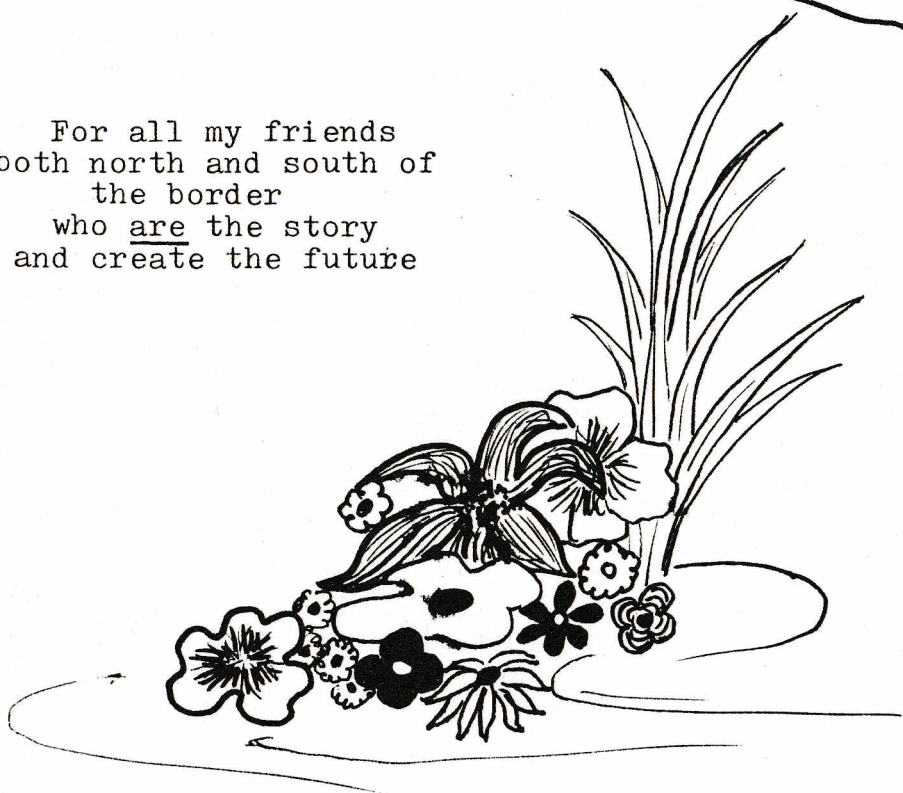


“WHAT MORE CAN WE ASK FOR?”

I've heard the expression "third world" and "first world" for years—but it never meant much to me until I came to work and live in Guatemala. Sometimes I read or hear things that make me feel as if I've dropped off the earth and landed ker plop on some other planet! I don't really know how to talk about it. Each of us seems to live where we are as if that were the whole world and the whole way of life. No wonder there is shock and confusion when people bump up against another culture. I guess I'm sense

By Donnamarie West

For all my friends
both north and south of
the border
who are the story
and create the future



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FROM THE AUTHOR....

It was NEVER in my mind, even for a moment....the thought of writing a book! I lived in Guatemala for almost six years and didn't even keep a diary. For me authors were some lofty and special breed apart from the rest of civilization and surely must have been endowed with special gifts by the great "Mystery of the Universe". I **was** clear that authors had to work hard. Assuming the key to writing is that the author has something to **say**, I don't suppose I ever considered I **did** have anything to say of enough interest for others to read. I guess what turned me around was the absolute deluge of misinformation and images about Latin America, and Guatemala specifically, that I discovered coming out of my native land, the United States.

I can remember back when the sum total of information most Americans had regarding Central America probably could have been printed on the side panel of a cereal box! I know that my own lack of knowledge regarding that part of the world was shocking, but it wasn't just me. One time when I tried to phone friends in Costa Rica, the international operator kept wanting to connect me with Puerto Rico. When I explained Costa Rica was in Central America, she didn't know where that was and tried to insist I must really want **South** America! Most Americans, myself included, pictured all of Latin America as being pretty much like Mexico. The Mexican sombreros, food, music, dance, clothing, and architecture were the images most of us had of all the land "down south of the border".

Long before I went to Guatemala to live and work I began to worry that my nation didn't seem to consider that what was going on in Latin America might affect our own nation's future. Much more attention seemed focused on Europe and Asia, farther away from our borders. Not too many people seemed to consider the possibility that the futures of all the Americas might be intertwined. Today we seem to have done a complete flip, with increasing attention by our government and the news media creating a swell of interest in the general public. I'm delighted that all those folks are finally taking an interest, but the emergence of self-styled experts does scare me a little. Senators and other V.I.P.s make a few days trip down to Guatemala, or some other Latin American country, and return to the States as experts. People spend a few weeks or months or years, and speak out as if they **knew** and understand everything that is going on in a particular country. After almost six years in Guatemala, the only thing I know that I know is that I don't know very much! I have only **too** clear and sickening a grasp of the **complexity** of the situation.

The American society has a rather beautiful, albeit simplistic and idealistic, belief that there is **one right answer**, and we have only to find it. This often makes it a huge struggle to face up to complex situations.

My first glimpse that my nation was stumbling around in their Latin American relations came with a visit to friends in Costa Rica. My dear friends and former neighbors in Evanston, had retired and built a beautiful home in the suburbs of San Jose. After many invitations, I finally made it down there for one of the more fantastic vacation trips of my life. The neighborhood they lived in was known as "millionaire row". As it happened, my

friends had new neighbors move in not long before my arrival. The new neighbors were Russian, to be exact the Russian Embassy. This was the first Russian Embassy in Costa Rica. As my friends explained it to me, the Costa Rican government was in an economic bind, so they had approached the United States government and asked for a guarantee of a certain minimum dollar amount purchase of coffee that year. Instead of asking for a loan or handout, they asked the United States to buy a product from them that would be imported from somewhere in any case. The United States refused, and Costa Rica was desperate. At this point, the Russians stepped forward and offered to buy the coffee in **exchange** for an Embassy in Costa Rica! The Russians got it, and my friends got new neighbors!

Of course, I have no knowledge of all the mitigating circumstances regarding coffee imports and international relations of the time, but I wonder when we decide not to support modest requests, how often we end up paying a much larger price later on, in order to deal with some crisis situation we might have helped to avoid.

It is remarkable how life can suddenly catapult a person off into a whole new direction! A series of seemingly unimportant happenings can pile up, then merge in such a way that they make a difference in life decisions. It would be impossible to count the number of times I have been asked the question, "How could you leave a lovely home in a pretty suburb on the North Shore of Chicago, to go live in a dirt-floored house in Central America?" Naturally that kind of shift in life style does not just happen overnight, or out of one incident or a sudden decision; although it

felt a bit that way at the time.

My life followed a solidly dependable, predictable and ordinary course, up to a point. A computer printout would tell you that I was a very average, upper-middle class, Caucasian, North American female. It would show that I had a very healthy, happy and normal growing-up time, with the usual tension between conforming to the crowd and searching for and being the "real me". Looking back, I can see that for most of my life there was some kind of searching for a life of service in some form; but it was unidentified, a flabby fantasy, unclear and undefined.

I grew up in Evanston, Illinois, went to college, did some fashion modeling, worked in the Delivery Room at Evanston Hospital, worked as an office nurse, got married, had two children, did photographic modeling, worked as an office nurse, got a divorce, worked six years in real estate.

Then all those underlying, secondary themes that weave in and out of any life, converged to send me off in a new direction. What were those "secondary themes"?

My childhood was centered both spiritually and socially around the Congregational Church. Many of my friends during that growing-up stage were from the church youth group. Consciously or unconsciously I soaked up the message built into the whole Christian story...the image of serving and caring for your brother (everyone)...the image of serving without expectation of reward...the image of expressing one's faith through quiet action. My grandfather was a Congregational minister, and my parents were deeply involved in the life of the church. It was at the core of me. During the early part of my adult life, my service

activities were focused in the church, but as I became more aware of critical community needs, my service work moved out into the more secular and ecumenical.

The event of massive demonstration with the Open Housing marches in Evanston during the early 1960's marked my first step out into the world to back up and speak out for my convictions. Later, I went to work as a volunteer teacher three days a week in an all black Child Care Center with the stipulation that my three year-old daughter could participate in the program. That equally fulfilled my desire to serve and my personal desire to have my kids grow up with some idea of the real world, with its infinite variety of people. The Center's facilities were in the basement of an old wood church, a real firetrap! One thing always seems to lead to another. Later when I accepted a position on the Board of Directors, I got caught up in the search for decent facilities in an area that would encourage integration. This was followed by fund raising and the renovation of an old mansion that was to become the new school.

Over the years I became increasingly aware that I wanted to do something more with my life than participate in the eternal struggle to keep ahead of the bills and acquire more "stuff". After my divorce I realized that once my children were "launched" I had total freedom to decide what to do with my life. I gradually began to gather information about the Peace Corps and similar types of vocational opportunities.

As it happened, my first step on the road to Guatemala began with a casual telephone conversation. A friend invited me to see slides of a Human Development Project in India

and to hear about similar Projects the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) had started around the world. My answer was even more casual than the invitation, "Well, maybe I'll stop by after my shopping, if I am not too tired and it's not too late." It was not what you would label a wildly enthusiastic response. Well I went, and my imagination was set afire.

My admiration for the Peace Corps was considerable, and while the work of the ICA was somewhat similar to that of the Peace Corps, there were some distinct differences. The ICA was not connected to any government, religion or other organization. Programs were the responsibility of local leadership and allowed for quick shifts.

Peace Corps workers are sent out to their locations singly, or by couples, as a general rule. ICA sets up an international team of people who live and work together at a particular Project. An attempt is made to have at least half the team be from the host nation and the other half be a mix of nations, races, religious backgrounds, ages, and skills. This provides flexibility in programs, better interaction with the community, and a network of moral support on site when the going gets rough. Just as important it creates support systems that allow the team to operate out of a philosophy that centers around the concept of comprehensive development. Comprehensive development simply means working in all arenas at once.

A major difference between the Peace Corps and ICA operations is that usually the Peace Corps sends in a person, or persons, who has special expertise to set up a focused program. That might be anything from bee raising to a health clinic. The Peace Corps worker might help locals set up the program, do training

and/or supervise the project. The ICA believes it is necessary to work on education, pure drinking water, better agriculture, and the sanitation system in order to have ongoing health improvement. They believe each arena is interrelated. Consequently, while they focus on obtaining electricity for a village as top priority, they will simultaneously start a preschool, an adult literacy program, a farmers' cooperative and some small industries!

ICA sees itself acting as a catalytic agent, a trainer, and a "connector", helping people find and connect up with the existing services available to them. This is no small thing in the case of poor, uneducated people, who usually have no idea of the services available to them or how to go after them.

As I understood it that first night, at the very foundation of ICA philosophy was the insight of "bottom-up" development. "Top-down" development of communities simply had not worked. All the governments and agencies had begun to find this out. Just throwing money and experts at people in an effort to improve the quality of life had not worked. ICA achieved amazing success where they went in and encouraged local people to articulate their hopes and dreams for themselves, their children, and their community. Once the local people could state **their** vision for a better future, they could be aided in creating a plan to make it happen. And once they created their own plan, they were willing to put themselves on the line to work for it because it was **their** plan, not someone else's!

When I asked how ICA selected each project site, they explained there were three key factors for making that decision: size, accessibility and need. A population between 500 and 1000 was considered ideal. Accessibility to a major city and an

international airport was always critical, for what use is a demonstration if no one can get out to see it? How can you expect to get people from business, government and churches involved in the work if it takes them three days by mule to get there? The factor of need had to do with poverty and hopelessness, but also with a situation where other groups were not already working. Thus, help was given to the communities that were without assistance, those with greater need.

The slides I saw that night were of one village in India which had been a starting point for work in over two hundred villages within two years. I found that plenty exciting! I felt I wanted to participate in that kind of challenge.

Still, I had a block in my mind as to how it would be possible for me to manage it financially. ICA was an organization of volunteers. Support for the Human Development Projects and other programs came from individual donations, churches, businesses, and grants. Some staff members worked in their professions in order to support the whole group in a modest way. They earned money for feeding and housing all, and each person received a modest stipend for personal needs. Volunteers like myself were required to pay their own way, making it a "double-donation." For me to go to work in a Latin American Project would cost me \$100-\$150 per month, plus a round trip airline ticket. My house could be rented furnished to support itself. I had two children in college and I would not be bringing in any salary while off in a Project, so the issue was how I could cover the monthly cost and buy plane tickets. There were no other real issues in terms of my responsibilities.

Then came my real moment of truth! My longtime friends, who had hosted the slide

show, removed all my excuses about finances. They said to me, "We would like to be able to go work in a Project ourselves but cannot do so at this time in our lives. We have some small savings, and we are willing to pay your transportation and expenses for the year if you will go on our behalf!" This was a real address to the seriousness of my professed desire to serve my fellow humans with an all-out commitment. I had been doing volunteer work in a modest way where I lived. Now I could choose to work in a broader way outside of it.

My gut response was a strong "yes", but I am not without a practical side to my nature. I am clear that what seems appealing from afar, just might turn out differently when I am really in the situation. Just who were these people I would be living and working with in a village? How did I know they weren't religious fanatics, or self-seeking autocrats? I had learned a little about the ICA philosophy of development, and I knew they were working in thirty or forty countries, and they had a major service center in Chicago. At least that made it possible to have some exploratory conversation with the staff.

In that conversation, I found that I had the opportunity to choose from four new Projects starting in Latin America over the coming few months. The most interesting to me in terms of place and starting time was in Guatemala in the village of Conacaste. Like each of the other Projects, Conacaste would begin with what ICA called a "Consult". A Consult is a two-week event during which volunteers from all over the world come at their own expense to work with the community residents to identify and articulate their hopes and dreams for themselves, their children and their community. Next in the process, they

identify the contradictions, or the roadblocks, the reason their dreams haven't already been realized. Once they have completed those two steps, they create a four-year plan of action to make the dreams come true! The plan includes actual assignments of villagers and staff for specific jobs on a day-by-day, month-by-month schedule.

The volunteers at the Consults are teachers, doctors, engineers, homemakers, farmers, and business people. They work side by side with people from the community, researching the situation, exchanging information and ideas, making field trips, and talking with various "experts". Villagers and consultants alike are each assigned to a team with a special arena, i.e., business, agriculture, health, education, or housing. Finally, the local people must design their own future for themselves. The volunteers simply provide information, expertise as needed, and what might be termed "you can do it" moral support. ICA, with their methods for participatory planning, provided the format and leadership as well as practical implementation for the Consult. The ICA role is to provide catalysts and trainers.

The participatory methods they use are actually just less sophisticated versions of those used when working with major corporations. International businesses hire ICA as consultants and facilitators for their participatory planning. This in turn provides self-support for the ICA staff so they can do a myriad of programs, including a variety of community development programs, both urban and rural.

By their own description, "ICA is an international, voluntary, not-for-profit organization, working in research, training, and demonstration projects, with particular

concern for the human factor in world development." Of the volunteers who have made a lifetime commitment to build a better world, some have remained to work in their own communities, while others serve elsewhere. They come from all nations, ages, races, religious backgrounds, etc. In each location where the ICA works, an attempt is made to have an international mix. That mode has had highly effective results in Third World work. I saw for myself, in Guatemala, the effect on villagers when they are able to discuss problems and solutions in common with people from villages in Japan, the Philippines, the United States and India. It is a powerful thing for people to communicate at the most basic level of their lives.

My friends had offered me an opportunity I couldn't resist, to try out the life I had been yearning for. Still cautious, I decided to attend the two-week Consult and stay an extra week to get acquainted with the resident staff and the real, everyday conditions of living in a poor village, in a poverty life style. After three weeks I planned to return to Evanston, either to stay or rent my house furnished and arrange the care of my real estate clients so I could go back to Guatemala.

Geographically speaking, my new direction was Guatemala; "life-style speaking," suffice it to say that some of my family and friends thought I had lost my mind. By the time I returned from the Consult in Conacaste I had no doubts. I had "fallen in love" with Guatemala, the people, the place and the work. My decision was clear. I arranged my affairs in the United States and set off for a year in Guatemala. I was to join hands with staff from Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala, Canada, the United States and the Philippines in a task and challenge beyond my wildest imagining.

