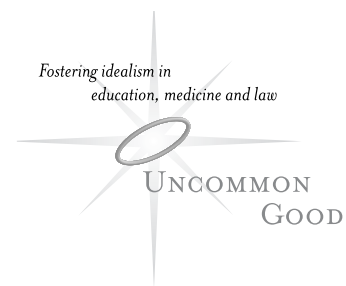




Vanessa Contreras, one of our Claremont School of Theatre Arts scholarship students, performs with Thomas Randles in the play "Minatory Mansion" at Pomona College.



Santiago Rodriguez harvests produce from our Teen Green school garden.



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F O S T E R I N G I D E A L I S M i n E D U C A T I O N , M E D I C I N E a n d L A W

FALL 2009 ■ VOLUME 6 ■ NUMBER 2

Dear Reader,

In this issue we invite you experience our Clinic to College program through the eyes of some of the hundreds of children and parents in the program. Clinic to College includes a dizzying array of activities that the families have embraced with great enthusiasm. Through the interviews and letters that we have featured you will read about how these activities have enriched their lives, and how these families in turn have enriched our lives and our world. And as always, I offer you our heartfelt thanks for making all of this beauty possible.

Gratefully yours,
Nancy Mintie
Executive Director



Our Families Speak to the United Nations



Celia Gonzalez, Juana Uribe, Irma Bran and Norma Rodriguez participate in the World Wide Views Citizen Forum in advance of the 2009 United Nations Climate Conference.

(In advance of the December 2009 United Nations Climate Conference in Copenhagen, citizen forums were held around the world this past September 26th, to gather input to be presented to the world leaders who would be gathering in Copenhagen. Five such forums were held in the United States, including one hosted by Pomona College for the southwestern region. Because of Uncommon Good's attention to the impact of environmental issues on the poor, several of our client families were invited to attend to communicate their views to the United Nations gathering. In addition, two of our staff, Michael Peel and Carlos Carrillo, were invited to serve as panel moderators. Uncommon Circle member Hilary LeConte, was one of the organizers of the forum. I interviewed one of the mothers from our program who participated in the event.)

Nancy Mintie: Tell me about where you grew up. Were you surrounded by nature?

Celia Gonzalez: I grew up playing in the nature that surrounded our town, Villa Corona, about thirty miles from Guadalajara. There is a famous cave in the mountains on the edge of town. It has an underground chapel in it that was built by a man as a penance after he killed his wife. There is a waterfall that comes down from the mountains above that is channeled to water the corn and sugar cane the people grow. There is also a lagoon that people fish in for a living.

NM: Why did you come to the United States?

CG: My dad had been making regular trips to the United States to work as a farmer and through that he got legal residency. So our whole family moved with him to Yakima, [continued on page 7]

The California Wellness Foundation, The California Community Foundation and Queenscare Support The Doctors of Our Adopt an Angel Program

Thanks to generous grants received this year, our Adopt an Angel program will continue to be able to provide critically needed educational loan repayment assistance to the twenty-six inspirational doctors and dentists who serve the poor in free clinics throughout the Southland. We are grateful to The California Wellness Foundation for its two-year \$200,000 grant, the California Community Foundation's \$180,900 grant through its Robert C. Fraser Fund, and Queenscare for its \$31,649 for its Nuziard Awards. These grants allow the dedicated young health professionals in our program to continue to serve the poor while repaying their college and medical school loans.

These generous gifts support physicians such as Dr. Amy Young, who was given the 2008 "Doctor of the Year" award by San Bernardino County for her work treating victims of child abuse and helping to prevent such abuse. Recently she gave a presentation to an international Shaken Baby conference in Vancouver. She and her two fellow public health physicians treat a two county population that is the size of the population of the country of Ireland. ☑



Dr. Amy Young, one of the physicians sponsored by our Adopt an Angel program.

Family Science Camp



Young nature lover, Danny Medina.

(This past summer twenty-two families from our Clinic to College program attended a family science camp in the Big Bear Mountains thanks to the sponsorship of the Los Angeles County Education Foundation. The children and parents studied plants and animals of the region, hiked, learned survival skills, explored ways in which they could protect the environment, and participated in family bonding activities. Here are the impressions of some of the mothers who participated, as well as those of Carlos Carrillo, our Family Services Coordinator who organized the event.)

Irma Medina:

“Everybody loved it! Especially my son (five-year-old Danny). He didn’t want to leave and asked one of the staff people how much it would cost to stay longer. Then he asked me “Do you have \$100, Mom?” My daughter (eleven-year-old Heidi) told the chefs, “Your food is better than my mom’s!”

“The first class we took was about a pond and the insects and birds around it. Danny kept asking so many questions that everybody knew Danny after the class was over! I was embarrassed because he was hogging the question and answer time! He got so comfortable asking questions that later when we came home and went on a college tour with Uncommon Good, he asked a lot of questions on that, too, even more than the high school students on the tour!

“He loves nature. He has a pet rabbit named Bugs Bunny that he takes care of. He even gives Bugs Bunny shampoos! When we let the rabbit go free he doesn’t run away because he’s so attached to Danny. At the family camp we herded chickens and Danny got to hold a fresh warm egg in his hand that the chicken had just laid.

“My favorite part was when we were all asked to write down five things that we liked about each member of our family and then share what we wrote. My husband and I started, and then the kids wanted to share, too. Our daughter told us she loved us. Danny cried and said that all he wanted was for his big sister to play more with him. We all cried! We’ve never talked like that before as a family.

