

## Global Connections Platform

January 8, 2017

### PEGGY GOETZ

Good morning! Our WES theme this month is Vision. I'm wondering, what was your vision this morning? Eggs and toast or oatmeal with raisins? Mine was a yogurt shake!

Most things begin with a vision: a vivid, imagined concept of something not yet realized. Yes, a vision can result in a delicious breakfast. However, a **prophetic** vision can change the world! The "change the world" kind of vision starts like a seed; it grows, develops, and eventually; it comes to fruition.

The first Ethical Society began as a seed, a vision in the mind's eye of its founder, Felix Adler. While teaching religious history and literature at Cornell, recognizing that most faiths are based upon ethical principles, Adler had a prophetic vision. He envisioned a modern religious society, one without creed or doctrine, or, the promise of heaven. His was a vision of a new kind of religion, based upon ethical relationships, focused on this life in the here and now. Its purpose? To develop the habits of ethical living in ourselves and others, improve social conditions and create a more just and humane world.

Just pause for a moment to consider the context. In the 1870's, just a decade after Lee and Grant met in Appomattox to end the civil war, Adler imagined a modern, non-theistic religious society. Now think about the danger of such a vision at that time.

Adler persevered and his vision became a reality in 1876 with the founding of New York Society for Ethical Culture. It came to fruition as society members engaged in ethical living, changing the world as they led the movement to end child labor and established the first settlement houses and free kindergartens.

This society, the Washington Society, was founded in 1944 when life in DC followed the Jim Crow laws of the day. We, too, have a long history of social justice activism spanning civil rights, gay rights and Black Lives Matter.

Part of that legacy of activism includes our engagement in the struggle for social justice in El Salvador. It goes back to the 1970's when the turmoil there was front page news. For over a century, El Salvador was run by a handful of wealthy families, backed by a military government. When farmers or workers organized for land reform and better wages, they were met with increasing brutality and repression. It reached a boiling point in the 70's, when thousands were routinely being tortured and "disappeared." A civil war, fueled with US support, erupted in 1980.

Inspired by the visionary courage of those fighting for a more just and humane life and outraged that US dollars were used to train and arm the Salvadoran military and its death squads; WES joined the network of congregations and communities providing sanctuary and safety to the fleeing refugees. When the war ended in 1992, our involvement faded for a time. Then the late 1990's, when El Salvador was still rebuilding from the devastation of a prolonged war, WES rekindled its activism with annual delegations and community development projects. In 2010, WES established a partnership, a sister community relationship with the people in the tiny rural village of El Rodeo. It began as a vision, a vision of solidarity. An ethical relationship based upon mutuality through which we would learn and work together - eye to eye, shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart. A committed relationship, with solidarity as the glue binding us together as one.

The seeds of our vision have grown as we've accompanied El Rodeo in pursuing their dream, their vision: which was simply to pipe clean, potable water to every household in their

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community. WES has been a generous and essential partner in bringing El Rodeo's vision to fruition. You dramatically improved the health of the community by purchasing water filters for every home, ensuring the availability of clean water until the water project is complete. You funded the community's purchase of the spring, the source of water needed to feed the water system.

It is said that love is the verb of solidarity. Over the years, those who have had the privilege to travel to El Rodeo have grown to love and respect its people. We've welcomed new babies into the world, watched children grow into teens, teens grow into young adults, community members into community leaders. Living in their homes, we've witnessed the strength and courage of men and women dedicated to improving their community. We've seen people working for the common good, in addition to their jobs and the daily work of life in rural El Salvador – hauling water, tending fields, gathering fire wood.

Here at WES we often talk about Ethical Heroes. People who act on the behalf of others, sometimes at their own risk. In El Salvador, there is no greater Ethical Hero than Monsignor Romero. His image and words are everywhere! Romero was chosen as the archbishop in 1977 during a time of increasing unrest. A conservative, he was regarded by the church as a safe choice to uphold the status quo. Within weeks of his appointment, Romero's dear friend, Father Rutilio Grande, was murdered for supporting farmers organizing their community. Traveling to Rutilio's funeral, Romero left the insular walls of the church and saw death and destruction, the impacts of violence and repression. Romero woke up. Choosing humanity over church doctrine, he began using his homilies and weekly radio broadcast to tell peoples stories and to denounce the government's use of violence against them. After appealing directly to the soldiers to "stop the repression," he too was murdered, shot in the heart. Today Romero continues to inspire, even the children born decades after his death.

Adler, Romero, our friends in El Rodeo; they are all Ethical Heroes. Each with a vision of a more just and humane world. Each with the strength, courage and commitment to face the dangers of changing the world.