With a lot of help from my friends I eventually sorted out, stuffed in, and squeezed shut my suitcases, finally packed and ready to go. Little did I guess when I was saying my goodbyes, what I was getting into--the change that would come into my life. For one thing, after almost ten years of being single, I was destined to have only a couple of more years before taking the step into marriage. For another, I would discover the richness of a whole "other" culture. And I was to come to understand how critical the future of Latin America is to my own nation, and feel compelled to write a book!

So what is this book about? This book is **not about** a lot of things. It is not about me. It is a "journal of experiences," not in the first instance an autobiography. It is a way of letting the reader view Guatemala through a particular set of eyeglasses. It is not a tourist guidebook. It is not a discussion of politics, international relations, religion, or secular morality, although to a degree it includes all those things. To omit totally my experience of the political struggles and violence would be irresponsible and give a distorted view of the nation. I hope some of my descriptions and stories will clarify and provide some response to what I see as distortions in the press and "grapevine".

Primarily, I want to share the richness of a particular culture, with all of its beauty and ugliness, fun and work, wealth and poverty, joy and sadness. I hope others can share my amusement in the contrasts, conflicts, and weird situations that arise when cultures mix. For me the greatest fun in my work comes out of working with such a wild variety of people. I

make no claims to be an expert on anything, least of all, Guatemala! I only relate some of my adventures, experiences and observations, good and bad. When I express a personal viewpoint, it is just that, nothing more.

So I went off to Guatemala! To do what? Was I just a "Don Quixote, tilting with windmills"? I'll tell you about it, and you can decide.

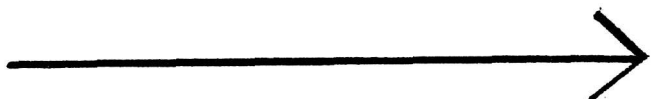
June 1978

Donnamarie,

Here are directions for you to get to Conacaste when you get to Guatemala. They will try to have someone meet you, but if no one is at the airport you can phone the house of Consuelo Deleon in Guatemala City (49115). It is possible no one there will speak English. If that is the case just take the Sanaratecas bus from between 18 Calle and 19 Calle and ride it about 50 km. to the Shell gas station out on the Atlantic Hwy. You can wait there until some of our people come by who are driving the 3 km. to the village. Have a good time at the Consult.

Prisilla Wilson

Go to a gas station!!! Maybe no one there to meet me? Dear Lord, what have I gotten myself into?



1 SO, THIS IS THE "LAND OF ETERNAL SPRING"

Chicago...Miami...Guatemala City! In 1978, I went to the "Land of Eternal Spring", as Guatemalans refer to their nation. Even before I had landed, I was "wowed" by the sight of volcanos, jungles, desert, lakes, mountains and a runway that seemed suddenly to be **there** in front of us on a mountain top, giving the impression that it came up to meet us rather than the other way around! The city sits on a series of lopped-off mountain tops connected by bridges suspended over incredibly deep ravines and valleys.

There is a special magic when you enter a new country for the first time; your senses are assaulted by all the sights, smells and sounds indigenous to the place. The very dust has a different smell in each country. The airport tells you a lot about the country before you have even collected all your luggage. The way you are greeted and moved through customs affects your attitudes about the nation before you get out the door.

Many of the world's airports are architecturally uninteresting, box-like with a variety of elongated appendages tacked on. They most often seem designed strictly for function with minimal esthetic value, and even the functional aspect doesn't always work. The Guatemalan airport was a pleasant surprise. It is built on four levels and simultaneously incorporates severe modern design in concrete and glass with the ancient Mayan forms. What might come off as very severe and "cold" has been softened on the outside by sloping green lawns often with horses or cattle grazing, something you are not likely to see at O'Hare

or LaGuardia. On the inside are huge, lush plants and carved Mayan stone stellae. The mid-level is chock-full of wall-less shops of clothing and folk art that form colorful splashes of activity. On the top level is a restaurant and bar where the waiters are dressed in typical Indian garb, complete with knee britches and sashes, and the tables are covered with beautiful hand woven cloths.

I happened to arrive on a plane with four other people on their way to the Conacaste Consult. As we left the plane, we passed between two bars offering free samples of national products: one of coffee and the other of rum. One of our group who had previously visited Guatemala grabbed me by the arm and steered me over to sample the rum, a pleasant enough way to wait for the luggage to "catch up."

From there we walked down to the lower level and moved relatively quickly through the visa process and into the customs area. Another surprise awaited me! There was a marimba band playing the happiest music I have ever heard. The musicians were all dressed in brightly colored Indian clothing with a predominance of red and black in the designs and elaborate headdresses on their heads. From above us came the shouts of greeting and laughter of hundreds of people who were hanging over the edge of a giant horseshoe shaped balcony. It was as if I had dropped into a carnival on Saturday night. The air was charged with such fun and excitement that I was almost ready to burst with it! It's a lot less painful to drag yourself through luggage collection and inspection with a spot of rum, happy music, and a jolly crowd of people.

We were found by our "greeter" and guided to a borrowed VW micro-bus. He explained that we had to pick up a repaired tire, 80 bed

sheets loaned from the Camino Real Hotel and the man who would drive us out to the village.

We hadn't driven far before I figured out that the "rules of the road" as I knew them didn't have much application in Guatemala City. Stop signs seemed to encourage a "slide-through and drive-by-horn" dynamic. A certain degree of aggressiveness appeared mandatory if one was to move at all, and it was clear that pedestrians did not have the right of way!

Driving matters quickly became insignificant as we moved down broad boulevards with wide grassy parkways running down the middle. They were filled with giant trees and an occasional large sculpture. The buildings lining the outer edges of the boulevard were often a dazzling white. Some were predominantly glass; one was a gigantic mirror reflecting clouds and trees. Flowers were everywhere: on the ground and on the shrubs, in pots and in trees, dripping from terraces on the side of buildings and being sold at sidewalk stands...a kaleidoscope of color!

But if the colors of plant life were astonishing, the colors on the people were more so! All the colors from nature showed up in the infinite variety and combinations of patterns in the woven clothes of the Indians. As I was to learn later, each village has its particular designs and styles. Centuries ago the Spanish conquerors assigned each part of the country to create its own design so that they could be quickly and easily identified by their "masters". The Indians created their own designs and color combinations. They wove their own fabric and sewed it into preferred styles which became an ingrained symbol of their particular community. Over all these hundreds of years the clothing has been preserved as a proud part of the heritage of the people. The majority of Indians wear their

special clothes with great pride and dignity to this day. I believe that Guatemala is the only place in Latin America where you will see such a beautiful array of indigenous clothing on the streets every day.

Of course the non-Indians or "Ladinos" as they are called in Guatemala wear western style garb. The upper class Ladinos are so modern and elegant as to be indistinguishable from their European or North American counterparts.

Suddenly, as we moved out into a traffic circle and around a lovely multitiered fountain, my eyes were caught by an incredible sight. From the ground up my eyes slid from stone walls and steps to grass terraces stacked up over and over until there, at the very top, my eyes feasted on a magnificent blue and white soaring sculpture of a building. Actually, it looked more like a giant bird or maybe a ship or a spacecraft. It was beautifully integrated into the form of the hill and what looked to be ancient ruins. I was informed that it was the National Theatre, a performing arts complex consisting of a small theatre, a gigantic auditorium and an outdoor theatre set amidst many fountains and gardens.

From the theatre area we moved into more narrow and crowded streets. The driver described it as the old downtown area and still very much the heart of the city. We were on one-way streets with sidewalk vendors pressed up close to the curbs. They were so close that it would have been possible for me to reach out the car window and snatch up a tube of toothpaste or jewelry or panty hose.

Entire Indian families sat on the sidewalks in places surrounded by piles of gorgeous woven hangings and clothing. Giant basket trays held little green parrots that pranced around and cocked their heads to look the folks over. I spotted one young man walking five baby goats

on leashes. The carnival atmosphere of the airport extended into my impression of the city.

"Instant restaurants" seemed to pop up on the sidewalks and in the parks with quickly assembled combinations of boards, crates, benches, large pots and small grills. I never did find out if any kind of license was required by the authorities but I doubt it. There were relatively few beggars on the street. Instead the people are very creative about finding ways to scratch out a living. Police and for that matter the population in general are very tolerant about folks "setting up shop" almost anywhere. They understand that the really poor people have no other way to survive. So people create little "restaurants" or set up carts to sell chewing gum, candy and cigarettes. If someone needs to take water from one of the elegant fountains in a park or traffic circle for washing the dishes in their "restaurant" or washing their hands and face, the police don't bother them. People understand the necessity.

Some people become "car watchers". You almost never park your car in Guatemala City without someone asking to guard it. You pay them whatever you think is right when you return. That might be five centavos or fifty centavos depending on how long you've been gone. They always express gratitude for whatever you give them. It is a worthwhile service as they see to it that no one steals your car or anything in it!

We drove by the Palace with its green stone, polished brass, balconies and leaded windows. It stretched two blocks long across from the great park-filled plaza. At one end of the Plaza was the beautiful Cathedral. At the other end was the National Library. I was overwhelmed by the Plaza. It was love at first

sight of the beautiful fountain, its flower draped gazebos, the big old bandshell and the swirl of human activity.

Finally we moved out of the city crossing a bridge arching very high above a river. To one side there was a cemetery with dazzling white tombs on terraces of lush green grass that climbed up and up the steep mountain side. Such elegant housing for the dead while in front and below hovels for the living poor were made of tin boards and scraps! Of course I knew that Guatemala had poor people and that in every city of the world the poor create their shanty towns or slums. Still it was a shock to see the shacks so near that dazzling cemetery. A couple of years later the government cleaned out those slums and put the poor in really fine, low income housing, only to have more poor come in from the countryside and build up more shacks in the same place!

We wound up and down and around on a two lane mountain highway. Some sections were brand new, others still under construction. Guatemala was still in the process of replacing what had been destroyed by the terrible earthquake of 1976, a disaster that had taken thousands of lives. A bus full of people had been buried when the mountains folded over on them on the very road we were now traversing. Bridges had split apart to drop cars and their contents down into the ravines!

At last we turned on to a dirt road, bumped and jounced, forded a stream, and drove on for three kilometers; and there we were in the village of Conacaste. I couldn't see much because it was dark. There was no electricity in the village, just candles and lanterns. Finally we turned down a lane and pulled up beside a house.

People swarmed around to greet us but it was too dark to really see faces. Voices murmured in both Spanish and English. Someone guided us into a dark room to drop the luggage and ushered us right back out to a table in the yard. I remember eating about three spoonfuls of beans and an equal amount of rice before we were hustled off to a community meeting. I know I stayed near a lady who had a flashlight because it was a starless, moonless night and I kept stumbling on the dirt road. I remember feeling a bit confused or disoriented. Maybe I was slightly nervous, but most of all I had the gut-tensing excitement of beginning a new adventure. A hundred questions rolled around in my mind: Would I be able to contribute anything of value? Would I be able to manage this strange, rough, new life style? What if the villagers didn't like me? Would I **ever** be able to communicate in Spanish?

We met in a room with a cement floor, walls about three feet high and screens above. Candles on the tables and a kerosene lantern gave us light. As new arrivals and the honored guests of the evening we had seats at the tables. People were packed in at least six or seven deep on the outside of the screened walls. It wasn't a long meeting; words of greeting, introductions of the "new" folk and singing a few community songs gave me my first chance to try out my Spanish. We were each asked to give our name and tell a little about ourselves. A very good translator helped us communicate with each other.

Back in my room, I found waiting for me two sets of bunk beds, one straight chair, two candles, a pile of newspapers and two roommates. After a bit of conversation, we began to sort ourselves out. The newspapers were put on the floor as a rug to keep ourselves and our suitcases out of the dirt.

One of the women asked if I would be so kind as to take an upper bunk since they were heavier and would have a harder time climbing up. I was only too happy to oblige as I had the silly notion that I might be more safely removed from the crawly creatures of the night. With candles snuffed I settled down for my first night in Conacaste...it was so dark...so quiet!

anyway dad, I'm sorry the income tax was so complicated this year - should be easy after this since I won't be making any money. I know you and mom think I'm a bit crazy but maybe it is partly your fault since you brought me up so involved in the church. I guess I took it more seriously than any of us realized, and translated it into a different kind of action than any of us expected.

A villager just came in and wants me to look at a sick baby - I sure hope it isn't serious. It's just hell to talk them into going to a hospital & I don't even know if we have a car in the village. Gotta run!

WRITE! Love, Donnamarie

2 WHY AM I DOING THIS CRAZY THING, ANYWAY?

I am often asked why I decided to live my life among the poor, trying to make the rich and poor understand the interconnections that can give us all a better hope for survival. All kinds of people keep asking, "Why are you doing this crazy thing, anyway?"

I answered that question before my experience in Conacaste with a romanticized idealism. The way I answer it today after living in the midst of the pain and poverty and hopelessness is a vastly different response. What happened to me one night in Conacaste decided the course of my future. Actually, it was something of a doubleheader. There was a preliminary event that preceded THE event.

When we began the Human Development Project in Conacaste there was almost no medical care available in the village. One male nurse with limited training was available Monday through Friday during the day. Unfortunately people seem to have most of their medical emergencies at night or on weekends. Just ask any doctor. Much to my horror, the villagers and our own staff regarded me with my limited medical experience as the closest thing they had to a doctor. The nearest clinic with a doctor was seven kilometers away in Sanarate. There was not a vehicle in the village except ours and that was a "sometime thing". It was not unusual for me to be dragged out of bed or away from my work three or four times a week to treat burns, bandage a cut or whatever.

Dealing with medical situations was bad enough, but dealing with the fatalism and apathetic acceptance that went with the serious illnesses was a horror. Over and over again I

would have to convince the patient and family that the critically-ill person might indeed die, but they should at least go to the hospital and try to save the life! We would often waste precious hours in conversation as my anxiety level and anger climbed in direct relationship to the sinking condition of the patient.

I was in the village two or three months before I finally glimpsed the underlying cause for the attitude of the people. Language limitations are one issue and it takes time to figure out the right questions to ask! Gradually we got a glimmer of what was going on in their heads. Many of the villagers felt that the soul was with the body and wasn't going to go to heaven unless the body was buried in its rightful place near home. If a person died in the hospital, the villagers claimed that it would cost around \$100 to pay for an autopsy and a special vehicle to bring the body home. The authorities would not let them wrap the body in a blanket and put it in the back of a friend's pickup truck. People in Conacaste did not have \$100 or even half that so whether that reported cost was accurate or not really was irrelevant.

But in addition to their practical fears, we saw evidence of a strong streak of fatalism in the people. What will be, will be! Many times a very sick adult has said to me something like, "Well, I am not so young anymore, and it is my time, I guess. There is no point in going to the hospital. Since I'm probably going to die, I want to die at home." And then, of course, because they had decided to die, they did! Undoubtedly, many would have died with the finest of medical care, but some would have lived.

Hardest of all to face were the babies that died, usually of dehydration as a result of diarrhea. Babies crawled in the dirt outside or on the dirt floors in their houses where a variety of animals roamed freely. Since babies put their hands and just about anything else into their mouths as their way of learning about the world, it was pretty hard for a baby **not** to get parasites! An additional parasite risk occurred if a mother was not nursing her baby and used unboiled contaminated well water to mix with the formula. Diarrhea would show up as a symptom from most types of parasites. Many of the mothers did not know how to treat diarrhea and would let it go on too long before seeking help.

Standard village treatment for all illness was to wrap the patient tightly in cloths and blankets. This was done even if the temperature outside was 95 degrees and the patient's temperature was 106 degrees! By the time parents sought help for their babies, it was often too late. Babies who had survived their first couple of years of life in the village provided classic examples of survival of the fittest. The project had a big educational job to do.

Late one afternoon I was called to a house to see a sick baby. I was appalled at the condition of the child and the fact that she had been ill for more than 24 hours. The family said she had some kind of seizure the day before and had been partially paralyzed on one side ever since. She had diarrhea and was burning up. They had wrapped her up like a little mummy in rags soaked in pungent herbs and ointments. The poor little thing looked near death and the family had decided it was inevitable. I talked and begged for hours and

finally they agreed we should try to fight for her life by taking her into the Childrens Hospital in Guatemala City.

