

October 28th, 2022,

I was 37 years old when I arrived in Belize in August 1976. I had been doing engineering work and had become a teacher with training in Special Education. Father John told me that he wanted me to create work for the men. There was no work for men in Benque and the men had to travel to get work. Their absence was difficult for family life.

Father John McHugh said that he had tried to have the men make brooms. It failed. He said that he got a machine that could cut logs into lumber but that failed.

Due to culture and absences, the men treated their wives like servants not partners. Men rarely would be seen with their children. They would not carry a child or would not walk with their wives at their side. Wives had to walk behind their husbands. Too many men physically beat their wives. Almost every homily Deacon Cal gave was on family life. Ginny and I tried to show the beauty of family life. Today most men are with their children, do not beat their wives and can show affection publicly. As always, I was just an initiator. The community and the country changed.

There were about 400 Catholic families living in Benque at the time. That was 90% of the people living in Benque.

When I came to Belize in 1976, the primary schools did not play competitive football and basketball. I spoke with Mr. Rafael Contreras and asked him to coach a team of Mt. Carmel Primary School boys. Mr. Rafael Contreras agreed to do it for no cost. We formed a team and went to two schools in Guatemala and four schools in Belize. The team won all of its games. A few years later all of the primary schools and high schools were forming teams and playing against their neighbouring schools.

In 1976, Benque was a closed community. Persons who were not mestizos were not accepted in Benque.

Father John McHugh and I built a small half size basketball court. A few years later, they built a small full size basketball court. After the full sized court was built, I encouraged young men from Benque to form teams. He encouraged young men from customs, immigration and the police to form teams. In a very short time persons who were not mestizos became accepted in Benque. Benque was no longer a community closed to outsiders. For me this was one of my best early accomplishments. A few years later, girls teams were formed.

I began teaching at Sacred Heart High School. When I was not at school, I would travel to our parish villages here and in Guatemala to help Fr. John McHugh celebrate masses. Often, I would give a service.

Only ten percent of the children who were born in Belize were graduating from high school. For several years, only 30% of the children who started Sacred Heart High School would graduate. Children starting the first year at Sacred Heart High School were poor in math and reading. In 1977, Fr. Panton, a parish priest, and I teamed up to change that. Five years later, 80% of those who entered Sacred Heart as freshmen graduated from Sacred Heart High School.

In 1979, I was made local manager of the four primary schools of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Parish. Children were having a difficult time learning how to read and how to do math. Children memorized a short story. Children could “read” the story but not the words in the story. I went to several schools to find out what they were doing in reading. In most schools, the teacher would write a three or four sentence paragraph on the chalkboard and the children would memorize it. They could not read words taken from the paragraph. The Ministry of Education discouraged the use of books.

In 1980, I brought from the US a reading series designed for children who lived in poor areas. The books were successful here in Belize.

In 1983, Bishop OP Martin came to visit me. He asked me to write learning how to read books, get them to all Catholic schools in Belize and teach the teachers how to use them.

By 1989, children in the Corozal, Orange Walk, Belize and Cayo districts were using reading and math books that I had written with the help of Mt. Carmel teachers. I had hired Loreny Rosado to letter by hand the reading and math books. She and her work were amazing. I hired young women for typing and hired Mike Mauricio to do art work for the books. Benjamin Sanchez from Succotz ran off the books on a mimeograph machine and several people collated the sheets and made them into books.

I had not done this to create jobs. I had done it to help children learn. The only way I could get books to the children was to create jobs/careers in order to be able to make books. I had fulfilled Father John’s request.

I did travel throughout the four districts teaching teachers how to use the Systematic Synthetic Phonics method rather than story memorization.

The Anglican Management decided to use BRC’s reading books but they could stop using past failing methods. After one year, they tested their schools and told me that the children had failed. I asked their General Manager to go to any Catholic school and give the same test. She did. She told me that she could not find a child that could not read. The next year the Anglican schools used BRC’s books as designed. The children learned how to read.

