



## Fellowship, letters energize CFCA's sponsored aging

As she sat on a cement block in the modest house she shares with her granddaughter and great-grandson, 78-year-old Francisca Lula, a frail woman with Coke-bottle glasses, expressed profound gratitude for the benefits she receives through CFCA's Teresina project in Brazil.

Thanks to sponsorship, Francisca eats a balanced diet of fresh produce and protein-rich rice and beans. A neighborhood doctor treats her excruciating joint pain. Even though she has family to care for her, Francisca appreciates the moral support provided by sponsorship.

"I don't feel alone because people from the project visit me and my sponsor writes me," she says. A warm smile illuminates her face when she mentions her sponsor.

Francisca is one of the 18,992 aging persons sponsored through CFCA projects. CFCA added aging to its sponsorship program in 1984 and is the only major U.S. sponsorship organization to do so.

"Including the aging in our sponsorship program comes from our core belief in the dignity and value of the elderly in society and in CFCA," said Paul Pearce, CFCA director of international programs.



CFCA/Kara Romero

*Eighty-year-old Francisca appreciates the regular visits she receives from CFCA staff in Teresina, Brazil.*

Through sponsorship, the aging see that someone recognizes their existence and their worth, said CFCA President Bob Hentzen. There is no better evidence of this recognition than the letters from sponsors. The elderly often beam with delight when they receive letters.

Aging persons thrive with the physical, emotional and spiritual benefits provided by sponsorship. Medical care and nutrition benefits treat physical ailments. Recreation and socialization programs nourish their spiritual and emotional health.

"The CFCA program provides an opportunity for aging members to come together and build community," said Paul.

Community-building programs provide opportunities for aging members to participate in folk dancing, singing, retreats or field trips, physical fitness exercises and even join a soccer team if they are physically able. They can also learn income-generating activities such as needlework. On CFCA Friendship Day in the Philippines, thousands of sponsored youth and

## Caring nurse connects CFCA aging to sponsors

At the Home for Abandoned Elderly in Kingston, Jamaica, nurse Petal Toomer frequently writes letters to sponsors on behalf of elderly residents who are unable to write themselves. In this way, Petal helps to strengthen the bond between sponsor and sponsored friend.

"When I tell them I am going to write to their sponsor, they are very happy," she said.

Lloyd, an 83-year-old man who is partially blind and prays that his son will visit, dictates:

"My scribe today is Petal. She is the nurse that always does my writing. She is going to type this letter when she gets the chance. I hear that her penmanship is good, though, so it is OK with me if she posts it just the way it is."

In the interest of full disclosure, Petal informs sponsors that she is the letter writer in case their sponsored friend forgets to mention it. She introduced herself at the beginning of a letter she wrote for 53-year-old Belvita:

"My name is Petal, Ms. Belvita's nurse, and I am writing for her because she is not able to do so for herself."

Petal includes details that enable a sponsor to get a sense of their sponsored friend. She writes for Frederica, an 88-year-old woman suffering from arthritis and dementia:

"Frederica talks to herself constantly, and these days is actually smiling with visitors and allowing the student nurses to comb her hair (she usually only allows one nurse to do that)."

If the person can speak, Petal dutifully writes what they say, as in the case of Ms. Belvita.

"I got married recently, a very nice gentleman that I met at the church. My friends here think that I am crazy because Clifford (that is his name) doesn't have a cent to his name."

Petal said the sponsored aging enjoy hearing from their sponsors. "They feel loved and know that someone is caring about them," she said.



CFCA/Sheila Myers

*Sponsored aging of Costa Rica enjoy folk dancing.*

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# CFCA's centenarians beat life expectancy odds

*If old age is a blessing, as it is considered in many cultures, then living past 100 should be the jackpot of good fortune. Though it is difficult to measure the number of centenarians because of primitive record-keeping in many parts of the world, the population age 80 and older is projected to make up a considerable proportion of the global total. In conditions of extreme poverty, it is remarkable that someone would reach the age of 100. Nevertheless, CFCA is proud to count 53 centenarians among its sponsored aging. Several of them shared their memories and wisdom for this issue of Project Perspectives.*

## Pancho Villa's gang no match for spunky Sofia

Sofia, 101, was a young girl when the Mexican revolutionary, Pancho Villa, roamed the countryside with his gang of marauders shooting wildly from horseback and harassing villagers.

"A bad man arrived at our house and forced my father at gunpoint to open the granary so he could steal corn from us," she said. "I put myself between my father and the man and hit the man's hand, setting off his pistol. 'Aha,' said the man. 'You killed yourself.' But the bullet went into my knee.

"After visiting the doctor, we decided to leave the bullet because to remove it would have left me lame."