Today we will introduce you to a few of our friends, our ethical heroes who tend the seeds of their community's vision. But before introducing our friends, we'd first like to acknowledge you and the importance of your support and solidarity with our sister community. Please stand, if you have:

- gone on a WES delegation to El Salvador
- plan to go on a future delegation
- supported a delegate or a midwife delegation
- contributed to the water filter campaign
- contributed to the purchase of the spring for the water project
- contributed supplies – books, school supplies, glasses or anything else

THANK YOU!!!! Thank you for your generosity and support, it makes a huge difference for the people of El Rodeo!

Now it is my great pleasure to introduce, youth delegate, Russell Corbin.

### **RUSSELL CORBIN**

Déjame pintarte una imagen. Imagina un pueblo bonito en las colinas verdes que se continúan para siempre, con caminos por el bosque. Hay vistas maravillosas del valle y arboles cariñosas

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siguiendo muy alto arriba. El vistazo ocasional de un torogoz. No hay aceras ni calles grandes impidiendo en la conexión a la naturaleza. Pero sobre todo, las personas más amables y fuertes de todo el mundo. Este es El Rodeo.

Let me paint a picture for you. Imagine a beautiful village nestled in endless, rolling green hills with footpaths through the woods. Stunning views of the valley and comforting trees standing tall above. The occasional sighting of a magnificent torogoz, a native bird. No sidewalks, or big roads competing with the connection to nature. Most importantly, imagine the most kind and strong people in the world. This is El Rodeo.

Hi everyone, I'm Russell Corbin. I'm a sophomore at Richard Montgomery HS. Last summer I had the great pleasure of travelling with the WES delegation to our sister community of El Rodeo. It was without a doubt an incredible experience.

Back in 2009, when I was 8, I began writing to a pen pal in El Rodeo through WES. Her name is Oneyda Ramos. It was nice to communicate with someone in the community directly at such a young age. We shared bits of our lives, and found things we had in common. We talked about school, but I also heard about her family traditions and celebrations. Of course when we went to the community I met her. And although it was a bit awkward at first, it was nice to put a face to the friend I had made. Even though I had heard some things about her life and the community through the letters, that did not prepare me for all of the wonders I discovered while there.

I think it's hard for most people to imagine El Rodeo, the people, the paths, the homes. Even after hearing many of the previous platforms about our sister community, I still did not fully grasp what I would see. For one to truly understand the hardships our friends in El Rodeo face and the heroism they demonstrate every day, one has to be there and live with them.

Fortunately for me, on our first day in El Rodeo, I had the opportunity to walk around the whole community and visit every family. Lola, Karen & I were team "lentes"! and our mission was to offer reading glasses to those who needed them. Besides the joy of experiencing our friends see well for the first time, I got to take in the "lay of the land." By meeting and conversing with so many people and seeing all of their homes, I began to get a real appreciation for who they are and how they live.

Before going to El Rodeo, we spent several days in San Salvador planning our week in the community and learning about social activism and the history of El Salvador. As tourists we visited several sites important of historical importance to the country. Probably the most special part of the trip for me was when we took some members of the community to visit the capitol. It was amazing to share with many of them their experience of going to the big city for the first time. One of the sites we had visited in the beginning of the trip that we returned to with the community was the church where Monsenor Romero was murdered. For those who are unaware, Romero was the archbishop of El Salvador and spoke out against social injustice. He was gunned down for his efforts to stand up for people who had no voice. To many El Salvadorans, he is a hero and savior. Although it was powerful to see this site as a tourist, I cannot tell you how humbling it was to be in the chapel with the community where their idol was assassinated. During this field trip we also heard first hand harrowing tales of the guerrillas and refugees during the civil war at the Wall of Remembrance that lists the names of people that died during the war. It was truly incredible spending so much time with them while they told us their stories and we learned from a primary source about their history.

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I was in a Spanish immersion program for nine years before high school. For me to be truly immersed in the language was personally beneficial. I was often asked to translate conversations for others individually or in our group meetings. Being able to communicate with our friends in the community directly really helped me connect with them, and my Spanish improved as well.

There are so many stunning take-aways I have from my trip to El Salvador, and I have only scratched the surface. But I will leave you with this: If you like being in nature, like me, you would love showering in the stream with a trickle of water coming out of a pipe, even if to get there, you had to hike 20 minutes down a steep hill as a storm was approaching. I am serious, all the hassle aside, I really loved bathing in the stream. I try to remember this every time I get in my nice, tiled shower at home with hot water I can stand under for as long as I want. But I'd like to think my showers have gotten a bit shorter since I've been back and I know I definitely appreciate them more.

Through the relationships we make with the incredible people of El Rodeo, we can grow as a community and individually. I thoroughly enjoyed being a part of the delegation and will continue my participation with them to further our relationships. Thank you.

### **Video Message Introductions**

#### **MARIXELA BIO**

Marixela Ramos was born in the Mesa Grande Refugee camp where 11,000 Salvadorans lived after fleeing their homes due to army attacks and massacres. In 1992, when the civil war ended, her family moved back to El Rodeo. She studied high school and then began working at Radio Victoria in education production spots.