In 1989, the Canadian Organization for Development in Education (CODE) came to Belize. They saw our books and realized that the children who were using them were learning how to read. They offered help if I would found a limited company and get the books to the southern districts of Stann Creek and Toledo. I registered BRC Printing with the Government of Belize and got the books to the southern districts.

Two years later, CODE gave BRC Printing Ltd. the equipment necessary for a print shop. BRC Printing became a company with close to 30 employees. Other businesses in Benque and their employees benefited from the salaries BRC paid its employees.

A few years ago, a young man I had never met came up to me and said, “Do you realize that we have a large middle class in Belize and that almost every young person who is successful in Belize learned how to read using your books.”

There is a story of which I am very proud. Around 1993, I went to the town of Dangriga in Southern Belize to give a reading workshop to teachers. I arrived early so I decided to walk around the town and learn about it. I went to their cemetery and saw a statue with the name "T.V. Ramos". At the workshop I asked the teachers, "Who was T.V. Ramos"? They did not know. I came to Benque and asked the teachers if they knew who T.V. Ramos was. They did not. I would try to find out.

A young man had written a history of the Garifuna people. I found a short explanation on T.V. Ramos. On November 19th, in the early 1900s, the Garifuna community arrived in Belize. They had come from Honduras to escape persecution. They settled in Dangriga and the southernmost town in Belize, Punta Gorda. Most were fishermen. A few years later T.V. Ramos organized the community to celebrate "Garifuna Settlement Day" on November 19th.

T.V. Ramos realized that the Garifuna people had no access to a hospital or clinic. He travelled by foot and by boat the hundred miles between Dangriga and Punta Gorda and encouraged young women to become nurses. He traveled by foot or boat the 100 miles to Belize City and encouraged the government to build clinics in Dangriga and Punta Gorda and get nurses to towns. He also encouraged the government to have a national holiday named "Garifuna Settlement Day". He accomplished all three.

BRC Printing had a children's newspaper. It was a four page paper 8.5 by 11 inches. We sold it to children all across the country for 12.5 cents. In one of the newspapers, the front page story was the story of T.V. Ramos. The whole country, children and adults, learned about T.V. Ramos. In the late 90's The country of Belize decided to honor T.V. Ramos posthumously. The Garifuna community in each of our six districts was to choose one person to speak at the ceremony. In five of the districts a Garifuna who was related to T.V. Ramos was chosen. In the Cayo District The Garifuna community chose me for what I had done to make the country aware of T.V. Ramos' accomplishments. I felt a little uncomfortable being the only person on the stage not being Garifuna and not related to T.V. Ramos.

BRC with me as owner/manager was very charitable. BRC helped Mt. Carmel Parish build school buildings. Across the country, BRC would get books to children whose parents could not or would not purchase them. BRC would help schools in the Mt. Carmel management hire extra teachers to keep the student to teacher ratio low. Families who were poor were given work to help feed their families. Funds from outside Belize helped with the charitable works.

Across the country BRC helped managements, schools and children with BRC's reading and math books, teacher's guides and additional financial help.

My engineering and construction skills were well used here in Benque. I designed or improved the design and supervised the construction of the following buildings; Six classroom buildings for Mt. Carmel Primary School, some construction in our three village schools, the original Credit Union building, the two additions to the convent, the basketball court, the Benque Viejo Town Library, the rectory/church center, BRC Printing and three homes. I also helped in the construction of several buildings for Sacred Heart Parish and Sacred Heart High School. With my permission, the Ministry of Education took the design of a classroom building and built several buildings with the design in the Stann Creek District.

High school education was quite expensive. Many families could not afford to send their children to high school. In the mid 1980's, with BRC's help, Queen of the Holy Rosary's help and other outside of Belize help I began to pay for children's high school education. I cannot remember how many young people got to high school. Most of the graduates are professional people or have good paying jobs.

In the mid 1990's, Ginny and I began to help women whose husbands had abandoned them. The funds came from the Queen of the Holy Rosary and other sources.

From the first days that schools started using our books, the Ministry of Education tried to get BRC's books out of the schools. They did not like the popularity the Catholic Church was receiving. They criticized BRC's books and myself.