Even before the opening Consult of the Project, we had visited Dr. Asturias Valenzuela to tell him of our plans to work in Guatemala and had gained his enthusiastic support. He had offered free care for any children of Conacaste brought in by Project staff. He was one of the most prestigious doctors in the country, acting as Director of the Childrens Hospital as well as a consultant with C.A.R.F. He also assured us that in the event of a death there would be no charge for releasing the body.

The trip to Guatemala City was wild and terrifying. The mother sat in the middle of the back seat of our VW double-cab pickup, clutching the baby tightly in her arms. The father sat silent, pressed close beside her with an arm around to clutch them both. I knelt backward on the front seat hanging over the back on the passenger side, watching every moment, ready to snatch the baby for artificial respiration should it be necessary. It was a good thing that George West was driving since he was familiar with the road and to some extent the city. He was Director of the Project and became my husband two years later. The road was not easy to drive as it had only two lanes winding through the mountains and was still under reconstruction from the big earthquake of 1976. We drove on the wrong side of the road and even off the road to get by other vehicles. That meant we were often on the soft shoulder precariously balanced on the edge of the mountain.

Then we came to the police barricades! This was at the beginning of a long section of road under construction, with only one usable lane. There was a 30 to 50 minute wait when it

was closed on our side. We arrived just as they were closing the road to us. We all yelled at the police. A man came over with his flashlight to check us out. We frantically explained that we had an emergency with a sick baby. He flashed his light on the baby and asked, "Is it dead?" It was about all I could do to keep from screaming at him, "No, of course not! If she were dead we wouldn't be in such a hurry to get to the hospital!" After an agonizing moment of discussion among themselves, the police dragged open the barricade, and we went tearing on down the rough, partially finished road. I was a frozen block of sheer terror, half expecting the baby to die at any moment but trying to appear calm and cool for the sake of the parents. To top it all off, I was very nauseated not just from fear and worry and the dizzy ride but from the pungent, acrid odor emanating from the rag wrappings on the baby, an odor that seemed to be getting stronger by the minute.

At the edge of the city, George jumped from the car and dashed in a store to phone the doctor. By the time we got to the hospital, the doctor had already phoned and the staff was ready for us. One of the nurses snatched the baby out of my arms, yelled at me for being so slow to bring her in, and threw the stinking rags from the baby on the floor at my feet. That medical team swung into action, working like demons. They stuck needles into that tiny, limp little body, hooked up the tubes to the bottles and draped the oxygen tent all in three minutes flat, I swear. No child could have had better medical attention. For three days they fought for her life and finally lost the battle. We had been too late. So the small body was brought back to the village for the wake and burial.

It was on the night of the wake that I was called back to the very same house for another emergency. The baby's grandmother was bleeding heavily. She was pregnant for the thirteenth time! In case your image of a grandmother is like mine was, this was no little old grey-haired lady. This lady of thirteen pregnancies was in her early forties at the most. That night, in that house, shall be imprinted on my mind for all of my life. We stumbled down the road and into the main room of the adobe house which had been cleared of what little furniture the family had. One end of the room had been arranged with flowers, palms, candles and statues borrowed from the church. All this surrounded the tiny little girl lying on a cushion in the little white box. She looked like a wax doll all wrapped in white.

In accordance with local custom, the house and back porch were full of people sitting, visiting quietly, drinking coffee, playing card games. Death was clearly accepted as an important part of life, dignified as inevitable and acceptable. There was a minimum of wailing and tears which would come primarily from the most immediate family. All those people would keep the vigil the entire night. As it turned out, so would I.

I paid my respects to the gathering and followed the husband of my "patient" back through the veranda and the leanto kitchen, and into a tiny, single-room shanty of stick and mud construction.

One look at the woman writhing on the bed was enough to make me want to cry out and run. She was bleeding heavily and was clearly in severe pain. Upon questioning her husband, I was told that the doctor had not wanted her to have another baby "because the walls of her womb were weak."

My first statement was that we had to get this woman to a hospital right away. The response from the family was that there was not a vehicle of any kind in the village. Our project car was back in the garage again for repairs. So, we sent a young boy off in the dark on his bicycle to ride the seven kilometers to Sanarate in search of the ambulance. Sometimes the ambulance was there; and if we had luck, the driver might be there also. When the driver was sick or on vacation, no one replaced him. This made for what might charitably be called "less than adequate service". For sure, we wouldn't have any information regarding the ambulance for at least one and one-half hours.

There was so little I could do. But in an effort to comfort the patient, the family and myself, I got busy. I sent the girls off to find lots of rags and get basins of water, checked her pulse and respiration which was ragged and cleaned the lady up. I started kneading her uterus in an effort to slow down the bleeding, praying she would not rupture. The whole scene had a dreamlike quality to it. I had the sensation of standing outside myself and viewing it all, almost as a disinterested party. My patient became more calm. I was able to slow the bleeding but I didn't dare stop massaging the uterus. We had a long night ahead of us.

After a couple of hours the boy returned from Sanarate to say a pickup truck would come at six or six-thirty in the morning!

So I had the whole night before me, sitting by that bed alternating hands to keep the massage going. What a bed it was! A crude frame of branches was bound together by a lattice of cord with a piece of burlap on top in lieu of a mattress. There were two such "beds", the wooden stool I was sitting on

between them, some boards and bricks that formed a shelf and an ancient dresser with one drawer missing crammed in between the beds. I had to squeeze by it to get to the bed. Those few things filled the space completely.

The young bereaved mother had come in to lie on the second bed, sobbing quietly. Most of the time it was just the three of us, although family members checked in from time to time. Now and again, someone would bring me a cup of coffee, kicking the dogs and pigs that followed out the door. And at one point, I almost jumped out of my skin when a rooster secretly ensconced under the bed began a great crowing. Contrary to popular belief, roosters do not crow only at dawn.

The air was full of greasy smoke from the lamp, a rather clever device made from a tin can full of kerosene with a slit in the top for a rag wick. In addition, we had a few small candles. Sitting there in the smoky, flickering light, staring at walls woven of sticks and daubed with mud, I found myself settling into a sort of sad and fatalistic calm not unlike that of the villagers. I began to "internally" understand how such an environment going on and on, year after year, might trap people into a habit of apathetic acceptance of their situation. I was to learn a lot more about that as time went along. I sat in that little mud and stick house and my mind bounced back: back to elegant homes on the North Shore of Chicago, back to shiny tiled and antiseptic operating and delivery rooms in modern hospitals.

All through that very long night, my mind slid around the world of money and power and modern convenience while I sat in the midst of poverty, apathy and almost total lack of hope. I thought of the "distance" between these two worlds on our planet -- not distance in miles,

not distance between differing political or religious philosophies -- rather the distance between those who have access to resources and those who see life as it **really is** for almost 85% of earth's humans who are disinherited. In the midst of my meditation, I had a very clear understanding that I could never return to selling pretty houses or even live in my own. There is nothing wrong with that comfortable life-style. I only wish everyone in the world could experience it! Rather, it was because deep down inside myself there was a screaming mandate to take responsibility for a tiny piece of the world's pain. True enough, one person can't make a huge difference but you have to begin somewhere. I had found a group of people who were ready to focus their whole lives toward building a foundation for a better world even if it **was** one pebble at a time. For my part, the urge to serve in the third world was so strong that I could not have returned to my old way of life and been able to live with myself.

There are many ways to care for the people of this world. I would not have been in Guatemala working with the poor if I hadn't had friends earning regular salaries, living the life-style I had left behind. They paid the cost of keeping me at work in another country and gave me the moral support besides. Other colleagues kept on with their old lives and jobs but used their positions and skills to help with the training or to influence people in governments, churches or the business world. Such people would have lost their influential power if they had run off to work in a village.

Sometimes people comment to those of us who live among the poor that they admire us, as if we were doing something terribly noble. That is to miss the point. It is one thing to live

trapped in a life of poverty which includes a "ground in" state of hopelessness. It is quite another to know you have the freedom to walk away from it anytime you choose! I always knew I was there by choice with a multitude of options. I have some marketable skills, abilities and education, plus the self-assurance to believe I can do something else with my life any time I decide. From my perspective, I was just one of those people who wasn't uncomfortable living in the midst of poverty. Truthfully, it was not a particular struggle for me. It isn't that I never missed my comforts and luxuries. It is simply that I was able to do without them for large chunks of time. I think my history as a tent camper may have helped. When thinking of going to live in a place for at least a year without electricity or running water, I imagined it as one long camping trip; and I had always loved camping. Nevertheless, I surprised even myself at how happily I could get along without lots of the things I had once considered imperative.

And by the way, I **guess** you could say we "won" that night. At least the lady lived through her spontaneous abortion. The next year she had a healthy baby. I'm not sure how I felt about that, but the child was loved by his family, and by that time conditions were improving in Conacaste. The child had a better chance for a decent life than his parents had.

Step by step, I had been moving through my life with a gradually increasing awareness of the struggle and pain the majority of humans endure to survive. Step by step, I had moved from an intellectual understanding to an emotional concept. Enduring that night with an aborting grandmother, dead baby, and mourning parents moved me into another level of comprehension. There was a moment when I took the pain and struggle into myself and truly

understood! There was no turning back from that moment.

If I have the chance to add even "pebbles" toward creating a better foundation for the future, for that family and all the others, why not? I know some of my "pebbles" will be weak and crumble, and others may just roll away, but a few will stick and work. Everyone can't sit and wait for someone else to do it.

So, I guess that about says "why I am doing this crazy thing, anyway."

June 20, 1978

Dear Dottie,

Sorry to bother you like this, especially when you just got me off your hands, but I need to ask a special favor. Could you please go down in the crawl space and look in that really big square box (I think the labels are for some kind of soap) for my Spanish book. If you could just mail it to me as fast as possible, I would be very grateful. I think it is a better book for me than what I have found here----easier---more basic. Thanks again for everything. Write soon.

Love,

Donnamarie

3 HABLA ESPANOL?....."NOT REALLY!"

I went to Guatemala with no Spanish-speaking ability. You don't need to be terribly brilliant to figure out that I got myself into linguistic trouble very soon. The few words of Spanish that I managed to recall from a two-year nearly fatal experience in high school were something less than adequate for communication. Nevertheless, being an eternal optimist, I tried. I figured that if I could supplement my pitiful little vocabulary with plenty of hand motions and smiles, I might fake my way. **Understanding** what was being said to me was another ball game.

My first total immersion in the Spanish language was at the Consult in Conacaste. For all of our serious work we had skilled translators, but during social events and just 'getting around' we each had to manage as best we could. Most of my friendly new neighbors had little or no education and had managed to reach adulthood without the benefit of elocution lessons. In addition to somewhat casual speech patterns, a great percentage of the population were hampered by a lack of front teeth since proper nutrition and dental care were unfamiliar commodities in the village. This caused many villagers to have a lisp which added to my difficulties. None of these explanations offer an excuse for my linguistic inadequacies. They only describe my situation.

Oh, how true it is, that a little knowledge can be dangerous! I had a few words I "knew" I knew, or so I thought. I answered certain routine questions with great assurance. When people asked me how I was, I could say "bien,

bien" as well as the next person. But I was puzzled at the frequency of one question. People kept asking me if I was tired. Women asked me sometimes and men almost always. So I began to think maybe they just used it as a casual greeting, the way Americans say "How are you?". They all seemed to expect a definite answer, so I gave them one, and tried to vary it a little. They seemed to be puzzled by my answers and sometimes downright shocked. I couldn't imagine why they reacted this way until the day a bilingual friend was witness to a conversation and burst out laughing. It seems I had mixed up two similar words. The question was not if I was tired but was I **married**? I had been giving answers like, "A little bit" or "Yesterday I was, but not today" or "Not really, do I look it?" No wonder they looked at me askance! Talk about feeling foolish!

It is always comforting somehow to know you aren't the only person to make such crazy mistakes. A friend of mine who was working for the ICA in Mexico topped my goof considerably, I think. He was a Roman Catholic priest, a man of responsibility, who took his language study seriously and was beginning to feel a little bit of confidence by the time he was invited to dinner at a convent in Mexico City. He felt he might be able to manage simple conversation. Unfortunately, weather and transportation problems conspired to make him late for dinner, and by the time he arrived on the doorstep, he was a bit rattled. When the nun opened the door, he burst into profuse apologies, stating how terribly embarrassed he was and how sorry. To his consternation, the nun burst into laughter. She laughed and laughed and finally gasped that 'she didn't think so'. When she got control of herself, she explained

that he had said he was **pregnant** and was so sorry.

As for my embarrassment over my linguistic goof, I decided that 'do it yourself' Spanish was less than adequate. It seemed like it might be a good idea to take some lessons or at least get a book and study!

Dear Louisa + David, June 27, 1978
Haven't time for more than a brief note. Just wanted you to know:

1. I got there safe + sound.
2. ICA staff did meet me at the airport.
3. The Consult is great!
4. I like Guatemala, it is gorgeous!
5. I like the ICA folks all right, tho I did get a little "ticked" at the crazies who insisted I had to change houses + roommates in the middle of the night in the rain! I'll tell you more about that when I've more time. Gotta run! I'll write as soon as I can.

Love,
Nonnamarie

4. MOVING NIGHT AND SHINY BLACK BOXES

When I first arrived for the Consult, I was assigned to a twelve foot by twelve foot room in a cement block house with a dirt floor. My two roommates were old hands at this Consult routine, which I considered helpful. We had two bunk beds but no other furniture, which I considered **unhelpful**! It was explained to me how lucky we were to have those bunk beds, mattresses and pillows on loan from the Guatemalan Army. Just two days before the Consult the Major who had promised the loan of the beds had been assassinated, leaving some doubt in the minds of ICA staff as to whether they would actually be delivered. Apparently the wheels of progress had already begun grinding and couldn't be stopped, to our good fortune.

An army truck rolled in on the appointed day dropping metal bunk beds in sections at several locations in the village. Staff and villagers then hauled the sections into the assigned houses and put them together. It was like playing with an erector set. In short order, the mountain of mattresses and pillows topped off the finished products.

I was so caught up in the excitement and activity of the Consult and so freshly arrived from my secure and insular life in the U.S. that I didn't even think to ask questions about the assassination. I don't believe it was a "real happening" to me! You know how usual it is for most people to glance at a horrible headline, say "Tsk, tsk" and toss the paper out of hand and mind in one motion! I know that I didn't even pause to make a connection in my mind between that incident and the possibility

of danger to those of us who were coming to live in Conacaste.