“Another really good thing was that we got to know the other families in the program a lot better. Now I feel like I have a bigger family because we have the same interests and values as the other families that are in the program. In fact, now we feel like we can ask each other for help. I recently took the daughter of the family we shared a cabin with on a college tour because her parents weren’t able to do it.”



Our families study life in a mountain pond.



Mr. and Mrs. Braun enjoy a mountain morning together.

Celia Gonzalez:

“It was awesome! We had such a great time. The staff people were kind, fun and respectful. My kids are so into recycling and protecting the environment. My husband wants to save the earth for future generations.

“But it made me sad to see that the trees are getting so dry. If the climate keeps getting hotter it is going to become a desert.”

Irma Bran:

“Beautiful! It was more than we expected. The staff treated us so well and we had time to enjoy with our kids. Me and my husband were waiting for the day. Making a bridge across a stream with the kids was the first time I’ve seen my husband so happy. It reminded him of working with his dad to make a rope bridge when he was a little boy.

“We went on a night walk. We could hear the birds and see stars. My husband said it was like a dream, so peaceful.

“On one of the days they asked us to write down what we appreciated about our spouses. Then we shared what we wrote. It was so nice to hear what my husband thinks about me! Many of the dads said that they needed to help their wives.

“We went on a survival walk and made a house from branches on the ground. It was so nice to see the men acting like kids!

“We met a lot of other families in the program with the same goal of getting their kids to college. We had so much to talk about, things like our kids’ grades, Teen Green (the Uncommon Good environmental youth program) and the kids’ trip to Costa Rica last year with the program. Everybody talked to each other, just like a family.”

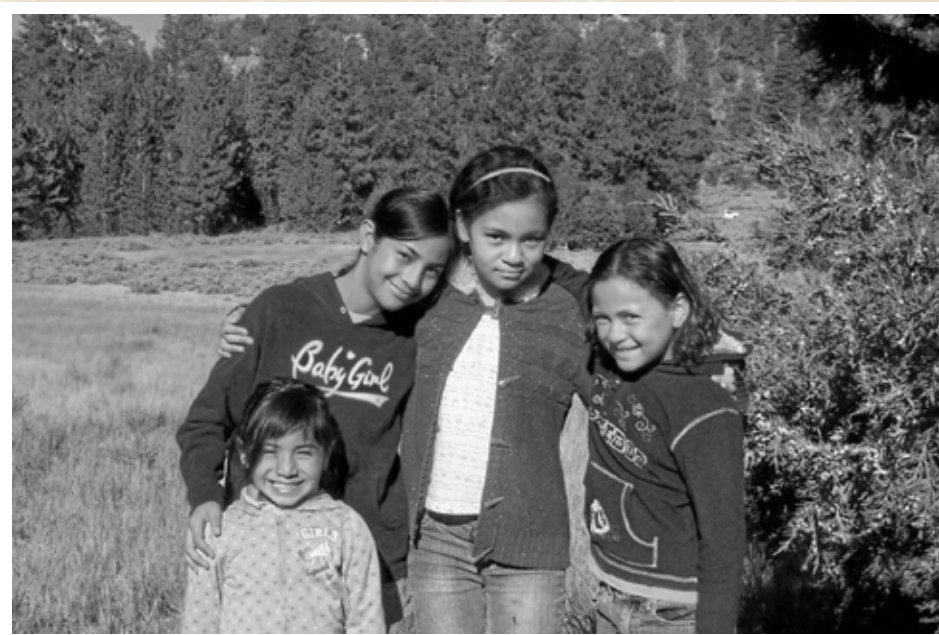
Carlos Carrillo:

“The Family Science Camp is a great way to get the dads more involved with their families. When we asked them how well they knew their kids, they cried. They think that their job is just to earn money for the family. The camp is a way of letting them know that it is ok to have a relationship with their kids. One of the fathers said, ‘I don’t want to be known as hen-pecked so I keep a distance from my family. But in this program, I can have a relationship with my kids and not be judged.’