Sofia attributes her long life to an unusual diet of prickly pear, purslane

(a short, weedy grass), carp, garbanzos and chicken feet. She abstains from pork and beef.

"The doctor tells me I have the bones of a man," Sofia said. "He also calls me Grandma. I very much enjoy this."

Sofia appreciates the fellowship and benefits provided through the Santa Catalina subproject in Colonia Buena Vista, close to Cuernavaca. She receives monthly food baskets and enjoys doing needlework with other sponsored aging. After Mass, she eats breakfast at the parish, receives a medical checkup and gets her nails and hair clipped.

Sofia always remembers her sponsor in her prayers.



CFCA/Martha Meireles  
Sofia, 101, enjoys needlework.

## "Lolo" Alberto hid in the hills during WWII

"Lolo" (Grandfather) Alberto shared memories of the Japanese occupation of the Philippines during World War II with his daughter, Ceritas, the sixth of 11 children.

"My family suffered a tremendous sacrifice, hiding in the hills because they were afraid of the soldiers carrying jungle knives and bayonets," he said. That was a long time ago for the 102-year-old.

Longevity runs in Alberto's family. His mother is said to have lived 118 years.

"Only God knows the reason for this long life," said Alberto.

Alberto doesn't smoke or drink alcohol. He eats a balanced diet and exercises regularly.

Ceritas credits her father's longevity in part to his life as a farmer and fisherman, as well as to the family's prayers. Leigh Hudson, a retired nurse from Oxford,

Conn., and Alberto's sponsor for seven years, has another explanation.

"I think having survived World War II, he is intrinsically a very strong man," she said. Leigh enjoys sending notes to Alberto throughout the year, to which Alberto responds "always with lovely handwritten remarks."

Alberto and his family are grateful to CFCA for the medical care, spiritual formation and nutrition benefits he has received through the Legazpi project in the Philippines. Alberto enjoys accompanying other sponsored aging on outings arranged by project staff.

"CFCA improved my father's life not only through material benefits, but psychological, emotional, social and spiritual as well," said Ceritas. "For that we are grateful to the Lord, to his sponsor, and to the CFCA family."



CFCA/Legazpi project  
Alberto, 102, gets regular exercise.

## Resilient Enriqueta conquers many obstacles

Immigrants crowd together in San Antonio, one of the most densely populated areas outside Guatemala City. Few opportunities for stable employment exist, driving children and elderly into the streets in search of menial work.

Such is the environment that has surrounded 103-year-old Enriqueta since the day she was born. Abandoned by her father, Enriqueta helped her mother sell cheese and homemade cigarettes in the streets of Guatemala City.

“It made me feel useful because my mother could count on my help to survive and the two of us supported each other,” she said. “This mutual support strengthened my relationship with my mother.”

Enriqueta left home at 18 and married at 22. Her husband left her when she was four months pregnant, so she moved

to Guatemala City to find work as a housekeeper.

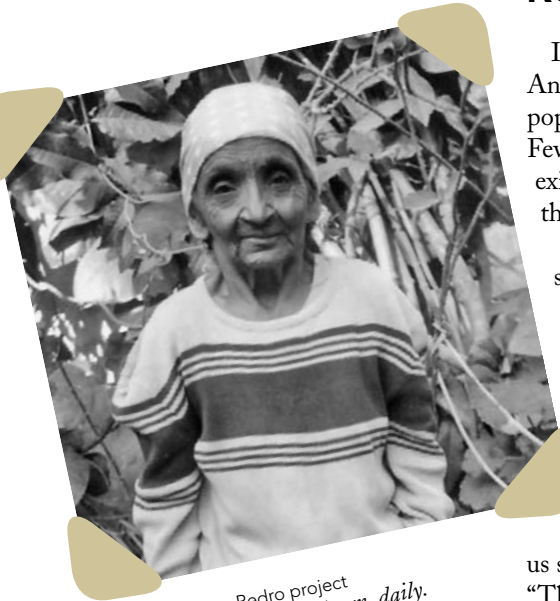
Her secret to longevity is never to stop overcoming obstacles and to rise early. She wakes up every day at 4 a.m. to wash clothes and dishes. She enjoys walking for two or three hours.

“It is God who gives long life,” she said.

Recently, Enriqueta was struck by a motorist and broke her collar bone and arm. The doctors said she died for a short time in the hospital. Enriqueta is grateful for her second chance and lives happily with her daughter, Alberta, and her granddaughter, Jacqueline.

She is thankful for the nutritious food, medical care and clothing she receives through sponsorship. The only gifts she received for her birthday and Christmas were from her sponsor.

She asks God to bless her sponsor and everyone at CFCA.