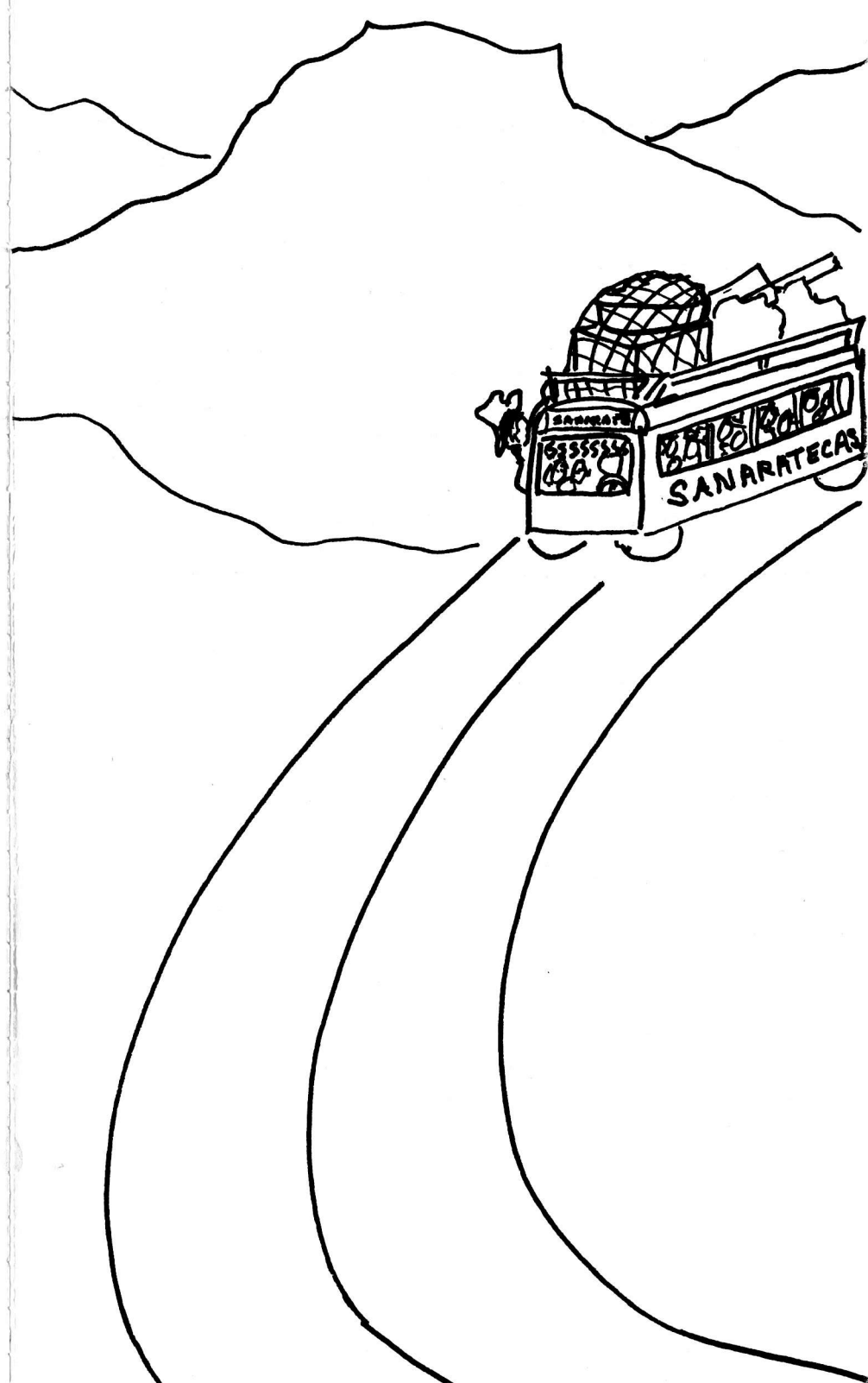
In the midst of the consult another woman and I were moved into a new house in the village. Normally such a move would not be considered a big deal. We each had only a couple of suitcases, and the bunk beds were already in place in the house. The contradiction arose from the fact that everyone had been so busy and involved in work all day that no one had thought to tell us we had to move until after dark. Conacaste has no electricity and there was no moon that night. For the benefit of city dwellers, when you are way out in the country with no electricity or moon or stars, it is **BLACK**. Enriching the challenge of moving in the dark on foot down steep, pot-holed roads with two suitcases, our purses and a water jug, it began to rain hard. Neither one of us felt able to carry a flashlight in our mouths, so it was all strictly by feel. It took us about half an hour to traverse the equivalent of three city blocks, but we made it after much slipping, sliding, staggering, cursing and giggling hysterics.

Home at last! Having both consumed plenty of liquids during the hot day, we needed to find the outhouse. Before the Consult began, it had been determined that a necessary task was to construct "facilities" for the forty or so extra people who would descend on the town. Therefore teams had been sent forth to dig deep holes. A large wooden box with a hole in the center was set over each of these holes. Next, four poles were stuck in the ground and black plastic was wrapped around these four posts creating shiny black boxes without roofs. Roofs were considered an unnecessary luxury, as the rainy season hadn't really begun yet. In case of rain, you could be quick or be wet!

These roofless boxes were generously scattered among the adobe, stick and cement houses, creating an interesting new ambience to the community.

On that first night in our new home we found the major flaw in the design of these "facilities." They were BLACK. We couldn't find ours. When we found it, after being scared half to death by a good-sized pig who obviously considered that we were trespassing on her turf, we found a second flaw. We couldn't find the entrance. We slid around in the mud, groping our way round and round a large shiny black box of plastic. We were desperate but laughing so hard, tears were streaming down our faces. **Finally** we found a slit in the corner we could lift back in order to enter the inner sanctum.

Why didn't we just squat there in the dark, you might ask? Well, it never even occurred to us. After all, we were still "refined gringo ladies."



5 TAKE THE BUS?

Many people are familiar with the word-association game psychologists and psychiatrists use to test their patients. If I shout the word "bus," what is your immediate, instinctive response? Mine would not be a solitary word, but rather "ball fringe and music". That would not have been my response before Guatemala. I would have shouted **CAR**. In fact, before I came to Guatemala, all other forms of transportation would have to be exhausted before I would consider getting on a bus. I hated buses. When I was in college I grumbled and groused something fierce if I had to make the 25-minute trip into the city on the bus. And **that** bus was clean and had comfortable lounge seats.

When I was living in Evanston, I was like most other suburbanites. I jumped in my car for any errand further than the corner. Buses were for when your car was in the garage and all your friends were unable to pick you up. Besides the buses didn't run often enough or go all the places one needed to go!

If anyone had suggested that I would one day be packed into Latin American buses with people, pigs and chickens, I would have considered then totally mad! In fact, when I came to Guatemala, all of my preconceived notions regarding transportation were thrown into reverse gear. Much to my own amazement, I **enjoyed** riding the buses and found it fun. After a few experiences in the back of a pickup truck, the buses seemed luxurious. Everything is **indeed** relative. Certainly there is no better way to get close to the local people. (Pun intended!)

For those of you who have been denied the experience, bus-riding in Guatemala bears no resemblance to strap-hanging in Chicago or New York. Riding the bus is a series of surprises. In addition, you may find yourself at any moment, hanging over the edge of the eternal abyss.

The city buses are less of an adventure than the ones that tear along the mountain highways, but they have their own unique qualities. Guatemala City has an incredible bus system. I'm convinced that if anyone could ever figure out the entire spider-web network of bus lines, it would be possible to travel anywhere in the city and never walk more than a block. There are no transfers. It was five cents a ride for years, but is now all the way up to a ripping ten cents. There are also micro-bus types which operate more like a collective taxi and are usually faster. They cost a whopping fifteen cents. They resemble traveling sardine tins offering a special challenge to large people. Stuffing yourself in and crawling back out requires great stamina and determination. It is impossible for anyone over 5'2" tall to stand upright. Actually, sardines are better off, as they are neatly stacked in a horizontal position.

Bus drivers often have a helper, which is a nice service for the passenger since they not only collect the money but help you on and off the bus. Other passengers are often helpful also. In New York, if someone snatched your bundles and/or your baby out of your arms on a bus, you would probably yell for the police. In Guatemala City, it is just that a friendly person who has a seat is helping you "take a load off".

On the negative side, I must admit that most of the city buses are not only **not** luxurious, but many of them are traveling

disasters held together by rope and baling wire. They rattle, wheeze, screech and roar through the city. And when the driver leans on the horn, I recommend you move out of the way fast, as he has nothing to lose but a little more paint, and unless you are behind the wheel of a semi, he "out-bigs" you!

Bus drivers seem to have nerves of steel and great faith either in God or in their battered equipment - I'm not sure which. They seem able to "keep their cool" under incredible conditions. I got on a bus one day that appeared to be on fire! The engine, beside the driver on the floor, was pouring out black, greasy smoke. Since neither the driver or the passengers seemed unduly concerned, I tossed the money in the general direction of the driver because I could barely see him and hurried back to find a seat handy to the rear exit, just in case things got too hot.

The REAL fun and adventure comes when you take the bus out into the countryside. In the first place, although city drivers decorate their buses, the country drivers usually get more wildly creative. The combination of "artifacts" are sometimes mind-boggling. Ball fringe, bells, baby shoes, Christmas tinsel, the crucifix, Playboy centerfolds, family portraits and messages written in English and Spanish. The English messages may be left over from the place in the United States from which the bus came. The messages are a mixture of prayers, political propaganda, ads and warnings that the bus drivers are not responsible for your forgotten packages. While city buses **sometimes** have radio music, the inter-city buses **always** do! Most often it is the happy, lively music of the marimba.

It takes a while to "learn the ropes". For the first three years, I used to go to the terminal to catch the bus to Conacaste. This

terminal is not a building. It is a couple of blocks where the buses all gather in order to compete for your patronage and load up. The trouble was that all the drivers would say they were leaving right away NOW, so I would get on, pay my money, and we would pull out -- maybe an hour later! I finally learned the trick. I would look for a crowded bus that I had to **squeeze** on. Buses left when they couldn't cram anyone or anything else in or on top. Better yet, in the third year I discovered that all the buses going out our highway drove down Eleventh Avenue. It was possible to walk anywhere along that street and flag them down. Generally, they couldn't resist stuffing in just one more person.

I shall never get over my amazement at the number of people that can be packed into one bus. Seats built for two usually held three adults and maybe two or three children. So that means six adults across the bus, EXCEPT there is another surprise. No reason to waste that good space in the aisle. Therefore, a seventh person wedges in the middle of the six. It is to your advantage to be a bit on the "hippy" side, broad in the beam, that is. You are really just sitting on air. More than once the jogging of the bus has shaken me right on through down to the floor. You **need** to be wedged in tightly for safety's sake. It does get sporting when the driver's helper climbs through that solid mass of humanity to check tickets or collect the fare. It doesn't look possible, but it is!!

No space is wasted on a Latin American bus. The top is loaded with enormous baskets, furniture, animals and huge bundles encased in plastic and what appear to be fishing nets. Very long pipes, boards or irrigation tubing may be lying on the floor of the aisle and baskets under the feet are filled with the baby

chicks who are too tiny to survive the wind up on top.

I thought I had seen everything. But there is always another surprise around the corner. Bouncing along one day, half asleep, I became aware of an odd sound. I couldn't identify it or tell where it was coming from. It seemed next to me but there was only a lady with a bundle on her lap. A little later, the "bundle" lifted its head out from under the lady's left breast and gave me a good look. Apparently I passed muster because the duck tucked its head back under and was transformed back into a bundle.

The most exciting show on the bus comes when the bus starts up with the driver's assistant still on top. Generally the minute the young man has dropped the last bundle on the ground, he shouts to get going. The bus takes off with a great jerk and roar as the young acrobat swings off the roof with a flip down the side and in either the open door or the first open window. I kept thinking we'd lose one of these daring young men on a sharp curve sometime, but their luck held.

Lots of buses break down on the highway. For a long time I had the good luck **not** to be on one that broke down. The day of reckoning comes to everyone. You can't beat the odds forever, and I was no exception. I finally got caught twice in one week in breakdowns. The second time was by far the more interesting experience.

We came to a stop with a loud bang. As it was a hot afternoon, everyone piled out quickly to search for a spot of shade and to consult with the driver and each other. The diagnosis shouted from under the bus was not very hopeful. I struck up a conversation with a young couple, and we agreed to pool resources and flag down a truck. It had to be a truck

because my "friends" were bringing home their new dining set on the top of the bus. Guatemalans are always ready to give a cheerful helping hand so it was no problem to haul down the table and six chairs from the bus top. We soon had arrangements made with the driver of a big, almost empty, high, slat-sided, open truck. So for the astounding price of only fifty cents, I found myself seated in a nice conversational group at a plastic and chrome wonder of a dining set as we roared down the highway in the back of a truck.

For the rest of my life, Latin American music, especially marimba music, will act as a catalytic agent. Two or three notes and the image of a bus will pop into my mind. For rising above the roaring muffler, quacking ducks, noisy children, chirping chicks, and shouting driver's helper, there is always the cheerful, jingling music. I LOVE IT!

Dear Donnamarie,

Greetings from all the gang in the office. We enjoyed your note, but we have a lot of questions. No one can really figure out how you could go live that kind of life. Here's our list of ?...try to answer at least some of them. What kind of food do you eat? Where do you cook? Are there lots of bugs? Snakes? What do you do for recreation? Are there any movies? Are there stores? Is it safe to drink the water? Do you have a car? Bus service? How far is it to the city? Are you in danger from the guerrillas? How do you bathe? Are there toilets? Does anyone speak English? How long are you going to stay there? Are you ever afraid? How can you stand such a different life?

Your old desk is waiting for you any time you feel like leading an ordinary life again. We'd love to have you back but hope you are having a great time.

Property is moving pretty well now, but the interest rates keep rising...so who knows about the future.

Take care of yourself and keep in touch.

Kathy

People asked all kinds of questions when they found out I was living in a village. The questions came not only from North Americans but also from Guatemalans who were used to a comfortable life in the city. Some Guatemalans were more nervous about visiting us than the folks from the States.

In Guatemala most of the organizations like ours were working with the Indians. Certain areas were thick with projects of one kind or another. In the state of El Progreso where Conacaste was located hardly anyone was doing anything. It was an area populated mostly by Ladinos rather than Indians. We had been told that this area was less picturesque and more difficult to work with. It was semi-arid and less beautiful than some other sections of Guatemala. It was an area of poverty. In Conacaste there was a greater sense of hopelessness.

In the third year of the Project a man who had done United Nations work all over Guatemala told us that Conacaste was the most difficult community he had ever worked with. He praised us lavishly for our success in getting the people really engaged in the Project. The time came when even surrounding villages exclaimed over the change in Conacaste. With the change it came to be called a "chula comunidad", charming community. Well, part of the ICA strategy in project selection is to take a community that appears to others to be an impossible situation, because if you can succeed in a place like that it is a tremendous sign of victory. People will say, "Wow, if it can be done **there**, it can be done ANYWHERE!"

To even begin to talk about what life was like in the village, you have to start with getting there. First of all, we had the great adventure of squeezing onto a bus for what was often a fairly wild ride. I discovered it was a more relaxed trip if I looked at the scenery out the side windows, and avoided looking out the front. Seeing the driver pass two trucks and a bus on a blind curve might stop the heart!

This trip usually took about an hour and a quarter. The bus stop is at the Shell gasoline station which includes a small restaurant. This was a real blessing because it was possible to fortify oneself with a cold drink before walking the three kilometers to Conacaste or it was a good place to wait if you had managed to arrange for someone to pick you up.

On lucky days the mode of transportation the Project had to offer was a battered, old Volkswagen double-cab pickup truck. This disreputable looking vehicle was a donation from the Dutch Embassy, bless them. At one time it was a decent looking car. That day is gone forever. Now the truck might remind you of something left over from a war or an act of vandalism.

Actually the outside of the truck was battered, but the inside was worse. That wasn't important because it ran! At least it ran some of the time. By the time I left the project the pickup had one windshield wiper that worked on the driver's side where it was important. Some of the door handles remained. It didn't really matter about the inside one on the driver's side because you could just reach outside to open the door, since the window wouldn't go up anyway. The glove compartment had fallen in our laps or to the floor so many times that we threw it away. The little knob

was missing on the front, right door window handle, so it was rather painful to open or close. Also, you had to be careful when opening the back door because the leather hinge-strap kept breaking and the door would fall open, banging into the front door or anyone who happened to be standing there. What I minded the most were the broken springs that poked up through the seats. You had to sit **carefully**. We cleaned the car regularly for a while, but it was useless. With just one three kilometer trip to the highway it was the same old dust bin.

We really **tried** to take care of the truck and it stayed decent looking and running well for a short time. It is hard on any car to have a lot of different drivers. And a road full of ruts, holes and stones plus the necessity of fording a rocky stream didn't help. We concentrated on keeping the truck safe. We repaired the brakes the minute they seemed "iffy" because we respected the mountainous terrain and our own hides.

We were very stern about not carrying more than 12 passengers. We knew that overloading was the worst thing for it so we really tried to be careful. But tell me, how can you drive by a woman trudging up a steep road with a huge, heavy basket on her head, a bundle tied on her back, a baby in her arms and two children tugging at her skirt...in 90 degree heat?! So sometimes we wound up with a few extra people. Hauling loads of sand or gravel or the donated bags of cement didn't help to keep the truck in tiptop shape either.

It is really pleasant to **walk** in from the highway to Conacaste if you are in good health, have reasonably sturdy leg muscles and it isn't high noon on a hot day. During the first year of the Project we all walked in and out a lot.

The tiny village of Monte Grande is right by the highway on the road in. So everyone got checked over as they came and went on the only road. The worst part of the road is in Monte Grande. It is a short stretch but rough, especially one steep, rocky, curving slope down to a small stream. The stream could change from drybed to too much water overnight. It was a favorite waterhole for passing cattle and horses during the raining season. The Monte Grande "hole-in-the-ground" which was the community well was right beside the road and stream. In truck, car, bus or motorcycle everyone would creep down that incline carefully, using breaks, gears and feet if necessary...scary! Going up was about as bad. A skilled motorcyclist might ask his passenger to get off and walk up that section to be on the safe side, especially when it was slippery with mud.

We had an old green Chevie someone had left with us after the Consult. It was too dangerous to take out on the highway but we sometimes used it to get out to the bus, until it died altogether. It was really terrifying to go up the incline in that car after a rain. It would slip and slide with the rear end swishing like a street-walker. Sometimes we would get about two-thirds of the way up and we'd start sliding back down. No one wanted to get behind that car to push. You could end up **under** it! A running start was the only hope.

Going to Conacaste, once you got on the other side of the stream, small trees and shrubs crowded up to the edge of the road. There was a stand of bamboo on the right, and best of all, a giant old Ceba tree with a diameter of at least ten feet. We went up and down around the curves, past fields of beans and corn, palm trees, sugar cane, mango tress, scattered little houses and some incredible

views of the mountains all around from the rises.

Finally there was Conacaste. Conacaste had a very definite entrance. At the side of the road as you enter town is an altar or little house with no front. It was made of cement covered adobe blocks, painted bright aqua and had a sort of ledge across the inside back on which to put flowers to honor the village's name saint, San Miguel Conacaste. For me, the strange thing about this niche is that in a land dripping with flowers nine-tenths of the year, this honoring of the saint is done with **plastic** flowers. I can only speculate that it is a matter of convenience to avoid frequent replacement. At any rate, this "niche" marks the entrance to the village. Before the Consult was over, there was also a "WELCOME TO CONACASTE PROJECT" sign.

The road continued straight ahead through the Plaza, on through town as the main street, passed by the parcelas or farm plots of the Conacaste residents and over the mountain to another community. In town the buildings crowd right up to the edge of the road. Around the Plaza they butt up tight to each other. Land is a very precious commodity so every inch is put to use. The Latin American method of land usage is really very wise. In cities or villages, walls run right along the edge of the sidewalk or street, with a door here and there. Some have windows, some not, hiding surprises. Walls hide pretty houses or slums, garden patios or collections of junk, stores or convents, cars or mule and cart, and heaven only knows what else. They back it all up to the street and turn inward to the pretty and the private.

But they don't waste the space in front. Most places in the United States show off a pretty front lawn and don't use it. In Latin America they hide it and use it! In the village they didn't have water for gardens. Dust was endemic to Conacaste. There were dirt roads, dirt floors in most houses, a bare plaza with bare dirt, no grass anywhere. The dust increased when there was a little wind or a vehicle passed through town. At the same time there were some medium-sized trees thick with green leaves, hedges of solid green and the plant I had always known as "mother-in-law's tongue", growing **five feet** tall! Many of the trees had flowers. Bouganvillea climbed over arbors, houses and just about anywhere it could get a hold. Other than the flatness of the main street and plaza, the ground went up and down all around us. The effect was a certain lushness combined with desert. Months after my arrival, at the very end of the dry season, I was treated to the wierd sight of good-sized trees without a leaf, bare as a bone, except for the brilliant colored flowers popping directly out of the branches here and there, a real "wow" but strange!

I early learned to watch where I stepped, whether on or off the road. Chickens, pigs, turkeys and an occasional goat ran loose everywhere leaving the usual evidence of their presence. Owners must have marked their animals somehow. I never discovered how. They always seemed to recognize their own "walking property". Many people rode horses. Anyone who had a few cows herded them right down the main drag. Mule trains went through loaded with cases of coke and beer held by big nets slung over the sides. The sound of clinking bottles could be heard long before and after they were in sight.

Conacaste had four basic types of houses. There were those of cement block with sheet metal roofs and cement floors for the wealthiest and dirt floors for those a notch down. Then there were the adobe, some with metal roofs and some with tile. These adobes were in the majority as a family could make their own adobe bricks out of the ground at almost no cost. The adobes were my favorite house, especially the ones with tile roofs. They provide the best insulation and were much cooler in the heat than any other kind of building. The classier ones were surfaced on the outside with a coating of cement, then painted. They looked as handsome as could be. Some of the adobes had roofs of palms which were the most picturesque but palms need to be replaced about every third year and tend to attract insects.

Even more picturesque but horrible to live in are the stick houses. These were for the very poorest people. In some an attempt had been made to coat the walls with mud to keep the breezes from whistling through. Folks with a lot of effort could create a fairly solid mud house. But many people didn't get that far, and when they lit their candles or lantern at night, you could see clear through the house. And lastly there was the type of house I privately thought of as the "junk yard special" lived in by the poorest of the poor. These were shacks of cardboard, tin, plastic sheeting, sticks, mud or stones. I always felt sad at the sight of them. Yet when I was inside one, it was amazing how the family might have created a sense of "home".

The insides of the houses varied from being just one room to an L-shape of three rooms plus a veranda and lean-to or separate kitchen. There was no electricity. Three families that

I knew of had a gas refrigerator. Two of them ran stores that sold beer and soft drinks. The third served the local cantina or bar. Stoves were built of adobe something like a barbecue pit waist high of slightly varied designs but all using a wood fire and a broad, heavy metal plate with edges that curve up for the cooking of the tortillas. To say that the kitchens weren't very sanitary is a gross understatement. The chickens, pigs, and half-starved mangy dogs wandered freely through many of them searching for goodies on the earth floor. It does save taking out the garbage, but, oh my! Many of the women kept the animals out by keeping a board nailed across the bottom of the door about six inches high that people could step over.

Other than the stove, a kitchen might have a table and some chairs or boxes to sit on. A fancy kitchen might have a concrete sink that drained out into the yard or street. Many houses just had a pan of water on the table to wash the dishes. Some families had an adequate number of plates, cups and spoons. Others might have to take turns eating or just use fingers and tortillas.

Without a refrigerator or anything more than old cracker tins to use for storage, women have to shop a little differently than their counter-parts in the States who hop in the station wagon and go to their favorite supermarket to load up for the week. We had twenty staff to feed. We quickly found out there was no such thing as buying the large economy size, even if you found the size, you didn't get any special economy! The stores are set up to sell small amounts of just about everything. You can buy just two or three cigarettes out of a pack, a quarter of pound of beans, rice or margarine, two rolls or four pieces of bread. There are some supermarkets

in the city geared to middle and upper classes that operate more like those in the States. But that is not where the great masses of people shop.

When the women of Concaste were ready to prepare a meal, they would first go or send a child to the nearest tiny store to buy the right number of pieces of bread, the one onion and two green chiles or whatever they needed. The main diet was always corn in the form of tortillas and beans. Both of these came from their own fields in most cases. Nutritionally this is good as the combination in the right proportion gives a complete protein. Other things grown and eaten in fair amounts in Concaste were tomatoes, onions, some sweet green peppers, little hot peppers, avocados, mangos and bananas. Later in the Project after the addition of irrigation a lot more variety was introduced and accepted.

Many Guatemalans really believe they will die if they don't have their tortillas each day. The custom is to eat bread at breakfast and supper and **always** tortillas at noon. In the village, around 11:30 each morning we'd hear the soft rhythmic slapping of hands. No matter where you were, the sound was all around you. You could just about set the clock by it. It was a pleasant sound, reassuring somehow, a symbol of life flowing on as it should.

To have that happen at noon, the women had to go to one of the two little mills in the town with their partially cooked corn. Early in the morning the women walk to the mill with a large plastic or metal pan on their head, gliding with straight backs, greeting each other, visiting, moving into the line in front of the mill. Voices had to be raised a bit. The generator and mill wheel make quite a lot of noise heard all over town. As each load of

corn is emptied into the mill pan, the miller feeds the corn in, adding water as needed to create a doughlike substance that goes back into the woman's pan in exchange for a few centavos. It always gave me a kick to see that some of the women as they walked and talked with their friends would reach up, grab a hunk of dough, pat out a tortilla, put it up on top, take another hunk of dough and never pause or lose cadence either in step or conversation.

It was easy in the village to understand where the expression "a woman's work is never done" came from. By five or five thirty in the morning the women were out in the street with stick brooms cleaning up the animal droppings and trash from their section of the street, sweeping it into a pile, and making a fire. They had already served breakfast and probably washed the dishes. Most people were up around 4:30 AM so the men could get out to their parcelas by the first light. After that they had the trip to the mill.

Then they made the first trek out to the well for water one kilometer away. Actually the well was just a hole in the ground. The dipping bucket had a rope tied on and looped around the branch of an overhanging tree. During the Consult we had talked with enough women to judge that each woman spent three to four hours every day just obtaining the **minimal** amount of water for her family to function. And this water was most often contaminated causing many babies to die as the result of parasites. The usual meal preparations and clean up, child care, sewing by peddle machine or by hand and laundry could keep a woman sufficiently busy.

Doing the laundry was **really** a challenge. In Conacaste the women had two choices. One was to haul many jugs of water to the house, fill up the plastic tubs and scrub

one piece at a time on the big flat scrubbing stone that was part of the equipment for every household. I found I could get my clothes much cleaner by this method than I had with an automatic washer but at great cost of time and energy. The blue jeans and bed sheets were real horrors! The alternative method was to carry a tub load of dirty clothes on your head the three and one-half kilometers to the river. This was an all day affair but a social happening as much as a chore. The women walked with friends, gossiped as they scrubbed clothes on the rocks and took baths in their slips while the clothes were spread all over the ground and surrounding bushes to bake dry in the sun.

Most of the women did this at least once a month but some went every week. Many communities in Guatemala have community laundry areas, a ring of sinks around a tank of water, often spring-fed. This is more usual in areas with plenty of water. There are even laundry centers scattered around in the city. In addition to all the usual women's work, some had to go help in the fields.

I guess just about every community in Latin America has a community gathering place often called the Plaza. A Plaza can be anything from a good-sized space of bare dirt with a few benches and a couple of trees as in Conacaste, to a huge, lush green park with fountains and bandshells and mind blowing masses of flowers. A Plaza is a place to visit with friends, do a little business, play a card game or chess, soak up some sun, rest in the shade, show off your new clothes, your new wife, your new baby and to gather as a community for any event of importance. The week long Fair to celebrate the village's name saint happens in the Plaza. Religious processions begin and end

in front of the church on the Plaza. The cantina is on the Plaza. Enemies meet on the Plaza to fight. Friends meet on the Plaza to celebrate.

The main meeting space for the Concaste Consult was in the Plaza in a "temporary shelter" that had been thrown up for the homeless people after the earthquake of 1976. It consisted of a sheet metal roof held up by a framework and posts of small tree trunks with a wall of boards at one end of the rectangle and chicken wire for the other three "walls". The men of Concaste built many long, narrow tables and benches. The women spread a thick floor of pine needles and wound flowers around the whitewashed posts. We had a really lovely, big, airy place to meet in the Plaza which signified the importance of the occasion.

Life is not easy for poor villagers, and the people of Conacaste age early. But to me it seems poverty in the cities is more terrible to endure. I stood in the village and looked around at the mountains, flowers, trees loaded with mangoes and bananas and felt there could be plenty of hope if the people could find ways to make an adequate living without trudging off to the city.

Just wait 'til you see the gorgeous handbag/briefcase I bought down at the market. We hassled over the price for twenty minutes....I walked away.. and when I passed the man's stand a little later, he came out and made another offer, so we went at it some more. Finally we were both happy, and I got this big leather bag for only \$10.00. Would you ever have believed a "nebbly" like me could bargain like that? If I stopped to listen to myself in the market, I probably wouldn't believe it was me!

If you can get down here on your vacation, Llani, I'll take you to see that favori

7 TO MARKET, TO MARKET, TO BUY....

Supermarkets in the United States are magnificent but not nearly as much fun as going to Sanarate for the groceries. The early trips at the beginning of the Project were the most fun of all. A couple of us would be assigned the previous day for the shopping excursion so that we could be prepared for an early start in the morning. It was important to get going early. It was a seven kilometer walk, about four miles, to Sanarate over hill and dale, to put it conservatively. So it was best to get well underway before the sun was high and hot.

About the third week of the Project, Joanne and I were assigned to go marketing. Joanne was one of the other North Americans on the staff, but she had spent the previous year in Venezuela and thus had enough ability in Spanish to get along. The locals found her conversation a bit amusing as she spoke only in the present tense but it is possible to make yourself understood that way! All you have to do is add "in the past" or "in the future" and the meaning was graspable.

During our walk, Joanne told me about life in the jungle Project in Cano Negro, Venezuela. They had dealt with some things there that we weren't cursed with in Conacaste. One was an abundance of snakes, some poisonous. Another was a jungle growth that encroached on hearth and home at a rapid rate, requiring constant work with the machetes. She also described the steamy heat. These things made me more than ever appreciative of the conditions in Guatemala.

We moved along at a fair pace on the dirt road. I was getting in better condition every day. We slowed down for the steeper climbs. The last steep, long hill into Sanarate was a real "ding-dozie" made worse by the passing of motorcycles, trucks and a bus, all kicking up quantities of dust.

Sanarate with a population of 20,000 had fascinated me from my first sight of it. Even more than Conacaste, it seemed to be a mixture of centuries, countries, economics, even of reality and unreality. I could believe I was on a movie set when I saw a cowboy in sombrero and chaps ride tall in his saddle down the middle of the street.

The dirt road became very wide as it circled around the plaza in front of us. The plaza had some big trees, benches, a few flowers and sparse patches of grass. Everything was dust-coated. On the far side was a large Catholic church. There were a variety of stores on the other three sides. Vendors were scattered around the edges of the plaza and anyplace they could stake out space on the streets. Streets spoked off in two directions from each corner. Directly to our left as we entered the plaza were a cluster of vendors selling everything from vegetables to clothing, forming a fair-sized market.

We moved straight ahead along the side of the plaza into a street near the Cathedral. The scene there delighted me. In the middle of the wide dusty street, some fair-sized trees provided a spot of shade. They were directly in front of the old-fashioned General Store to which we were going. There in the shade were "parked" one VW "bug," two pack mules, and a saddled horse. I couldn't resist whipping out my instamatic and "playing tourist" with my camera. It was a great, funny picture and was a clear statement of the incongruities of the community.

The General Store was often called the "Chinese store" in acknowledgment of the owner's ancestry. We purchased nails, cooking oil, sheet plastic and scotch tape. Then it was back to the market across the plaza to bargain for onions, carrots, cabbage and such. Each new item required a whole new negotiation.

At first I was very inhibited, but I came to enjoy the game of bargaining. Joanne explained that it was important to hold our own in the market place or no one would have any respect for us. If they thought we were fools in the market, it could affect their respect for the Project. Once I plunged into it, I found great fun in negotiating a price.

There were variations in the "drama" we all went through. We would mutter about how the tomatoes didn't seem quite firm or as big as others we had seen or about a better price elsewhere. The sellers, meanwhile, would carry on about the freshness, quality and what a great bargain it was. We would offer half what the seller had said was the price. He would gasp and come down a few centavos. This would go on and on. We might walk away to look elsewhere and he would follow. Eventually, the price agreed upon would be about midway between his first price and our first offer! It is a slow way to shop. Sometimes we would deal with several vendors at the same time and other shoppers joined in with their opinions. Everyone got in the act with lots of action and laughter. With our horrible Spanish, it was really extraordinary entertainment.

When it came time to see if there was any chicken, beef or pork in town, we stacked our baskets and bundles on the ground by one of the vendors we had bought from. They were perfectly safe there. Then we set off to walk around the streets searching for red flags over the doorways. Anyone in town who had killed a pig

When it came time to see if there was any chicken, beef or pork in town, we stacked our baskets and bundles on the ground by one of the vendors we had bought from. They were perfectly safe there. Then we set off to walk around the streets searching for red flags over the doorways. Anyone in town who had killed a pig that day or some chickens would hang out the red flag to announce they had some meat to sell. Sometimes you bought from a butcher store and sometimes from a non-professional. There were days when it was impossible to find a red flag in the whole town. At times there just wasn't any meat to buy. Certain days of the week and times of the day were better, but we would learn about that in the future.

As we searched for red flags, we also made stops at "regular" stores which had fixed prices to buy things like sugar, salt, detergent and toilet paper.

Once we had completed our pile on the ground, we had to find someone with a pickup truck that we could hire to get home, and we had to negotiate that price! With the price settled, we jumped in with the supplies and were on our way with sufficient food for the staff to survive another four or five days.

Later when we had a truck, we sometimes combined our marketing with other errands in Guatemala City. There we went to the huge market where we had an enormous selection and could dicker the price on **everything**. That required a minimum of three people. We parked our giant baskets on the ground and carried good-sized plastic bags with us.

One of us would guard the growing pile in the baskets while the others scurried around bargaining, filling up the plastic bags and emptying them into the big baskets. Then they run off for more through a massive crowd of people wending their way in and out of blocks of stalls. We guarded our purses and wallets while slipping and sliding on wet cabbage leaves and beet tops. The first time I was led down into the basement area of a huge pavilion to buy meat, my companion told me to roll up my pants legs so you have some idea about what we were slipping and sliding on down there! That set my stomach to churning a bit. The smell of blood never did too much for my appetite.

Shopping in the big city market was rather like running in a marathon. It was an exciting experience if you didn't have to do it too often. It was a wild riot of smells, sounds and colors, from mountains of bread to mattresses to luggage to flowers to live chickens -- you name it, it must have been there. And the people: rich people, poor people, Indians, tourists, beggars, nuns, thieves --- every kind of person. Tremendous!

"To market, to market, to buy a fat pig...."

Oct. 1978

Dear Louva,
You are a dear for offering to send me a "care" package, but I wouldn't be able to afford to get it out of hock. Duty is charged on everything sent into the country, gift or no. And, they tend to put a very high value on things, to my way of thinking. At any rate, I don't think prime ribs of beef or leg of lamb with cream gravy would travel well! I'm adjusting! It's all in the mind, I'm sure. Besides, it's been very good for my figure. Are you still enjoying your work at the museum? I'm really impressed by your descri-

Eating has always been a favorite subject and a favorite activity of mine. A man I dated years ago used to say he loved to just sit and watch me eat because he had never seen a human being who got such downright sensual pleasure out of food. Unfortunately, I do not love to cook. This is a real contradiction in my life. I learned to be a pretty good cook as a matter of self-preservation, but the most beautiful and well-equipped kitchen in the world will not get me excited about the preparation of food.

Needless to say whenever I drew the assignment to prepare meals for twenty people in our pitiful excuse of a kitchen in Conacaste, I was something less than thrilled!

One thing for sure, meal preparation was a challenge! The first hurdle had to do with light; there wasn't any! At least there wasn't any for breakfast and supper preparation. Breakfast preparation started at 5:00 AM. With no electricity, we had to manage by the light of three or four tiny candles. Whenever possible, the supper crew tried to get in the kitchen early enough to do as much as they could by daylight. But for sure, the dishes were going to be washed by candlelight to the detriment of our standards of cleanliness.

The Project was operating out of the big room with screens on three sides plus a long, narrow room running side to side along the back wall laughingly known as the kitchen. The space had been donated for our use by INCAP, an agency of the United Nations to do nutritional studies. They had stopped working in Conacaste some months before the Project began, so the space was available for our use.

I shouldn't knock the kitchen because it certainly was the finest one in Conacaste. Across one end, it had two huge gas burners sitting on a concrete slab. These were connected by metal tubing to large gas tanks housed on the outside of the building in a shed. Every morning it was necessary to go out and open the valve to the tanks. Then the gas could be turned on in the kitchen. Strike a match and you were in business. The worst glitch regarding the use of gas was the shock when you ran out, invariably in the midst of meal preparation. There was no meter, no way to know when you were running low, and a major operation to get refill tanks. It was one of our minor challenges.

We had a kitchen sink complete with water that ran from a faucet. This was possible because we had a well in the Plaza which had a pipeline up to a storage tank above our building. With a gasoline pump we could get the tank filled once a day, and water came down to the faucet by gravity. The pump was too costly for general village use but the project used it in rationed style to free our time for more critical work. The water from the well was contaminated, but we boiled it or treated it with tablets. Getting the pump started to bring up the water required a strong and talented person. The motor was one of those awful things with a cord that you have to wrap around and pull just right. I never did succeed with it!

The only other thing in the kitchen besides the "stove" and sink was a base cabinet with screened cupboards lining the long wall across from the sink. It was a problem not to have a refrigerator but not as terrible as you might think. One of my new learnings had to do with the fact that most food is safe to keep

unrefrigerated if you keep reheating it thoroughly at least every 12 hours. With twenty hungry people we were never overwhelmed with leftovers anyway! Fresh eggs can be kept in the cupboard and we buzzed through those pretty fast. Margarine was sometimes a bit of a problem because on really hot days it would melt and run down the cabinet onto the floor. In the third year of the Project, we had the donation of a refrigerator.

A major challenge in the kitchen was the guarding of our food from the animal life. We chased after the mice with brooms, smashed cockroaches that seemed big enough for me to saddle and ride, brushed the ants off the counters and out of the food and swatted flies with anything at hand. I remember one day when I nearly went berserk pushing ants from the cutting board and off my arms as I tried to chop cabbage for salad. Perhaps the worst moment I had in the kitchen was the morning a large cockroach elected to commit suicide in the pot of oatmeal I was cooking. It just climbed up and jumped in! I was so furious I just hauled it out with a big spoon and threw it in the garbage can. There wasn't time or extra oatmeal so I cooked it a long time and kept my secret.

Our biggest enemy was a cat who would get in during the night. It raided us of the little bit of meat or chicken we had, even getting into the cupboards, literally eating us out of house and home and creating huge messes on the floor. To deprive us of our small rations of meat was tantamount to a declaration of war! It was ages before we could find where the cat was getting in, and seal off the entrance.

Our constant battle was with the budget. We were really poor and we were twenty hungry souls. That first year we managed on

twenty-five to thirty dollars a **week** plus whatever food was donated, such as oatmeal, rice and noodles. Various charitable organizations and companies believed in the work of the Project and helped us out. It was lucky for us that we were living in a land rich with lots of inexpensive fruit and vegetables.

I think the biggest dietary struggle for those of us who came from plenty was adjusting to the lack of meat. Would you believe it is possible to feed 20 people from ONE chicken? We did it more than once! That works out to about one and one-half bites of meat per person. I never knew you could cut a chicken leg in three sections and I'm not including the thigh. Guatemala villager style, we used the **whole** bird. The only thing missing from the pot were the feathers!

Well I adjusted to the food or lack of it, and I learned new ways to cook. We all ended the first year with a little less blubber around our midsections. Undoubtedly we were all healthier for eating less meat.

Gradually the budget got fatter and so did we! Companies who believed in the work donated beans, cereal, hot dogs, soup and jello on a regular basis, bless them. And we gradually had a little more money and a smaller staff to feed as villagers took over more of the running of the Project.

Next time you look at a chicken, think about feeding twenty people with it, something like that old story of the loaves and fishes. We have great meals these days, but I look at a chicken, and I remember. More importantly, I remember that we were eating better than most of the people in the village. Maybe a twenty-person chicken is a pretty good symbol of the reality of this world.

How many races do you expect
to enter this season, Don? I still have
trouble imagining my son dog-sled
racing! Don't think it would be
my kind of sport - all that snow
& ice - brar! You must get almost
as much exercise as the dogs.
I'd like to try it once - if you
think I could do it without injur-
ing myself or the dogs.
We have our own kinds
of sport that go on here in
Guatemala. You'll get a fix

Care to take a guess what the National Sport is in Guatemala? Guatemalans would say, "futbol", known as soccer in the United States, and that might be your guess too. But I think that's the wrong answer.

I am convinced the national sport is 'woman watching' or how to find beauty in almost every female from fourteen to seventy, and tell her so! To some extent this is true all over Latin America and in fact much of the world. But it seems to me that in Guatemala the men have developed this into a beautiful art form. They have practiced and polished their skills in the verbal admiration of the feminine species to the highest level.

I have heard that in Italy, men pinch. I know that in the States they whistle and cruder types may make lewd remarks. From my experience in Mexico, they GRAB.

The Guatemalans, on the other hand, are a very gracious people by nature and this characteristic extends all the way down to street flirtations. They do have one habit I found strange, and a bit unnerving. They often hisssssssss. When I first experienced this while walking in the streets of Guatemala City, it made me nervous. It is possible to believe you are walking through a bed of snakes at times when hissing is coming from all around you.

Actually the hiss is simply the Latin American method of catching someone's attention. For example, one hisses for the waiter in a restaurant, a habit North Americans often find a bit disconcerting. Although, when you think about it, a hiss is far more delicate

than shouting, and the sound carries an amazing distance.

At any rate let's get back to the rules of the Guatemalan sport. A man is to look, open the eyes wide in admiration, come closer for a better look and murmur something charming to the lady as she passes. The gentlemen demonstrate a surprising diversity and degree of creativity in their remarks. The more common words are something in the order of "Oh, how beautiful you are", "How lovely", or "If such beauty could be mine". From the more experienced men, you get "You must be a dream, such beauty can't be real", or "All my life I have searched for you, my love".

When several men are blocking the sidewalk as they stand in conversation, they will invariably split down the middle so that a passing female must walk through the center of the group. That way they can all pass comments on the loveliness of her eyes, her hair, her face, her walk and her legs. This is all done with great flourish and style.

For the woman's part, she looks straight ahead, does not slow down and may allow the tiniest hint of a smile at the corners of her mouth. In fact, it is sometimes difficult not to laugh right out loud, as some of the protestations of admiration and 'love' are so outlandish. Who would want to break the spell or hurt the feelings of such gallantry especially when it is directed at a middle-aged lady from a seventeen-year-old? I forgot to mention that there seems to be no age regulations regarding the participants in this sport. As best I can determine, all healthy males from about age ten to death join in the fun.

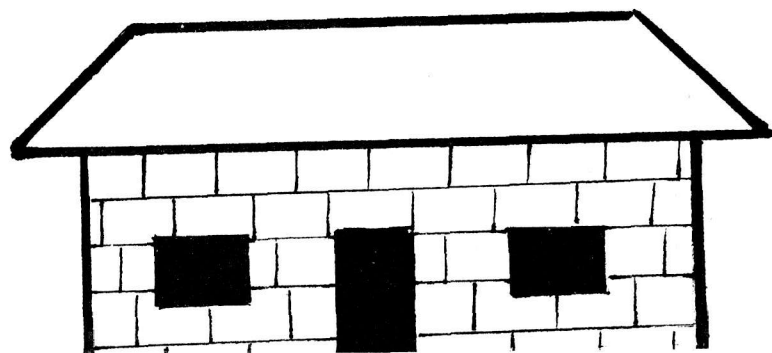
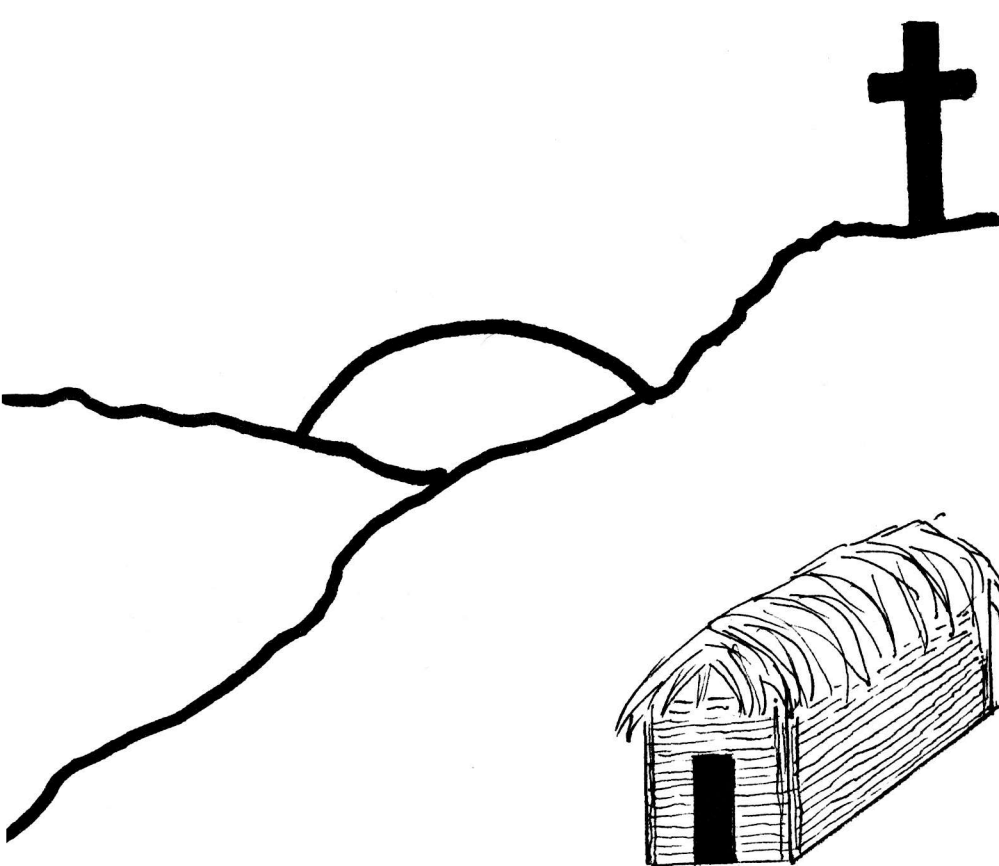
To me one of the most delightful aspects of this sport is the inclusion of women over forty, women overweight, women less than

gorgeous, and women who may have had their attributes overlooked elsewhere in the world. I think it's great!

I know that several of us from the Project had one or more experiences of marriage proposals from perfect strangers on the street. I had one from what appeared to me to be a teenager, and another from a white-haired gentleman who could barely walk. One day, an elegantly dressed gentleman with a briefcase, coming toward me from the opposite direction did a sudden sidestep and stopped smack-dab in front of me. We were about four inches from toe to toe and nose to nose. He smiled and said, "You are the loveliest lady I have ever seen, will you be my wife?" I took a quick step to the right, smiled, said, "Thank you, but no" and trotted right on without looking back.

I must say this sport is a great tonic for the ladies. You don't have to be an exceptional beauty to capture the attention of the men of Guatemala. They are generous with their praise. Never fear, they will find your redeeming features, whatever they are -- a pretty smile, a graceful walk.

This sport seems to cheer everyone up and creates a friendly atmosphere that is quite pleasant. It sure does beat clobbering people on a "futbol" field. Now you know why you see so many smiling faces on the streets of Guatemala. It's not only the weather!!



10 MOONLIGHT OVER CONACASTE

From the time of our earliest serious conversations about how we would research, assign ourselves and strategize to get electricity into Conacaste, I experienced some painful little psychic "twitches" commonly referred to as mixed emotions.

Clearly, electrification was the first direct, major target of the Project. To the best of my knowledge, we had 100% agreement on that from villagers and foreign staff both, including myself. My mixed emotions had to do with a new kind of beauty I had been introduced to in the village. It was an entirely selfish reaction.

When I first arrived in Conacaste, the nights were so black I learned to be very careful about locating my flashlight before the sun dropped behind the mountain. The same way blind people keep seeing-eye dogs by their sides, I kept my flashlight by me. It is odd that it didn't register with me that the blackness of the nights was not a constant condition! What a surprise it was then the first night the moon appeared along with the most incredible, sparkling stars! By the time the moon was totally full, I found the end of the day to be the most delightful part.

All my life I had seen the moon and stars in the dimming glare of an electricity powered earth. Even when camping, cars with lights passed near by, other campers used kerosene lanterns, state parks had lights, towns were generally not far away. All of those things affected the sky more than I had realized.

When that huge, silvery ball would first creep up over the edge of a mountain in the earlier part of the night, we could see to walk around in the streets, and people did! On all those very dark nights, people had tended to tuck into their houses early. When the moonlight came, that changed. The streets were full of folks visiting in the deliciously cool evening air.

As the moon moved higher the village became more and more beautiful. The rich, black shadows became increasingly intense in contrast to the areas in moonlight. Houses, trees and people created stronger images than they gave in the sunlight. By 11:00 PM the shadows shortened and the streets seemed almost as bright as day. Everything was light and yet softer than the day, velvety. Like most of the inhabitants of the village, including the cats and dogs, I resisted going to bed or even into the house.

On nights like that I discovered long walks out to the far side of town were a real treat. Sometimes I went alone, sometimes with one or more friends. Fireflies would wink and waltz all around us. When we walked in silence it was possible to hear all the night sounds--tiny animals scurrying, rustling through the corn, gentle breezes whooshing through the leaves of the mango trees, pigs grunting in their sleep, insects making strange "calling out" sounds. Sometimes we would sing quietly-- old fashioned, romantic or sentimental songs seemed to be the instinctive choice. Sometimes we tried to copy the sounds of the insects and carry on a "conversation" with them.

All of it somehow reminded me of a long ago childhood chasing and capturing fire-flies in a jar, scooting across the grass in bare feet while grownups sat in lawn chairs. All those symbols of tranquility and simplicity are hard to find in today's world.

When the electricity would come so would streetlights, TV, irons, refrigerators, ceiling lights, pumps, record players, and radios. Progress would come to Conacaste! All of that was imperative if Conacaste was to join in as a part of the twentieth century. I wanted all of that for the village, but there was a little bit of sadness in me for what would be lost. Silly, romantic nostalgia? Sure, no doubt, but real. The moon wouldn't stop shining over Conacaste; it would always be a beautiful moon. The stars would still sparkle, just a little less brightly. That little bit of beauty lost will be a small price to pay for pumps to bring irrigation and pure drinking water. But I just couldn't help having some mixed emotions.

Remember that old song called "Dancing in the Dark?" A title change applicable to life in the village could have been "Dressing in the Dark." Getting ready in the village for appointments in the city, during the year and a half of no electricity was a real challenge. Great practice if I had the misfortune to be blind later in life!

That first year my roommate and I were both assigned to be in Guatemala City to search for funds and materials at least three or four times a week. This entailed getting up at 4:30 AM, fumbling around in the dark for clothes and makeup, grabbing a cup of coffee, and walking or riding the three kilometers to the highway to get the bus. The latter part of the year, after the Dutch Embassy donated the double-cab pickup to the Project, we had rides all the way to the city on occasion.

At 4:30 in the morning it is completely DARK, any time of the year. By some miracle I made it all the way through that year without putting lipstick on my eyelids or aqua eye shadow on my lips. My roommate was even more talented. She was able to apply makeup base **evenly** by the light of two tiny candles and a small kerosene lantern.

It was impossible to check color compatability in the dark, so we tried to memorize color tones and which things went together. Nevertheless, we sometimes had unpleasant surprises when the dawning light revealed forgotten grease stains, weird color combinations, and runs in stockings.

Starting out in fine shape was no guarantee we would arrive that way! Some of the buses

You realize, Donnamarie, that those of us on the other side of the camera used to make jokes about your make-up, wanting to run to the mirror to check out their faces, while you waited until I shouted at you that you were melting, for Gods sake! Sounds to me like you'd be right at home getting ready for the aqua lips might make a really interesting and just come around make a really interesting and real spooky shot! any old time...I can get a photo.

were very dirty, so sometimes when we were wearing white or very light colors we would wear our clothes inside out and go into a restroom to turn them around after we got to the city. And sometimes we had minor accidents when we went to the highway one by one on the back of a staff members motorcycle. One day, on my ride the driver came too close to some shrubs, and one leg of my panty hose was torn to shreds. There was no time to turn back; I had to appear at an 8:00 AM appointment "as is" since no place was open to buy a replacement. So I went to the office of a corporation president whose hoped for contribution was critical to the Project, looking like I had been attacked by a wildcat.

I apologized and explained my appearance as briefly as possible. There was a moment of silence, and then the president leaned across his desk and said, "You came by MOTORCYCLE and BUS from a VILLAGE?" He was so thunderstruck by the degree of our commitment that he offered to give us money before we asked for it!

Although we joked with one another about showing up at more appointments in tatters, we realized all over again that our effectiveness both within and without the village was heightened by the demonstration that it was possible to appear clean and neatly dressed, even though you may live in poverty under difficult conditions. This is something that the poorest villagers seem to know. When they go to the city they look sharp. What their city cousins may forget is that being neat is nowhere near as easy for rural people to do!

One of my favorite stories about "dressing in the dark" comes from one of my colleagues who laughingly shared a story on herself. It seems that she had completed a lengthy and important session at one of the embassies, and as she was taking her leave, asked permission

to use their restroom. As she was washing her hands, she looked up in the mirror. To her horror she had three bright red blobs of lipstick on each cheek that she had meant to blend into softly rouged color. Instead of looking like a serious and demure lady, she looked like a clown! I for one think those diplomats deserved an A-plus for their gracious diplomacy in such a ludicrous situation. I can certainly understand why they are called diplomats.

When it came to dressing in the dark, we were all in agreement. Electricity couldn't come too soon.

PUBLIC NOTICE

The city of Evanston, Il. here-by serves notice that electrical permits and inspection are required for the remodeling of existing housing, as well as for new construction. There will be no exceptions.

One of the more unusual assignments I was given in the Project came toward the end of the first year. For nine months, certain members of our staff along with some of the villagers had been working with the mayor of the municipality, the governor of the state, and the officials of I.N.D.E. (the government-owned electric company) to get electricity in the village. They had waded through the miles of red tape, written countless letters, and attended meetings.

At last the work and patience of all those people paid off. Money had been collected and paid. Permits were granted. Cement poles for the street lights had been dropped along the road from the highway. Excitement was high. We were ready for electrification! Well, almost!

I.N.D.E. explained, "We will put the wiring to the houses when the houses themselves are wired. Now we must order the entrance meters. For how many houses do we need them? One hundred and twenty houses?!!! We've never had so many at once! Let us know when they are wired."

So who do you suppose was going to wire those houses? **We were**, that's who!

That's how it happened that we twenty staff members found ourselves in "Basic Electricity 101". It certainly **was** basic! We had to create a place on the outside of each house to hang the entrance meter. We bored holes through the wall. We strung up wires from the meter area through the house, winding them around those little ceramic spools to the place for the ceiling light. A one room house would

have only one light. Larger houses might put a light in each of the additional rooms. Concealed wiring was an esthetic not given any consideration in the village. Each household was given a shopping list of materials they had to buy. They also had a promise that a two person team from the Project would come on the appointed day to do the actual wiring job.

As it happened, during the time villagers and Project staff were getting their act together, I.N.D.E. had decided to set all those cement poles in the ground. They dug deep holes in all the right places, putting boards or a large rock on top as a cover to keep from losing any curious children. Then they started to pick up one pole at a time with a sort of crane, while six or eight men guided the pole and tilted it to guide it into a hole and raise it. There was, not surprisingly, a good sized crowd watching at all times. It was not just the **best** entertainment in town. It was about the **only** entertainment!

Everything was going along just fine. Poles were standing tall in their holes marching up the entrance road around the Plaza and halfway down the main street. Small crews of men were packing dirt around the placed poles.

All of a sudden, there were screams and roars of laughter from the area where they were getting ready to drop the next pole. We ran up the road to see what was going on. In the time between removal of the cover from a hole and getting the pole into position, a curious pig had fallen in! He was squealing and carrying on to beat the band. It was impossible for him to climb up those straight sides and impossible to get a rope on him. Finally, the skiniest man in the crowd was lowered head first into the hole and held by his feet. It wasn't easy to get a firm grip on that hysterical pig. It

was quite the wrestling match at the bottom of the hole but finally they emerged into the sunlight amidst cheers and applause. Never a dull moment!

A young Peruvian man and I were teamed up as "electricians". Since he had been one of our instructors, I had hopes that we wouldn't make any disastrous errors. Off we went to wire them up! At the first stop on our customer list, the people were missing an "ingredient" so we switched them to the next day and moved on. The second place was an adobe house, two houses really, each with only one room. We nailed up a foot-square board on the outside of one house for mounting the meter, drilled our holes through the wall, strung our wires, installed a fluorescent light fixture, continuing on into the second house and fixture. It took lots of wire, but there were no problems. I did giggle to myself. It felt so silly to me to be putting up a fluorescent tube light in an adobe house with no floor or glass in the windows. Most people selected fluorescent lighting, because it gave them more light at lower cost than regular bulbs.

The third stop presented a new challenge. We walked up to the wall to mount the backing board for the meter, looked at the wall and each other. Then we burst out laughing. Our laughter was in the nature of black humor. The wall we were facing was constructed of sticks and mud. If we hit it with a hammer to nail up the board, the whole wall would most likely fall into a pulverized heap at our feet. After a bit of consultation we went on a search for some long screws and a second board. We drilled matching holes in the boards, then took up positions on each side of the wall and managed to screw the boards to each other through the wall CAREFULLY. It worked! On we went with the wiring.

I'm sure any reputable electrical inspectors would have had a stroke to see our amateur work. But three years later we hadn't had any electrical fires or electrocutions in Conacaste. The lights all worked. When I passed that mud house, they still had their same wall and the meter was still hanging on the original mounting on the wall!

So we had really "broken our necks" to get those houses wired fast. We completed the one hundred and twenty houses in about three weeks. Then we reported to I.N.D.E. that we were ready for the meters.

SIX MONTHS later, the meters arrived, and we were ready to turn on the lights in Conacaste!

What a night that was! The Plaza was packed with excited people. There were speeches, marimba music, refreshments. Then at last, the time came to throw the switch on the darkness. On flashed the street lights, the house lights, the tiny, multicolored lights decorating the Plaza with one giant simultaneous AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH from the people, expressing their wonder and thrill. Conacaste was "wired up" to the rest of the world and the Twentieth Century.

Dec. 27, 1980

Dear Fred,

Just a quick note to let you know we have everything ready for your students. I've chartered buses to meet your plane - housing will be ready in the village and we've lined up some great trips for the weekend. They will need the rest 'cause they're going to work very hard!

The villagers are looking forward to welcoming the Repauw team.

Hasta luego,
Donnamarie

A special program is offered during winter break to the students of DePauw University at Greencastle, Indiana. It gives students some rather exotic opportunities for research, study and special service for course credit. In January, 1980, Conacaste became one of those "exotic offerings". An ICA staff member in the USA had worked with Chaplain Fred Lamar at the University to create a program beneficial to all involved. The ICA staff in Guatemala was requested to present a model plan for a DePauw construction team to implement.

What kind of help did the village most need? What would be meaningful, long-lasting assistance into a better future for the citizens? What would be a project that students and residents could work on together, side by side to the benefit of both groups? What might give the youth an incredible experience, teach them a lot, allow them the opportunity to serve others in a serious way and still maintain the villagers stance of participation and responsibility?

What was the most urgent need of the village at the moment? The answer to that was easy! They needed WATER -- PURE, CLEAN WATER!

Conacaste had electricity by then. But clean, readily available drinking water was the second big dream of the village. Making that dream come true seemed completely beyond the capacity of the village. Conversations with anyone who knew anything about water systems gave a pretty clear idea of what had to be done in order to see water running out of faucets in the village. Help was needed from outside, lots of it. The series of events which combined to provide that help still amazes me.

A mountain stood between Conacaste and the river three kilometers away. What might be feasible for an irrigation system was beyond both budget and technology for potable water. Experts recommended one deep well which would pump water into a big reservoir at the high point of the mountain just above and behind the village. Water could be pumped up there once a day from the well and treated with chlorine as necessary. From that height it would come down with plenty of pressure anywhere in town. So the first step was to carve a big reservoir out of the stoney ground. After that we could work on the well and delivery system. The DePauw construction team could help build the reservoir.

As the plan evolved, DePauw decided to send two teams. In addition to the construction team there would be a medical team to work on health problems in the area. The team would include a dentist, a doctor, a nurse, and six or seven pre-med or pre-dental students. Each team would provide its own supplies and equipment. Money would be sent to purchase necessities that were abundant and inexpensive in Guatemala. Other things would be brought from the States. The medical team would seek donations of drugs, a microscope and any other medical products that the project might find useful.

Conacaste citizens and project staff would be responsible for providing housing, meals and other needs for the forty team members. We would organize transportation, provide housing, prepare meals, purchase tools and supplies, and arrange a weekend rest and relaxation to favorite tourist haunts.

We set to work with a vengeance. In order to have a place to house the students, we decided to construct a new building as the first of Conacaste's planned industrial park.

Construction materials donated by four Guatemalan companies were stacked up at the site. Soon staff and villagers were levelling ground, mixing cement, laying a brick floor, putting up steel girders and cement block walls, and topping it off with a sheet metal roof. Everyone worked at a fever pitch to be ready for the "guest workers". On the night before the students were to arrive, lights were strung from a nearby house and the construction went on until two o'clock in the morning. But there was a place for the students to stay!

When we arrived at the airport the next day, we learned that the plane had been delayed in Miami. We waited for three hours with the drivers of the two buses we had chartered. What a sight it was when our guests finally arrived. All forty of them in white nylon jackets poured into the luggage area like a blinding stream of light. They were soon surrounded by what seemed to be a mountain of supplies, sleeping bags and luggage.

Had the customs officers decided to open and inspect it all, we might have been there all night. Fortunately, the National Committee of Reconstruction had given them papers of inventory and permission. The officers knew about the project so they whisked through the formalities like lightning. Although it was a tight fit, everyone and everything somehow made it onto the two buses. So we were off to Conacaste. We had begun the very first of many DePauw/ICA joint projects.

The team spent the first week in Conacaste providing health care services and learning about the people. Some things surprised them such as the fact that even poor villagers have their share of psychosomatic illness. The doctor laughed at his preconceived notions that

psychosomatic illness was restricted to upper-class educated people. The dentist pulled 500 teeth. He bemoaned the fact that he couldn't give treatment instead, but the teeth were just too far gone from lack of care. One old man had every tooth in his head pulled. The dentist was appalled. But the patient was only relieved and grateful. The medical team confirmed what those of us who lived in Conacaste already believed. The community's greatest health care needs were for preventive medicine and health education.

The second week the medical team was loaded into the back of a big truck and sent out to three of the difficult to reach villages. When they returned to Conacaste it was easy to see they had had been shaken by their experiences. They were quick to inform the students who had remained behind of the differences made by the presence of a Human Development Project. Staying in villages without Project service and activity dramatically demonstrated the improved life in Conacaste.

They had noted the differences in hopefulness versus hopelessness in the people regarding the possibility of creating a better future for themselves. They had experienced the thrill of saving a baby's life and the despair of helplessness while they watched another die. Their reactions took different forms but they all responded.

Meanwhile, the construction team was becoming the tireddest, 'achingest,' bunch of humans ever seen! At the end of the very first day, a strong athletic young man described his humiliation.

"I thought I was doing terrific, especially out in that hot sun. I figure I'm in pretty good shape because I play in sports and work out regularly and all that. I was moving pretty fast for a long time. But finally I knew I had to take a break or I was going to die! I flopped down on the ground and I look at this **scrawny** little old man who was at least 60 years old. He was just working -- digging, hauling, swinging that pick and using that shovel -- as steady as when we started. So after a while I haul myself back off the ground, and he is still going. I never did see him rest, at least not for more than a couple of minutes leaning on his shovel. I thought I was pretty strong, but that guy was something! Even the women just went on and on, hauling the dirt and all."

Every morning the construction team was up there on the mountainside. Thirty students and faculty advisors were joined by at least that many villagers. Any ICA staff not assigned to medical or kitchen duty were assigned to the reservoir project as well.

The mountain sloped so steeply that we hired a grader to scoop out an access road. But after that first day, all the work was done by hand. Day by day the reservoir was carved out of the stone until there was a twelve foot square hole at the top and twelve to fourteen feet deep in the center. As they went deeper into the ground it was necessary to create wood ramps of planks so that wheelbarrows could be filled with dirt below and pushed up the steep incline and dumped out away from the construction. Of course, that became an

increasingly difficult job. Big stones had to be hauled up by hand. All this was going on in the blazing sun, sometimes surpassing 100 degrees Fahrenheit. The desert conditions made the sweat dry fast increasing the dangers of dehydration. That made it imperative to keep a good supply of water and soft drinks on site.