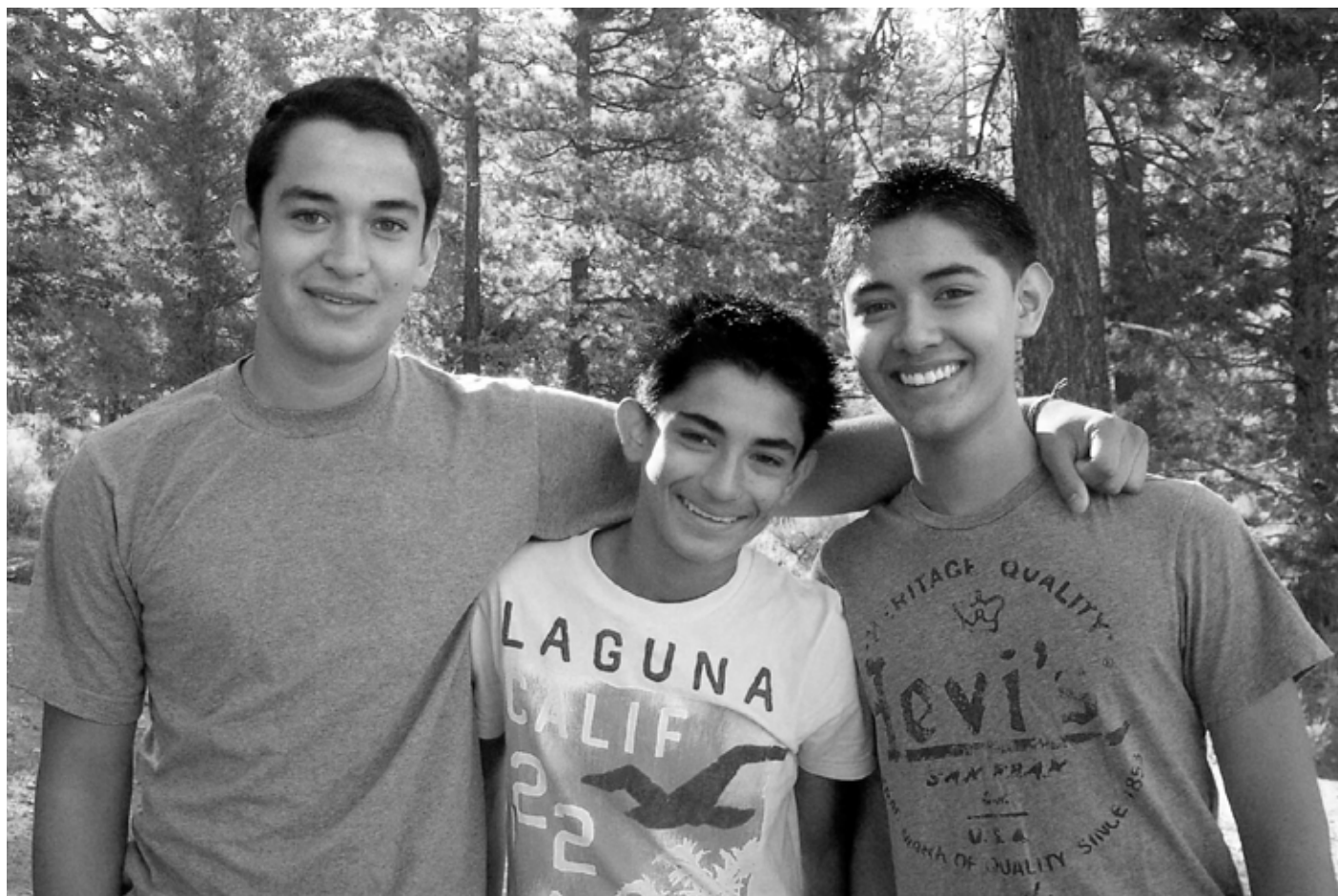
“In the weeks before the camp I got a call from Ruben Fernandez, who graduated from our Clinic to College program and now is in college. But even though he’s moved on, he asked if he and his family could still come to the camp because he’d enjoyed it so much the year before. Of course I said ‘Yes!’”



Norma Rodriguez crosses a rope bridge made by our families during their class on survival skills.



Mountain sprites Rubyana Fernandez, Heidi Medina, Raquel Palacios and Sara Palacios.



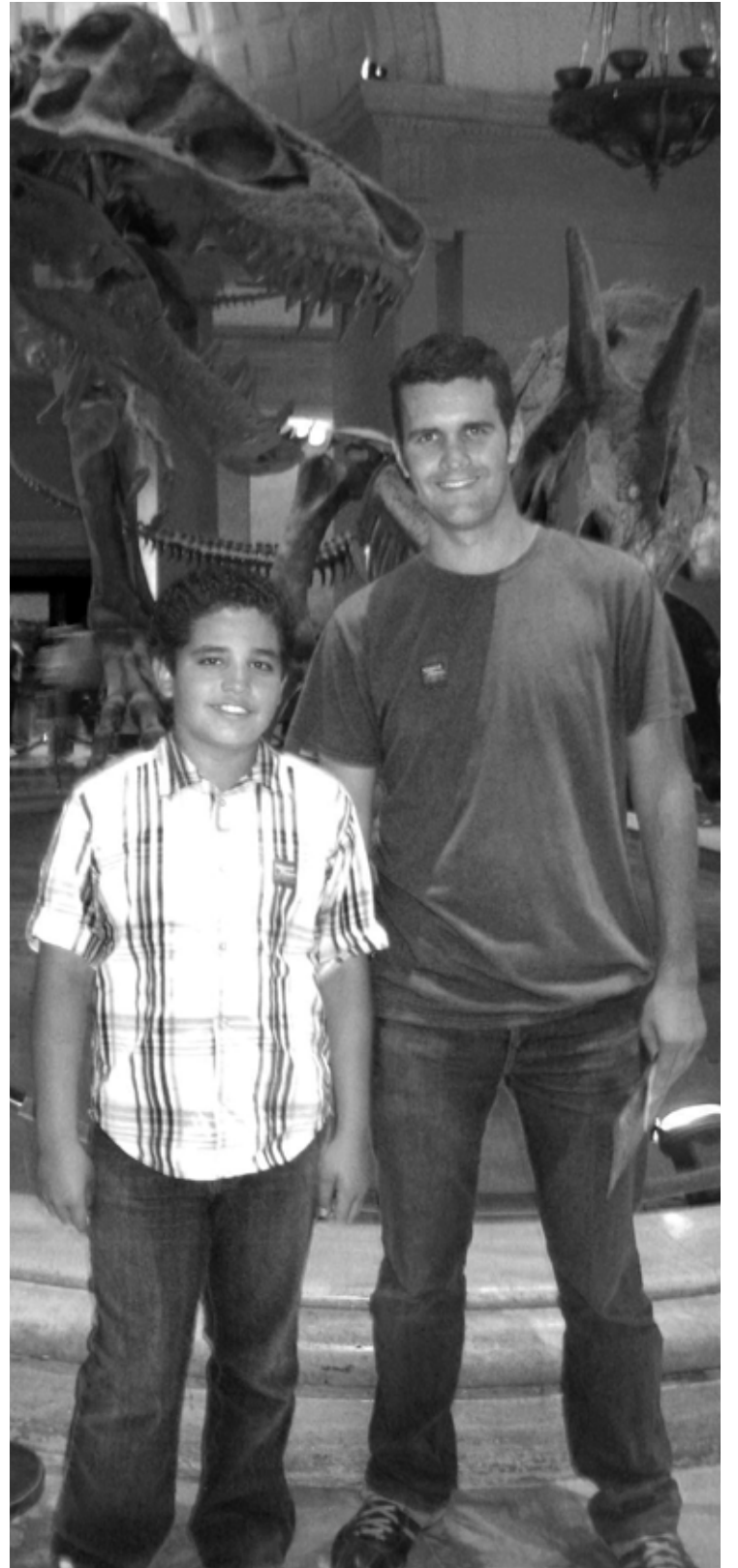
Brothers Ruben, Christian and Daniel Fernandez.