CFCA/Hermano Pedro project  
Enriqueta, 103, rises at 4 a.m. daily.

**“Really, there is no secret to long life. It is God who gives long life.”** - TAMBA, 101, SPONSORED AGING FROM LIBERIA

## To live a long life, be at peace with neighbors

In his 101 years, Tamba has witnessed many changes in his country of Liberia in West Africa: the appearance of cars and airplanes, a succession of 11 presidents and the waging of civil war.

Tamba saw his first car near the Sierra Leone border and he often heard airplanes flying overhead, though he did not see them.

“The elders used to say the gods were angry,” Tamba said with a chuckle.

He remembers the names of nine of Liberia’s 11 presidents, including newly-elected Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Tamba witnessed first hand the effects of global industrialization. As a young man, he left his home and walked south for 62 miles along bush paths to an area west of Monrovia, where he worked clearing land for a rubber-tree plantation. He recalled the tragedy that occurred after the land was cleared.

“So many people died in the process,” said Tamba. “After the clearing, the only way to remove the dry bush was to burn it. So many villages were burned up by the fire. It was not possible for all those

people to leave. They had nowhere to go.”

Tamba has nine children by three wives. Six of his children are still living. He earned his surname, Bungalow, after he fought three men at a bungalow, but he has mellowed with age. He lives in a small house he built in 1980, and was displaced from his home for two months because of civil war.

Long life runs in his family. His grandmother and mother both lived to be very old.

“Really, there is no secret to long life,” said Tamba. “It is God who gives long life. Have a clean heart and be at peace with your neighbors. Do not harbor bad feelings for others.”

Tamba is very thankful to CFCA and to his sponsor.

“I am fed regularly,” he said. “I get soap to wash, medical service and the best of all, the mattresses, beddings, the pots and all the things that were given to us during this Christmas season. I thank you very much for your help.”



CFCA/Monrovia project  
Tamba, 101, pictured at left, tells his story to a  
Monrovia staff member.

# Sponsorship is a lifeline for CFCA's aging members

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aging assemble to express their gratitude to sponsors.

"The aging interact with the children," said Paul. "There is a mutual benefit to this interaction because the children learn to value and care for the elderly and the elderly are inspired by the energy of youth."

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the size of the elderly population (age 65 and older) around the world is projected to increase rapidly, almost doubling by 2020 and more than tripling by 2050. The CFCA sponsorship program reflects this changing demographic.

"Certain projects are asking to add more aging to their programs," said Marcia Willman, CFCA director of child services.

The vast majority of CFCA sponsored aging members are age 65 and older. However, more than 1,000 are in their 40s and 50s, and 51 aging members with disabilities are under 40.

"The term 'aging' is relative," said Marcia. "It's based on the living conditions and life expectancy in their country."

In Africa, where HIV/AIDS has wiped out a generation of parents, sponsorship is a lifeline for aging who often support



CFCA/Sheila Myers

*Sponsored aging in Costa Rica learn to make table runners and pillows to generate extra income.*

grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

"Most have no means of support because they can't generate an income," said Marcia.

For the few who are strong enough to earn money by selling items they make at home, sponsorship is a stable supplement to erratic day-to-day income.

Providing enough support for aging members is a challenge for CFCA because the work is labor intensive. CFCA serves the sponsored elderly through 651 home-based and institutional programs. Most sponsored elderly live at home where they are visited regularly by staff that deliver benefits and assess individual needs.

"These are the most vulnerable because no one knows if they fall sick," said Bob.

To monitor the condition of elderly members, the Teresina project schedules home visits depending on their physical health. Healthy aging receive visits once a month, sick members once a week and severely ill members are visited every day.

Whatever the case, the aging are grateful for sponsorship. Sponsoring an aging friend is a chance to make a profound difference in someone's life. More than 950 aging persons are awaiting CFCA sponsorship.

"Many are brought to tears when they talk about the program and their sponsors," said Paul. "They are overwhelmed by the fact that someone chose to love and encourage them."

Josefina, an 80-year-old from Zamboanga in the Philippines, was so moved when she was asked to talk about the



CFCA/Ilene Adams

*Sponsorship provides nutritious food baskets for Josefina, 80, from Zamboanga in the Philippines.*

CFCA program that she started to cry.

"The CFCA food baskets help to sustain my life," she said.

Patrick Curran of New Mexico sponsors 51-year-old Arnoldo, a blind man from Costa Rica. "I already have 21 grandchildren so I didn't need another child," he said.

Meeting for the second time recently on a mission awareness trip in Costa Rica, the two sat peacefully side-by-side.

"We can't talk and my friend can't see me but I still feel the love," said Patrick.

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**- PAUL PEARCE, CFCA DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS**