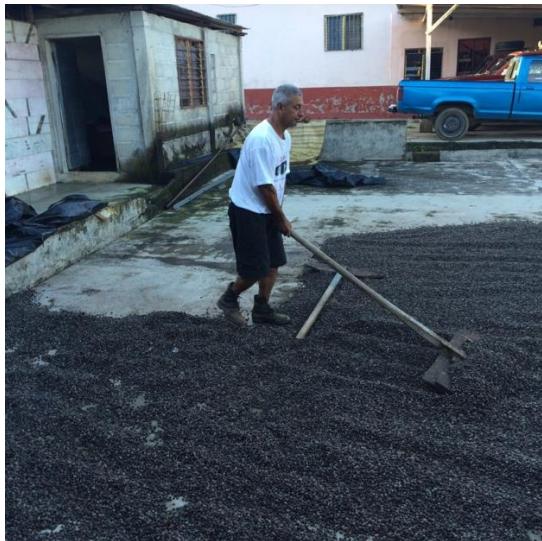




Soria Ballinas, Edmundo's Mother



Idelda, Edmundo's Wife



Edmundo Ballinas Santiago on his patio



With Daughters Madelein and Nilda Concepcion

Meet the Ballinas-Santiago family. During an immersion experience in 2015 arranged by Frontera de Cristo, Mundo's family hosted me for 4 days. In broken Spanish, I asked Edmundo to tell me his story. Here is what I learned from him and the book "Just Coffee: Caffeine with a Conscience" by Mark Adams and Tommy Bassett III.

A dramatic drop in coffee prices and the destructive aftermath of hurricane Mitch triggered a mass migration from the region in Chiapas in the 1990's. The townspeople of Salvador Urbina organized a group of 19 young men, Edmundo included, to find work up north. Each family paid \$1,800 to a coyote to lead them on a 3,000 mile trip to Atlanta, Georgia. There Edmundo lived and worked on a Golf course. He was so miserable. He had wanted to become a teacher when he was young but when his dad died he was pulled out of school to help his mother run their parcel of land and process the coffee. On this occasion he left behind his wife and two very young daughters. Finally, he could not take the separation and loneliness any longer. He said his employer had been good to him—bringing him medicine when he was sick and telling him that he would always have a job if he ever returned. I asked Mundo (as he is called) if he could still remember any English. He thought for awhile and then haltingly said "You..are..my..friend."

While Mundo was away, two Americans named Mark Adams (Minister of Frontera de Cristo) and Tommy Bassett (businessman) arrived in Salvador Urbina to present an idea for organizing a coffee cooperative. If the farmers would do all the work, they would find US customers for the coffee. Many of the growers were very skeptical of the scheme because they had been ripped off before. However, 25 growers—Mundo's mother, Soria, included—made the decision to trust Mark after meeting his wife, Miriam who is a Mayan from Chiapas. Soria became one of the original members of Café Justo and still works every day in the processing area. Mundo arrived back home with enough money to build his family a house which is also the processing plant for the harvest. Thanks to the Café Justo cooperative, his family has remained intact and he has become active in both the cooperative and the City government. He is so happy and proud that he could pay the tuition for his older daughter to complete her nursing degree. At the time of my visit he had asked the coop for an advance of \$1500 mandated by the local hospital to give Madeleine a job. Then she will be bringing income into the household, too. Idelda is a great cook and seamstress, able to run the household instead of working on the land. She was sewing the costumes for her younger daughter's Folklorico dance. Together they generously open their homes to the customers and partners of Café'Justo. They have a migration story with a happy ending!