Madeline Santizo and Jessica Gonzalez on an Uncommon Good field trip to the California Institute of Earth Art and Architecture to learn about Superadobe buildings.



Jannette Alonso with her mentor, Deborah Serschion, and her sister, Jayllene Alonso, at our mentor thank you event at the rock climbing gym, Hanger 18.



Mentor and Uncommon Good Development Director Michael Peel with his mentee, Raul Gallardo, on a field trip to the Museum of Natural History.



Hey, wait! Isn't the baby the one who's supposed to be crying? Raquel Palacios sounds off at our Babysitting and First Aid Class.

A Mother's View of Our Clinic to College Program

(This fall Irma Bran and two of her children, Carlos and Marissa, spoke on behalf of our Clinic to College program to fifty members of the outreach ministries at Our Lady of the Assumption Church. This is the church that generously has allowed Uncommon Good to use its old convent for its office for the past decade. I interviewed her about her presentation to the group, and her other experiences with our program.)

Nancy Mintie: Tell me about what you and your kids shared with the OLA church group.

Irma Bran: It was such a nice meeting. The people treated us with so much respect. They really listened to us! My son Carlos told them how your program had helped him. His mentor, Adam, is a college student, who wants him to go to college, too. Carlos said that our program had encouraged him to get good grades and now his dream is to go to Harvard. When he said that, everyone clapped!

My daughter Marissa told them she wanted to be a nurse. She talked about her mentor who is a UCLA student, and also about how much she had learned about the environment from the trip with Uncommon Good to Costa Rica. What a beautiful country! People live there simply yet happily, even though they don't have things like hot showers. And Marissa learned a new appreciation for being able to speak two languages.

I told the group about having the honor to be a part of the citizen's forum for the United Nations Climate Conference. I also told them about the Parent Book Club. I come from a family where reading wasn't important. Through the club, I've learned the importance of reading and I can talk to my kids about what they are reading. My favorite book club selection has been *Love in the Time of Cholera*. It's about love and war, the rich and the poor.

“I insist on A grades and my husband backs me up. Once Carlos asked me, ‘Is it okay if I get a B?’ I said, ‘No!’”

The parent education classes have helped me to learn how to confront the challenges in parenting. And my kids are getting involved with community service, which will also help them get into college. Carlos is in Teen Green and Marissa plans to volunteer at the hospital.

NM: Why is it so important for you for your kids to get an education?

IB: I come from Piedra Parada, a very small town in Guatemala. There were ten kids in our family. I had six younger brothers and my dad couldn't pay for college for them. I wanted to help him but I couldn't find work in Guatemala so I came to the United States by myself when I was eighteen and worked as a housekeeper for a family in LA and sent money home to my father.

I always had wanted to be a nurse, but I couldn't afford it, so I just kept it in my dreams. I was a good student and really wanted to go to college but I didn't have the chance because I had to help my brothers go to college. My husband always wanted to be an engineer. He is very good at math, but he never had the money to go to college either. That's why we tell our kids to study hard, so that they'll have the chance that we never had to get an education. I was so pleased recently when my daughter Lucretia told me that she wanted to take some speech classes.

Carlos is an A student and is taking honors classes. I insist on A grades and my husband backs me up. Once Carlos asked me, “Is it okay if I get a B?” I said, “No! If you study hard you can do anything.” We have a black president now. Why not an Hispanic president in twenty years? But sometimes my kids aren't happy that I'm so strict with them.

NM: Don't worry about it! Carlos will thank you in twenty years when he's our first Hispanic president!

IB: Seeing how hard my kids are working to stay in your program, I thank all of you with all my heart. You are such a blessing to us!

NM: That's how we feel about you and your beautiful family, too. It's a blessing to have people like you in our lives. You make it a pleasure to wake up every day and come to work here. ☑



Irma Bran, who has had all four of her children in our Clinic to College program.



Irma Bran with two of her children, Carlos and Lucretia (who has graduated from our Clinic to College program and now is in college).

Kids Talk About College

(An important part of our Clinic to College program involves getting children at an early age to start thinking about going to college. One of the ways we do this is through our Clinic to College Clubs in the elementary schools. We also take our sixth grade students to college campuses. After Carlos Carrillo, our Family Services Coordinator, gave some of our sixth graders a tour of the campus of Pomona College, they wrote to thank him. Here are three of their letters.)



Dear Mr. Carrillo,
Thank you for arranging the field trip. It was very cool and interesting. When I get through high school I want to go to college. This field trip helped me realize that if you don't go to college you're really not going to know what to do with your life. Some people might not even finish high school. They might drop out and start selling drugs or robbing innocent people. That isn't going to get you anywhere. Anyway, you guys inspired me to want to go to college.

Sincerely,
Sagred J.

Dear Mr. Carrillo,
It was one of the best field trips I've been on all year. Thank you for the experience of being in a college. It was lots of fun. After high school I'm going on to college. I would love to go to Pomona College. I want to help my mom after college and get a job as a lawyer or judge.

Sincerely,
Lewis S.

Dear Mr. Carrillo,
Our class is really pleased to have gone to the college. The whole school was exciting to see. Thank you for even inviting us to the college. After high school, I want to go to UCLA. My cousin went for a while but she dropped out. I don't want to end up like her. The speech the students gave make me think. The reason I want to go to college is because I want a good job when I grow up.

Sincerely,
Manuel C.



Reading Together

(A Parent Book Club was formed by our Carlos Carrillo to encourage parents to read and to teach their children the joy of reading. Carlos has the parents read books that are on their children's school lists. One of the mothers in the group asked her son what he was reading. "Never mind," he replied. "You wouldn't know it." But then she saw the cover of his book *To Kill a Mockingbird* and exclaimed, "What do you mean? I'm reading the same book!" I interviewed two mothers who serve as the officers of the club, President Annette Nunez and Vice President Maribel Coronado.)

Nancy Mintie: Do you enjoy reading?

Annette Nunez: Reading is my passion! It's how I relax. Mostly I learned to love reading as an adult, but I did have a favorite book when I was a child. It was *The Giving Tree* and it was about a tree that loved a little boy. I've read it to my son.

NM: Why did you join our Parent Book Club?

AN: I joined to set an example for my son, Aaron, who's ten. He loves to read now, too. He used to read children's books like *The Diary of a Wimpy Kid*. But now we're reading *The Call of the Wild* together. He likes it, but it is sad. This is the first time he's read an adult book.

NM: How did you become president of the club?

AN: As soon as I joined the club, I didn't miss a single day. I was very interested

and stayed involved all year. When Carlos said he needed help, I agreed to run for office.

NM: Do you have a favorite book?

Maribel Coronado: My favorite of the ones that we've read here in the club is Isabel Allende's *House of the Spirits*. One of my other personal favorites is *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Now I'm reading *The Call of the Wild* with my ten-year-old daughter.

NM: Does your daughter like the book?

MC: She likes it because we're reading it together. It's the first time we've read an adult book together. She asks me for my opinions about it. I've tried to make reading fun and interesting for her. She used to really like the Goosebump books. Now I've gotten her into the Accelerated Reader program where they give kids tests and medals and get them really motivated to read.

NM: Do you read to your younger children?

MC: Yes, my four-year-old, Angela, likes to be read to. When we get to the end of a story, she continues it on her own, making up new chapters for the characters.

NM: That is very significant! You know the famous scientist, Albert Einstein? He said that if you want your children to be smart, then read them fairy tales. And if you want them to be geniuses, then read them lots of fairy tales. That's because imagination and creativity are the bases of intelligence. So you keep reading to Angela and she's going to be one smart young lady! ☑



Officers of our Parent Book Club: President Annette Nunez and Vice President Maribel Coronado.



Our Parent Book Club with its organizer, Carlos Carrillo, in the foreground.

Our Families Speak (con't)

[continued from page 1]

Washington. There were lots of other farming families there. I helped my dad in the summer to pick cucumbers, strawberries, blueberries and blackberries.

In the fall I picked pears, apples and plums. It was beautiful being in the orchards. The flowers scent the air in February. I remember climbing up on a box so that I could pick the biggest shiniest apple off the trees. Eventually they made me the supervisor to check the quality of the produce. That's how I know today how to pick the best fruit in the store when I shop for my family.

NM: Why did you participate in the forum to collect citizen views to bring to the United Nations Climate Conference?

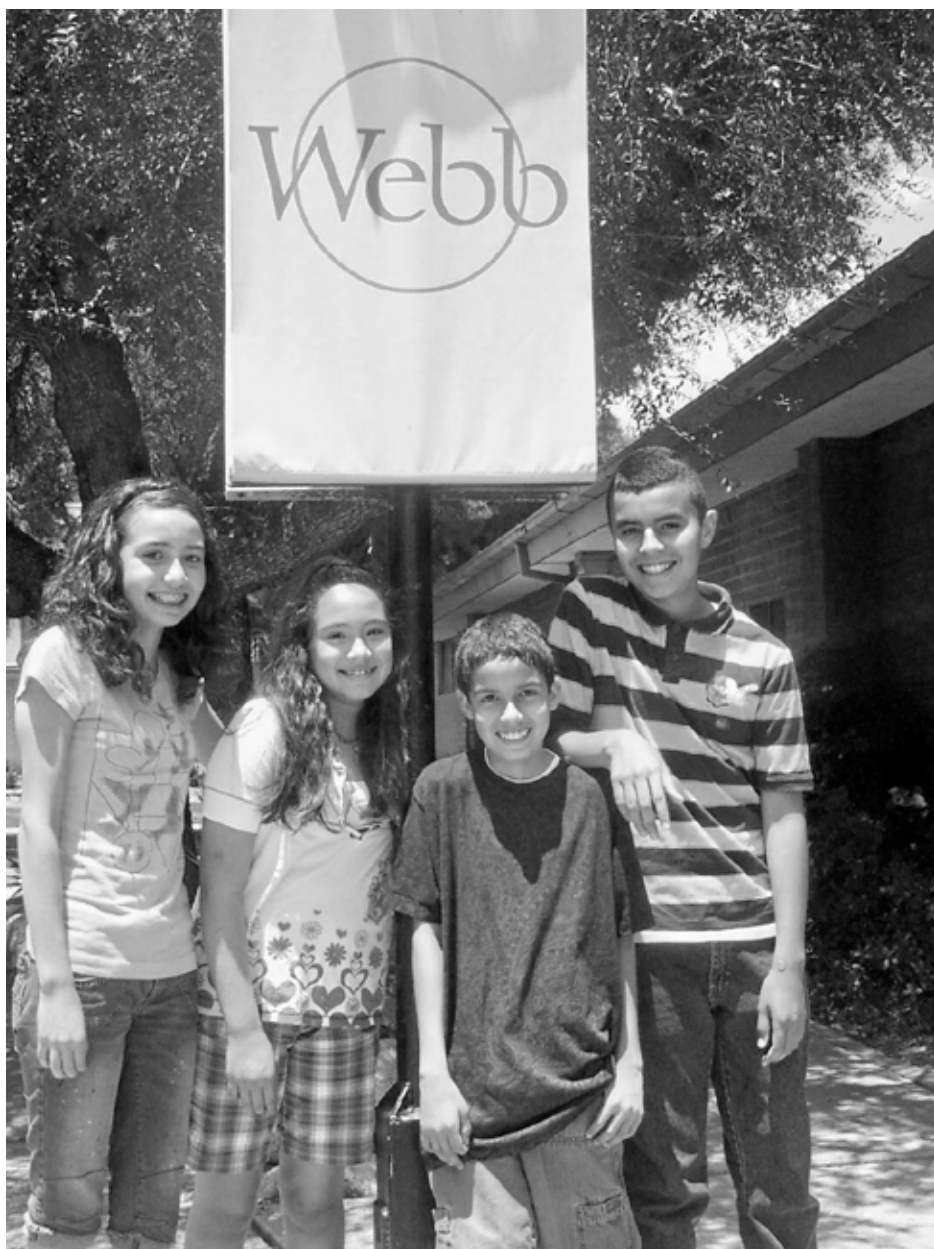
CG: I love nature. It is the best thing we have. Our Creator gave us something we don't value enough. We have the art of nature all around us, but we hurry on and

don't notice it. Here in the city we can't even see the stars.

I think we should make this a new kind of religion: protecting the environment. We can make a difference. Imagine if every one of the ten million people in Los Angeles County picked up just one piece of trash every day. How much cleaner would our environment be?

I see myself as an ambassador to help others understand the importance of green living. I got the people at the school where I work to turn off unnecessary lights. Now we have so many energy using appliances: washers, dryers, blenders, ovens. We need to simplify our living and go back to the old ways. And if people won't cut back then the government should mandate energy cutbacks. The quality of our lives can improve if we simplify them. At my home I encourage less TV and more family time. ☑

Scholarship Student Describes Her Summer Learning Experience



Our Webb School summer scholarship students Karen Uribe, Jailene Rodriguez, Eustacio Rodriguez and Carlos Bran.

(This past summer one of the students in our Clinic to College program, Karen Uribe, was awarded a scholarship to the summer school program of The Webb School, a rigorous college preparatory high school whose graduates attend the top colleges in the country. Here is her description of her experience there.)

Getting the opportunity to attend Webb High School was an honor: not only did we all learn and grow together but we also had fun. Throughout my wonderful experience we took different classes and the great thing about it was that in every class there were only about twelve students. You really got to know your teacher and had more one-on-one time. When I was there I knew I was in a safe environment. I also had the opportunity to meet new people with different cultures, languages, and life styles.

Having only about twelve students in each class is amazing because you have more time to ask the teacher questions and you really connect with everyone in your class. If you were confused or had a question the teachers would be more than happy to take the time to explain it to you. Not only did you receive knowledge from the teachers but also from your classmates. The students came from different cultures so they would share their knowledge and experiences.

“When I was there I knew I was in a safe environment. I also had the opportunity to meet new people with different cultures, languages, and life styles.”

My favorite part about the whole experience was that we all were having fun and learning at the same time while respecting each other and the environment. Generally when you go to school they just teach you straight out of a textbook. Not at the Webb. Here in the classes the teacher went over a couple of facts then we would do experiments. In one class we even had the chance to dissect a fetal pig! How cool is that? We were taught different strategies, formulas, and helpful tips. Throughout those learning experiences I had the chance to share that with respectful and helpful students. One thing that I really like about Webb is how clean it is and how everyone helps keep it that way. For example, one day as I walked to class I saw this girl picking up trash from the floor that was not even hers.

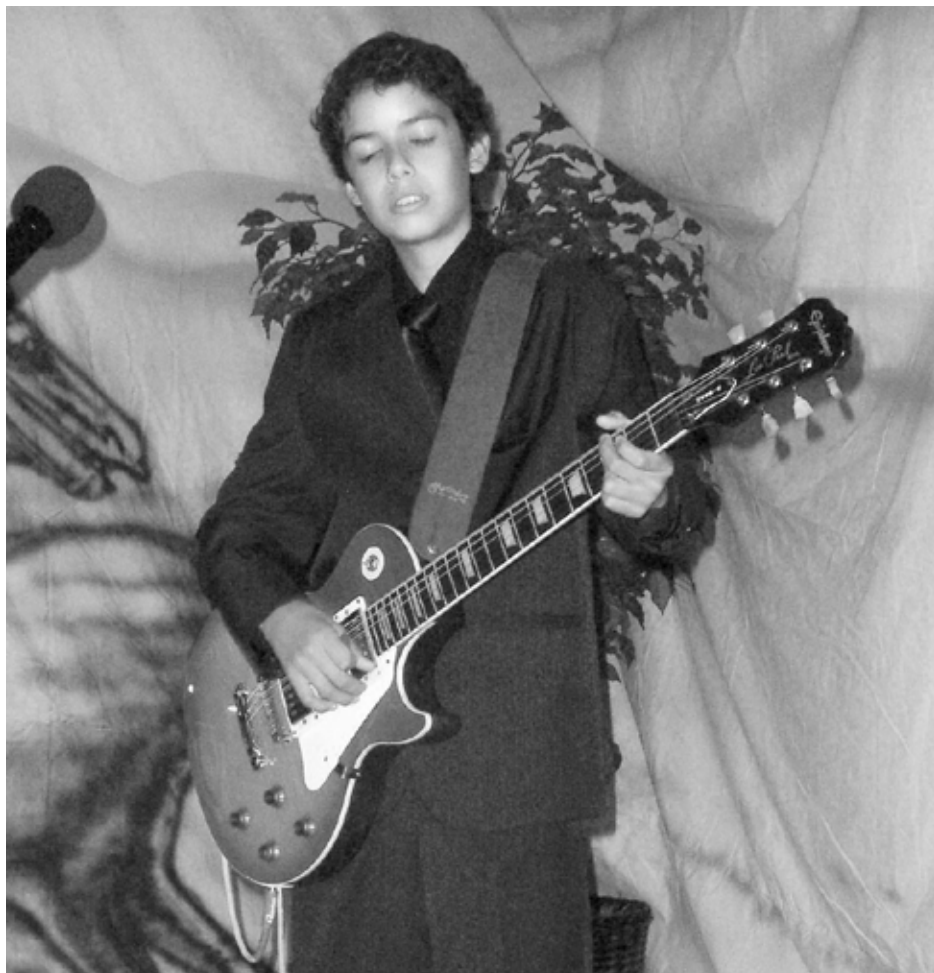
I really enjoyed my stay at Webb High School. I believe it was an honor to be able to take the classes that I took. I feel like I learned a lot from the teachers and from the students. If I had the opportunity to take credit classes next year I would be more than happy to. ☑

Dreams of Costa Rica

Two summers ago generous donor Daniel Colimon gave our best high school students a free eco-science trip to Costa Rica. The kids had such an incredible time that they have inspired our next generation of high school students to work towards a Costa Rica trip for themselves. To that end they and their parents put on a benefit dinner this past October to begin to raise the air fare and associated costs for a possible trip this coming summer. ☑



High school senior Mauricio Bran was the Master of Ceremonies for the Costa Rica benefit evening.



Clinic to College student and talented musician, Eustacio Rodriguez, provided entertainment for the fund raiser.

Blue Sky Meadows

(This past summer we sent 57 students from our Clinic to College program to summer camp at the Blue Sky Meadows camp ground in the San Bernardino Mountains thanks to the generosity of the Los Angeles County Education Foundation. To be selected for the camp, each student was required to write an essay explaining what he or she hoped to get out of the experience. I interviewed our Family Services Coordinator, Carlos Carrillo, about this event.)

Nancy Mintie: What kinds of activities did our kids get to do at the camp?

Carlos Carrillo: They studied earth exploration and astronomy. They learned survival skills, archery, paper making and birding.

NM: How did our kids react to the whole experience?