In 2009, Radio Victoria began to denounce the murders of anti-mining activists in the area and began receiving death threats. In 2011, Marixela took over the news team coordination position. Every press release the station issued bore her name. She was the main speaker at press conferences and began receiving credible death threats. The emails she and others received were signed "extermination group." One message gave her a deadline of May 3, 2011, saying they would come for her and her daughter. Shortly after that, Marixela and her daughter went to Ecuador for several months. "I had to decide if I wanted to keep being a radio reporter," she said.

Today Marixela continues to work with Radio Victoria's news team and is studying journalism full time in San Salvador as well as raising her beautiful young daughter, Izel.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/QSVVn8m54IA>

#### **ELVIS BIO**

As a baby Elvis had to flee his family home and grew up in war refugee camps in Honduras. He has worked in Radio Victoria for 19 years, beginning when he was 16 years old. He has been a news reporter, on-air announcer and educational production coordinator. He learned how to work on a computer and manage audio editing programs. Today he is in charge of the radio's production team and chairs the Radio's coordination team.

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Elvis has a love and broad knowledge of nature and works with his family to grow the beans and corn that sustain them.

Elvis has been President of the Community Development Association for 2 consecutive periods and leads the Water Team for El Rodeo. He is raising his 7 year old daughter with his partner Marixela.

Link to video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_oUu-dCKVgM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oUu-dCKVgM)

### **INGRIS BIO**

Ingris was born in the Mesa Grande Refugee camp in Honduras, after her family fled the “scorced earth” campaign in the area of El Rodeo. She is the daughter of Esperanza and Carlos, both of whom were active in the FMLN resistance during the civil war. Ingris worked diligently to complete a degree in early education, traveling by bus at 4:00 a.m and returning at 8:00 p.m. on school days at the Lutherin Univerisity in San Salvador. in 2016, she graduated first in her class.

Although she hopes someday to find employment as a teacher, she currently uses her skills to help the children in her community by volunteering her time managing the Little Library and other educational activities. She is a member of the ADESCO (Community Council), and is interested in learning more about employment opportunities for women in her community. Ingris has a quiet and gentle nature that draws from a formidable inner strength, all of which can be seen in her beautiful eyes and smile.

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/L0vBi3499OE>

### **CESAR BIO**

Cesar is 24 years old and was born in 1992, the year the peace accords were signed ending El Salvador’s armed conflict. While he was a student, and still to this day, he cultivates the corn and beans for his family. Cesar is gender non-conforming and his bright personality and kind heart have won the trust and love of his school mates.

Cesar works with the Association CoCoSI in the Prevention Program as an educator. His enthusiasm and natural creativity contributes to educating children, adolescents and teens about reproductive and sexual health rights, non-binary gender, self esteem, masculine gender deconstruction and more. When Cesar walks down our roads the little children call out his name, wave to him and tell their parents "that is Cesar, he is our teacher".

Link to video: <https://youtu.be/qi4QTjONyFg>

### **VIDALINA BIO**

Vidalina Morales lives in a tiny house at the end of a steep dirt path in El Rodeo. She is a farmer, the mother of 5 boys and recently became President of ADES, a local aid and

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development organization. Over the past 8 years, Vidalina has traveled the world speaking out against mining in El Salvador. She spoke at WES in March of 2015. Recently, she was asked the following question:

“IN A WORLD AS CONFLICTED AS OURS TODAY, TELL US WHAT GIVES YOU HOPE?”

**QUESTION: In a world as conflicted as ours today, tell us what gives you hope?**

**VIDALINA:**

I believe, first of all, that the hope each human being has, from the individual to the collective, is the hope to feel alive, to feel that we can do something to transform this society. There is no doubt that we live in societal upheaval, in a very troubled world, where there is so much power over people, over communities, over countries. (30 sec.)

But we have hope and I believe that is what moves us, that has us still standing up. If we had lost hope, we would have been like the living dead. Nevertheless, we maintain our faith and hope, and we also maintain that desire, that life force to continue and to advance. (19 sec.)

And in this new moment, in this new context we are living in the world, we continue believing in the hope to live, and we continue believing in the hope that a better world is possible, and we are demonstrating that in the smallest things that we do. And I believe that we in El Salvador, we have shown the whole world that we are capable of feeling hope, and of feeling strength, and of feeling the courage to fight and resist, because there is a saying, “It is worth more to die standing up fighting than to live on our knees begging”. And this saying gives us strength. (38 sec.)

We can believe in a world where everything is, as Eduardo Galeano said, upside down. Nevertheless in this world, upside down is what we have had to live and struggle with. We feel the life force, and we feel hope, and we have a bit of energy, because we believe in the solidarity of the people, way beyond the powers that be...