In the late 1980's, Belize was a very peaceful country. I wrote a booklet stating that unless we started teaching our disadvantaged children how to read, we would have unbelievable crime and violence.

In the mid 1990's, crime and violence came to Belize. A Belizean priest said that I was a prophet. I told him that all I did was read about what was happening in other countries that failed to teach their poor.

In the 1990's, I was involved in different educational activities. I became A member of Sacred Heart's Board of Directors and was Chairperson of the Board when we formed the Sacred Heart Junior College. I was chairperson for eight years. After that I became a trustee on the Bishop's "Teacher Retirement Savings Plan". I did much of the development of the plan. I remained a trustee until Government regulations on private savings plans required stopping the plan.

In 1997, the Government and Ministry of Education had devised a plan to take control of the denominational school managements. When I discovered it, I showed a copy to Bishop O.P. Martin. He immediately called Catholic Church leaders together to fight the plan.

We fought. We won much. We still lost much.

Bishop O.P. Martin formed the "Bishop's Commission for Education" to help protect the Church's rights in education. I was on the Commission until it quit functioning. We won a lot but still lost much.

From the late 1990's, I was a member of the Board of Directors for "Guadalupe Media". We grew from a radio station to a true Catholic Media house. We have a bookstore, a radio station and a nation wide television station. During COVID-19, it was the Church's communication to Catholics.

Belize had many schools with more than 40 children in many classes.

In the year 2000, the World Bank and the Ministry of Education were going to education leaders across the country telling them that if the number of children in a class were to increase by ten percent we would still have the same results. None of the educators accepted the idea.

I was given a copy of the draft contract for \$40 million US between Belize and the World Bank. Many would

make much money. The draft contract clearly stated that the country would have to increase the student to teacher ratio. Both World Bank planners and Government of Belize officials would make much money.

I agonized. If I revealed the content of the draft contract, the government would try to destroy me and BRC. If I did not reveal it, children and teachers would be hurt. I wrote a short pamphlet and gave it to the teachers at their National Union meeting. The teachers passed a resolution that they would only accept an actual student to teacher ratio of 30 to 1. The \$40 million US loan did not go through. I was not very popular with the Government and World Bank. Government leaders told me that they were going to destroy me and BRC.

The execution of their plan:

In the year 2002, the Ministry of Education leaders had a meeting with the country's education leaders and announced that they were going to write the reading and math books for the first three grades of school. BRC's reading and math books were for the first three grades of school. At the end of the meeting, one of the four Ministry leaders put his arm around me and said, "Fight them. Your books are good. I will help you fight them."

In the year 2003, the Government spent over \$1.5 million dollars Bz fixing up their government print shop. They then sold the 8 million dollar Bz print shop to a friend for 2.5 million dollars Bz. They then gave the new owner a five year contract. The new company would do all government printing and get duty free importation of supplies and equipment for five years. That was how they were going to print the books after they wrote them.

All the printers in the country banded together and sued the Government. It was the first time anyone had sued the Government. The printers voted me to be their media spoke person. The court case took two years. We won. The Chief Justice said, "This type of governing will lead the country to chaos." He would not overturn the contract but he did say that the contract could not be renewed.

In 2007, the Ministry of Education published their free reading and math books for first grade for September 2008. I will be diplomatic when I say. "They were not very good." Schools put BRC's books on their book list and parents bought them. The Government got angry and wrote a law telling teachers and administrators that they would be fired if they used BRC's books. The teachers and administrators ignored the law. No one lost their job.

Their plan completed:

In 2009, the new Government bought BRC's books and gave them away free. They left the same people in power who had written the Government books. One of the persons who wrote the government books told me that they will get BRC's books out of the schools. They began attacking me and the books. They did get their old reading and math books improved a little and got them back in the schools. Many schools still ask parents to purchase BRC's reading and math books. I wrote the books to help the non privileged children learn. Sadly the only privileged children can afford to purchase the books.

Father John McHugh and I have helped people who were fleeing from persecution. There are many stories.

Deacon Cal