and increase our level of support in Guatemala. Since this endowment is in the early stages of funding, we can really use your assistance in getting it up to speed.

[puravida.org/endowments]