

## **Vey Smithers**

*Antigua, Guatemala*

I came to Guatemala in 1973 to visit family and work in the highlands as a sheep management consultant. I'm still here! Early on, I met Doc. I remember him as a simple, warm man with a great sense of humor. My primary contact with Behrhorst and the clinic was through Jim Hogan who was a doctor working at the clinic then who was enthusiastic about the clinic and its community focus. I also knew Dennis Wheeler, who had traveled to the highlands on Doc's behalf looking for the missing community health workers after the violence. It was Jim and Dennis who inspired several of us to found PAVA to respond to community needs because of the violence. Doc provided us with office and storage space in Chimaltenango. PAVA fought to help the rural Mayan population receive funds for agriculture and basic needs from the Guatemalan and US governments and others at a time when no help was available.

Life was so hard in the highlands after the violence. Women I knew would come and ask me to buy their old family weavings. I knew that just myself buying their textiles was not the solution to their economic problems. So I rented a storefront in Antigua to help them sell their product. Originally, I worked with a small group of women teaching them about quality control and what the customers wanted. This small group has now grown to 500 weavers whose high quality work is available at our store, Colibrí.

PAVA and Colibrí, just like the Behrhorst Partners for Development have the mission of helping people help themselves. Organizations like these that really partner with the people truly help make individual and community change possible.