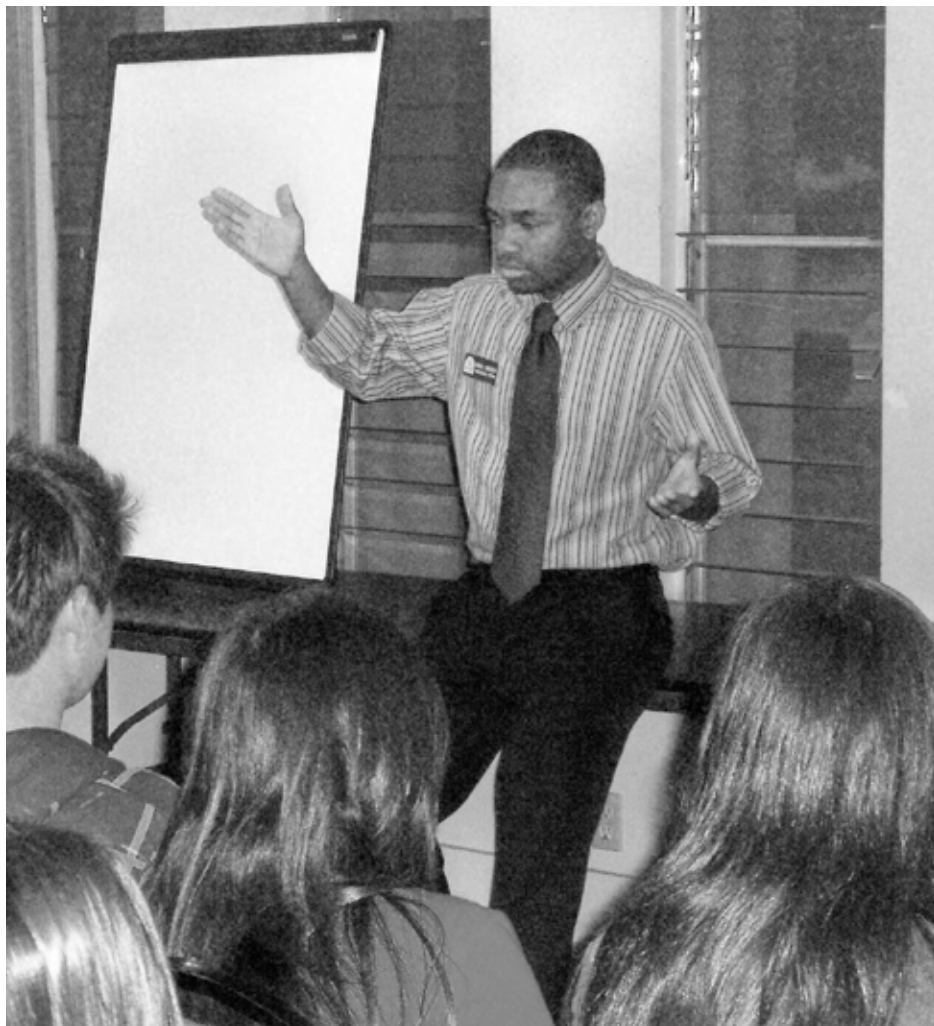
CC: What really impressed me was the way our kids adjusted to nature so easily. They're all city kids, but they love the wild. They love the smells. They kept exclaiming, "It smells so good in the morning!" I loved seeing them run around and get dirty. Most of them had never had the chance to be in nature before. There they were able to explore it safely.

They were really well-behaved, too. Some people think that because our kids are poor, they are going to fight and act up. But that didn't happen.

They really loved learning out in the environment. Since they've gotten back, when I go to visit their schools, I frequently hear them talking about it. I know that this is an experience that is going to stay with them for a lifetime. 📌



Student with an eco-friendly cloth bag that she designed at our Blue Sky Meadows camp.



A Pomona College recruiter speaks to our high school students about how to be competitive applicants for college.

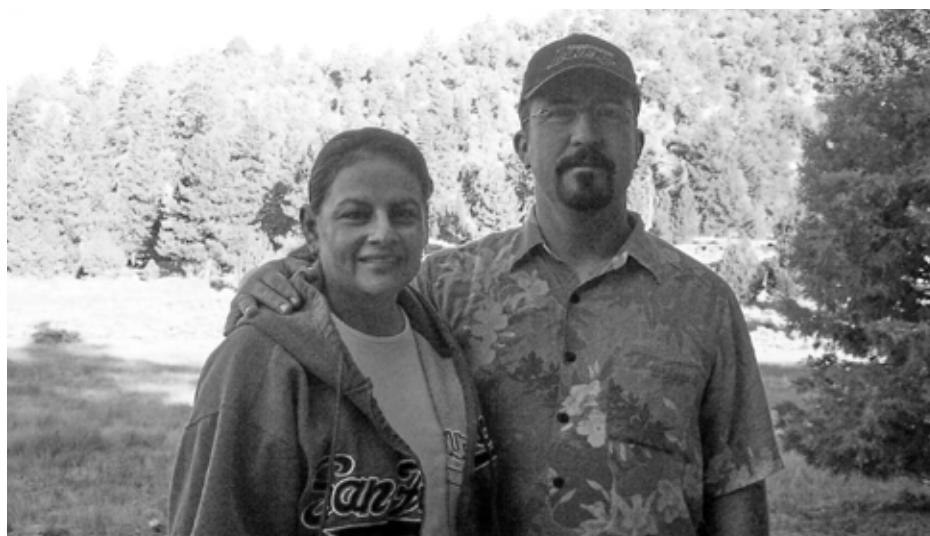


Nathan and Xavier Garcia at our annual pool party.

Oral History Report

(Professor Martha Barcenas of Pitzer College asked some of the mothers of children in our program to be part of an oral history project that records the stories of immigrant women. The Professor and her students meet at the homes of the mothers and share not only their life histories, but also a traditional meal that the hostess prepares from her home country. One of the mothers in our program, Celia Gonzalez, spoke to us about the project.)

"Meeting with the Pitzer students and telling our stories was very emotional for us. And it got me started telling stories to my own children. I tell them about my childhood, but also the old legends of our people, Bible stories, and even stories that I make up myself. Now sometimes in the evening my son comes and lies down on my bed and says, "Tell me a story." 📌



Celia Gonzalez with her husband, Armando.