



The Paths We Follow



Ask someone how they ended up in their current career, and often the answers are fascinating. Maybe a seeming coincidence, maybe an adult who took special care to mentor them, maybe a family tradition -- and, we hope, the values and knowledge that we share with our MFS graduates in their years with us.

In this issue, we share stories of former students and a former teacher who have followed different paths. In each of the stories, they are not the only ones in their family to attend MFS or even the only generation to attend our school.

We hope you'll enjoy their stories and especially some fun pictures of them both now and back when they were in our school.

It's the Leadership Skills, Not Just the ABC's



Daniel and his sister Felicia

"My education was not just the subjects like math or art or social studies that were taught" said Daniel Vargas Cambroner, 2009 graduate of the Monteverde Friends School. "Equally important is that MFS teaches us servant leadership towards our communities, wherever we may be in the world and an eagerness at a young age to explore the world and the 'truth in everyone'."

Those skills developed in his 11 years at MFS are what Daniel now uses in his career and giving back to the Monteverde community through his volunteer work.

He describes coming into grades 1 & 2 as initially "shock and awe". He didn't yet speak English and other students who had attended MFS kindergarten were already pretty fluent. His family lives on their farm in San Luis, a smaller town about a 20 minute drive from Monteverde, so coming to Monteverde felt like visiting the exciting big city. But after the initial shock, he settled in. It helped that his older brother Marco was two years ahead of him at MFS, and later his younger sister Felicia attended as well.

Following graduation, Daniel headed to Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana not as much because it, too, is a Quaker school but for its servant-leadership models and career skills. Through connections with people who had gone to Earlham, he learned that Earlham College was peace-focused, had one of the highest proportions of international students of all U.S. colleges, and that it combined a very high-quality education with activism in its community.

Daniel thought he would major in the social sciences, but got interested in biology, though he found ways to view biology not just as science but as influenced by factors like race and economic status. He has combined that approach with his interest -- and heritage -- in farming. While not interested in being the one to plant and reap, he is deeply interested in helping to build the structures that ensure a sustainable (economically and ecologically), healthy food system.

Currently, Daniel applies his career skills at [Cafe Monteverde](#), where he is the Academic Program Coordinator fostering partnerships of over 50 international university or ecotourism groups with local coffee plantations. He develops and offers educational programs for students to see not just a healthy cup of Costa Rican coffee but all the structures and practices involved -- from the farmers who produce that coffee, to the distribution and retail channels to get the coffee to market.

And Daniel hasn't forgotten activism and community involvement. He volunteers with Enlace collecting statistics in Monteverde to "generate community knowledge about the impact, challenges, needs, and community resources related to COVID-19. [Enlace provides] to local authorities and leaders key data on household impact, vulnerable populations, valuable assets, and high impact opportunities."

All that in a 29 year-old! We can't wait to see his leadership skills flourish in the future!



Daniel (on the far right) and his coffee farm colleagues

Little Things That Change a Life



Eugenio in nature, one of his favorite places.

Daniel and his brother and sister were not the only Vargas family members to attend MFS. Thirty years earlier, their father, Eugenio Vargas Leitón, completed 7th through 9th grade at MFS though it was a vastly different school in the 1970's. When Eugenio attended, there were only 25 to 30 students, and only he and three other students were from local, non-Quaker families. Today, MFS has over 130 students and approximately 90% are from non-Quaker families.

Eugenio, the oldest of 12 children in his family, had attended 1st through 6th grade at the local primary school in San Luis, the highest grades available to San Luis children at the time. He particularly remembers a teacher who recognized his interest in reading and managed to get books for him even when books were very difficult to get to the rural public schools. Left without further schooling, Eugenio heard of tutoring

available in English and he convinced his parents to let him join that class. For the next two years, he faithfully attended that tutoring twice a week.

At one session, the tutor drew Eugenio aside to tell him that the director of the Friends School wanted to meet with him and that he needed to bring his father along. Somewhat intimidated -- was this good news or bad? -- he proceeded with the meeting. Mary Mendenhall, then the MFS Head of School, explained to them that the school had selected him as one of two candidates to receive a full scholarship as the Quakers had started to reach out to the local community. His scholarship was funded by the Monteverde Cheese Factory, which was founded by Quaker dairy farmers to process their milk into marketable products.

The English Eugenio learned in that tutoring and the years at MFS turned into skills that have provided both his life opportunities and challenges. After trying to continue with university studies and work in San Jose for 5 years, Eugenio decided to return to San Luis to work on the family farm and help with the local coffee farmers organization needs. With support from other friends, he was part of the founding board of Asociacion El Buen Amigo, (1983-2003) a community group of 10 formerly landless families dedicated to farming coffee, sugar cane,

dairy cows and organic vegetables. With his language skills and education, and support from friends in the Quaker community, he was able to develop grant proposals for Right Sharing of World Resources, and Inter-American Foundation, and write the project reports for the grants received. His greatest satisfaction from those years was seeing the empowerment of San Luis neighbors and families -- including their children -- by working together to plan and manage projects, account for grants, and feel pride in their own capabilities despite very little education.

But as he married and his family grew to include five children, he also needed some outside income. He found a part-time job at the [Monteverde Institute](#), a local non-profit dedicated to teaching, researching, and encouraging sustainable communities. With many international students, researchers, and other English native co-workers, Eugenio's bilingual skills were important. That part time job developed into a 15-year stint with full time work in a variety of management roles.

Six years ago, Eugenio moved into an administrative position with the Monteverde Friends School reaching out to international visitors, volunteers, teachers, and the diverse composition of MFS families and staff -- again, often using his bilingual skills as much as his lifelong exposure to cultural diversity appreciation and spirituality. In this pandemic year, he is on loan to the Friends Meeting to translate their book on the history of Quakers in Monteverde (the Jubilee Family Album.)

Eugenio in the 1970's



Isn't it amazing that 11-year-old Eugenio's discovery of an English tutoring class and his thirst for learning set him on this life path!

Why is it important for MFS to offer bilingual education?

Part of MFS's mission is to open students eyes to the world beyond their local borders. This is accomplished through bilingualism and by having teachers and volunteers often from Canada and the United States.

But a very practical reason beyond that is that with so much tourism in Costa Rica and international companies locating here, bilingualism opens many career doors. A **study** looking at wages in Costa Rica from 2005 to 2017 concluded that across all sectors, those who were bilingual earned 20% more, and that within that, in the private sector, earnings were 28% higher.

A Different Country ... And a Different Career



Moving to a new country wasn't all that new an adventure for Emanuel Hemi and his wife Danielle in 2012; they had already travelled a good deal and had lived in Nicaragua for 6 months. But little did Emanuel know that he would find a new career.

Emanuel and Danielle knew they wanted to try life in a different country for a while and to share a broader world perspective with their young boys, then age 6 and 8. But they also knew they both needed to work while there to support the family. Danielle was already a teacher, a skill many countries want to attract. She found a position teaching at the Creativa, another private school in the wider Monteverde district.

The Creativa principal offered Emanuel a list of job possibilities in the area. Emanuel saw the listing for a math and science teacher at the Monteverde Friends School -- he had majored in math (and considered a physics major) as an

undergrad at Tufts University -- so he applied and got the job. With that, the family committed to live in Monteverde for two years.

They moved and dove into Monteverde living, honing their Spanish skills and for Emanuel, not just teaching math and science to 3rd through 8th grade students but, in his words, "falling in love" with teaching and with the community spirit of Monteverde. Not only did he see his students in class and on campus, he would see them and get to know their families around town in this tight-knit community. And both of their boys were able to attend MFS.

Two years turned into 4 years, 2012 to 2016. As much as they wanted to stay in Monteverde, teacher salaries in Costa Rica -- an average of \$12,000 US per year for the country -- were not enough to support the family long term. So with a lot of regret, they left the Monteverde community they had grown to love, and headed back to the United States.

Knowing they were headed back, Emanuel sought ways to continue his new passions for teaching and language. Amazingly, he found a perfect fit in Pacific University's master's degree in STEM with an endorsement in English to Speakers of Other Languages. With his degree in hand, he has since been the Dual Language Immersion

Science Teacher for a middle school in Oregon. Watching his wife's hard work as a teacher, he used to think it was much too much work. Now, he says, he works just as hard but with a smile on his face, delighted to see his students learn and grow.

Family dinner while in Monteverde

Since leaving, Emanuel has continued his connections with MFS. Emanuel has been a monthly donor since early 2018. And in 2019, the family offered a homestay for an MFS student they had known in Monteverde while that student did an exchange semester in the United States.

As Emanuel puts it, "I give because I love and wish to support both MFS and the community, in addition to appreciating the financial support that allowed our two sons to attend MFS."

We at MFS deeply appreciate those connections, and have every hope they will continue for many years.



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