Once the hole had been dug to the proper size and proportions, the job was still a long way from done. Next they had to line the hole with steel mesh to hold the cement. The cement had to be mixed by hand on flattened areas of ground and then pushed down in the wheelbarrows or lowered in buckets. The villagers were experts at mixing the sand, cement and water with hoes into just the right consistency.

Even when the whole thing was lined with cement, the job was not completed. An edge wall of cement blocks had to rim the top. Then all of the reservoir had to be "painted" with a special black sealer similar to the tar used on flat roofs but of a special chemical composition so it would not poison the water. It was a slow, terrible, painful job. But what a thrill for everyone to finally stand there and look at the completed task. We had taken our first giant step to clean water!

What did we have after two weeks of incredible labor? Obviously, we had a huge, cement-coated, watersealed hole in the ground up on the mountain. Obviously, we had a good-size pile of teeth that had been giving their owners pure hell! Obviously, we had some ailments diagnosed and treated. Obviously, a few lives had been saved. And obviously, a few of the villagers had learned a little bit about how they could keep themselves in better health.

What was less obvious may have been what was more important. The people involved in the project were changed in significant and subtle ways. We had started off with two sets of people -- the villagers and the visitors -- observing and weighing up each other, perhaps taking measure, even competing a bit. At the end of two weeks, people had new friends, interests, and compassion and experienced a great deal of pride in the job they had done **together!** I don't believe the villagers thought anyone had come in and done something **for** them or **to** them but rather that friends had given them a helping hand, a big difference from a "do-gooder" handout.

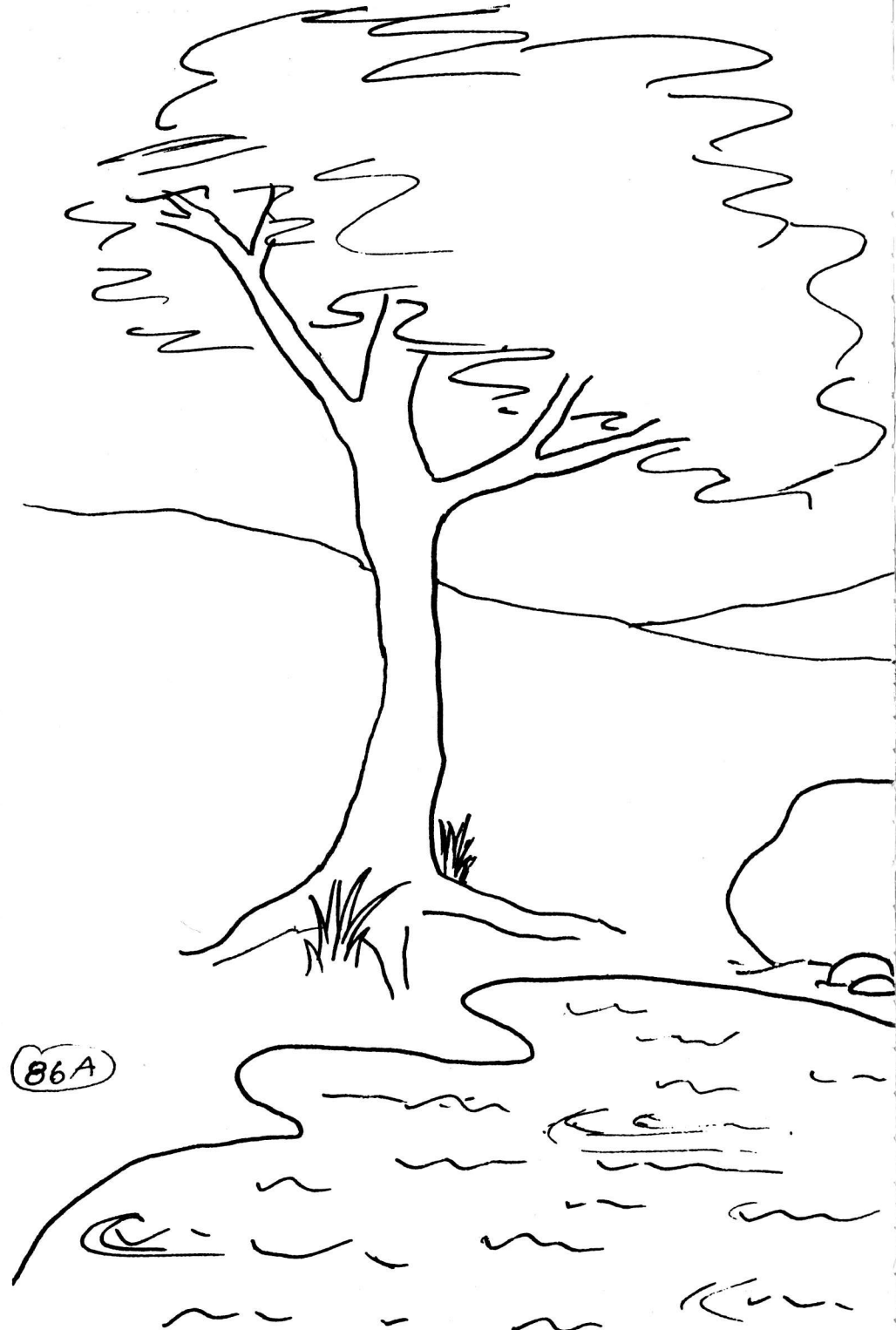
It is just possible that the students were the biggest beneficiaries. We had a formal conversation with the 40 students on their last evening in Conacaste. They had some deeply moving and telling statements to make about their experience. In various ways, individuals expressed a determination to rethink the direction of their lives.

I especially remember one young man who said he had always thought of his way of life as the usual and ordinary and of poverty as the exception. Intellectually speaking, he knew that most of the world's population came from the rural areas and were poor but that did not have meaning for him until he found himself in the reality of a poor village. Now he had come to understand that his comfortable life was, in fact, the exception in the world. He expressed that as a difficult fact to face, but added that it had made him very aware of his good fortune to have such excellent education and his responsibility to use that education well. He said he needed to re-examine how he could best use that gift to better serve humanity.

A young lady said that she had often thought that maybe poor people were just lazy or not very bright. For her it had been an eye opener to see first hand how hard poor people had to work just to stay alive. And she had discovered for herself some of the local wisdom, though it may have come from people who were short on "book learning."

I am told that DePauw University produces a lot of leadership in business and government in the United States. Perhaps some of those young people who went to Conacaste will become tomorrow's leaders. They may have an extra measure of compassion for the problems of the poor and they may evaluate the situations of their neighbors to south with greater wisdom.

A good time was had by all, in Conacaste -- working, eating, and celebrating -- side by side!



Meg, I wish you could have seen the village women at the foro. We were afraid they might not speak out, but they got real excited & caught up in it. Some of those shy women are beginning to show leadership qualities. They are discovering

14 WOMEN -- A POWERFUL SEX!

I must confess that every time I hear expressions like "the little woman" or "the weaker sex" it makes me sick. It is such a false image of the women I have known. After the first few months of living in a Guatemalan village, my images moved more and more to women as a powerful sex. In fact the Latin American village women, who are mostly poor and euphemistically referred to as "third world" citizens, have amazing physical strength as well as courage which often outstrips their female cousins to the north.

One of the first things ICA encouraged and helped set up in both urban and rural projects were preschools. There was absolute consensus in the community regarding a better future for the children. The village mothers gave first priority to family and were nervously anxious about protecting that role. At the same time there was curiosity and excitement about the possibility of women assuming leadership roles. Taking responsibility for the creation of a preschool program was a natural and comfortable first step for the village women. ICA was ready to help train staff and provide the necessary backup to create good schools, but strictly from behind the scenes. ICA did plant the seed that preschools were possible in any community. At the Consult in Conacaste slide shows of other projects had wonderful pictures of the preschoolers in Fifth City, Chicago, as well as in the Philippines and India. The Guatemalans adore and value children and thus took special enjoyment from seeing the young of many nations demonstrating their skills. Lots of questions were asked. Their first assumption was that ICA or the national

governments had just provided all the teachers plus money for uniforms and materials. This created yet one more opportunity to show we weren't running a giveaway program, but could help people develop a fine educational experience if they made the decision to do it.

One of our staff members, Priscilla, was a volunteer from the ICA Project in Cano Negro, Venezuela. As a villager she had been trained and worked in the preschool there. Priscilla, with her snapping eyes, broad smile and wiry, slender body, was a bundle of energy. She was our black, female version of the Pied Piper. She attracted children as surely as iron filings are drawn to a magnet. Whenever Priscilla appeared, there were children. They draped themselves all over her. They followed her through the streets, prancing and dancing all around her as she walked. Others were assigned to work in the preschool who often had more formal training and maturity, but our eighteen year old Priscilla definitely had her own special gifts to offer. And precisely because she was from a poor, small village herself and had so little formal education, she was a wonderful demonstration of possibility for the women of Conacaste.

The parents of Conacaste decided to have a preschool. Owners of a cement block house agreed to donate the use of it for a school for one year in exchange for the installation of a floor and doors. The village men contributed their labor to lay the cement floor and build doors. The nearby company of Cemento Novella donated cement for the floor. The cement company remained generous with regular donations of both money and cement on a regular basis to the Project.

However, it was the women of the village that decided to give the long-term practical implementation. Several of them volunteered to

train as teachers. Other women volunteered to sew uniforms. After a bit of role playing practice a couple of the women went to the city with one of our staff to visit fabric stores to ask for donations of yardage. They talked to store managers, describing the four year plan created by the village and the details of how they would operate a preschool. They won the support of enough people to return to the village with fabric for all the uniforms. They were beaming with pride as they staggered in with arm loads of peach and white checkered material.

At the end of the year when the house was turned back to the owners, some of the mother/teachers decided to donate part of their houses as schoolroom space. That was no small sacrifice since that often meant as much as half of the family living quarters. That decision also led to "decentralization". We eventually had smaller schools in four different sectors of town. In time we found money for tiny salaries. Today the preschools are supported by a cooperative program with "Save the Children" organization.

The real importance of the preschools became apparent after the children "graduated", when they entered the elementary school. The elementary school teachers who came from outside the community to teach were skeptical about the value of the preschools until they discovered the direct results in their classrooms. Since there was no kindergarten, children went right into first grade to begin to learn to read and write. The teachers found for the first time they had kids prepared to learn, to study and capable of sitting still in a classroom. They functioned well with their peers.

The more subtle results showed up in the community attitude about education. The word "education" began to take on new meaning for the village. People began to see practical and possible use for education. More parents brought the children to preschool. The night time literacy classes for adults were graduating more and more proud people. The newly formed farmers cooperative was faced with the need for leadership that could read and write and manage bookkeeping. People began to understand that education could lead to a better life for themselves and their children. With the change of attitude, children stayed in school longer. Some parents made the necessary sacrifices to send their kids to high school in Sanarate. No one had gone to secondary school in years in Conacaste.

A great moment of victory for Conacaste women came when the teacher/mothers decided to enter into a serious training program to equip them to train women of other villages to set up schools and teach. From the first year we had a fairly constant trickle of inquiries from surrounding villages as to how they could "do a Project". Inquiries about how to get a potable water system, preschools, electricity, drip irrigation came in a steady stream. Our Project staff and various villagers gave as much information and advice as they were capable of. In the fourth year the women of the preschools taught class in the morning and went to class in the afternoon. Next they began visiting women in villages in our area to give advice and training. Gradually preschools began to pop up all around.

My house and garden life on the North Shore of Lake Michigan had always been physically active, but nothing in comparison to digging

wells, latrines or ditches for pipeline. Shoveling sand and gravel, hauling water and rocks were also new to my exercise regime. I began to really develop some muscle and strength, but I could never catch up with my Guatemalan sisters. I used to watch the village women pick up a huge basket loaded with fruit, or a heavy mug of water and give a quick, light flip to settle the whole load gently on top of their head. It didn't seem to matter what shape, size or weight an object was; it was no problem to toss it in place like a hat. One day a group of us were moving mattresses from a pickup truck to a house a half block down the hill from the road. I watched as one after another of the village women hoisted a mattress on top of their heads and trotted down the hill. It looked easy. It wasn't. At least it wasn't easy for me. I managed to get the thing on my head after a bit of struggle, but both the mattress and I were off-balance and tipped forward into a treacherous downhill roll. All that saved me from disaster was the woman who grabbed me by a belt loop and yanked me back to the edge of the road. I may not have been very good at carrying a mattress by myself, but I sure did provide entertainment for my Guatemalan friends.

I remember another time when I was staggering down the street with a jug of water. I tried to wrap both arms around it and hug it to my chest. That didn't work. I tried to hold it with one hand at a time by the handle, alternating sides. That didn't work for very far. I tried the "stick out the hip" method. Every few yards I tried a new position or set the jug on the ground for a moments rest. To my consternation I saw one of my neighbor ladies watching my act as I hopped, hobbled and dragged my way up the street.

Finally as I got near her house she shrugged, laughed and came running out to meet me. As she whisked the jug out of my arms and onto her head, she chuckled and called me her "poor little kitten". I trotted along beside her, feeling foolish all the way to my own doorstep, where she gave me a toothless grin and told me I needed to learn to use my head as she set my jug on the ground.

I never got over my amazement at the physical strength of the village women, especially those who were five feet tall or less and probably couldn't hit 90 pounds on the scale soaking wet. It wasn't just their strength but their endurance. The village decided to spell out CONACASTE near the top of the mountain that stood behind the village. It was decided to carry up large rocks, lay them out to form the letters and give them a good whitewash job. The Project staff joined the villagers to find rocks and carry them one at a time up the steep mountain side. I finally made it to the top with one rock, feeling really virtuous about my accomplishment. I turned my rock over to the people who were forming letters and painting them and I dropped to the ground, which was practically vertical, in exhaustion. While I lay clinging and panting on the side of the mountain a wiry little old woman came trotting up and set down a rock considerably bigger than mine. She didn't even look tired. When she turned to go back down, I asked her if she didn't want to rest a minute. She said, "No I'm not tired, and if I hurry I might get two or three more stones up before I go to the river to wash clothes." I refrained from asking how many rocks she had already carried up. I didn't think I could stand to know.

When I was out in the fields picking little cucumbers under the searing sun in the demonstration farm fields I couldn't hold a candle to my Conacaste sisters. I had to wear gloves because the fuzzy, prickly surface vines turned my skin into a red, raw rash that itched and burned. My back felt like three of the Chicago Bears had jumped on it after only an hour of bending. I did not move and produce with notable speed. The Guatemalan ladies went rolling down the rows with all the ease of suburban housewives plucking products off the shelves at the local supermarket.

The women seemed lively in conversation with other women and in small groups they expressed their opinions, but at community meetings with the men present they rarely said a word. We knew they had good ideas, but they didn't seem able to stand up and share them. We needed a way to break through their inhibitions regarding speaking out in meetings with the men.

One of the programs developed by ICA was called the Global Women's Forum. It was designed to be for, about and by women. The structure of it stimulated honest conversation among women even though they came from wildly diverse backgrounds. When our staff in Guatemala learned that a team of women from the States were going to be circuiting in Latin America with the Global Women's Forum program, we asked to be put on their itinerary.

The response at the community meeting where we announced that there would be a special program just for the women was received with snickers and smiles and disbelief. I suspected the men were not taking us literally when we said they would be excluded. There was no need to press the point since they would find out

for themselves when the day came. We announced it would be held in the pavilion in the Plaza where the Consult had been held and that the women on our staff would be hostesses.

The young Guatemalan women on our staff, Odelia, Elida and Castula, took special delight in preparing for the momentous event. No one had ever created a special occasion just for the women of the village. They selected a menu that consisted of a salad of lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, crispy fried tortillas topped with guacamole and refried beans. It was decided to serve beautifully arranged individual plates. The beverage was to be a "fresca", a fruit flavored Kool-Aid type drink; and dessert was to be a thick slice of fresh pineapple topped with a maraschino cherry. We would also pass plates of pretty store bought cookies. We would also serve coffee during the meeting. It would be laced with plenty of sugar in order to satisfy the Guatemalan taste.

Decorating for special events was always relatively easy in the village. The color scheme always depended a bit on which flowers were currently in profusion. It was possible to create a gorgeous meeting space with pine needles for the floor covering, white paper to cover the table tops and palm leaves and vines to form arches and wind around the posts that held the roof up. When you add the fact that one could look through the chicken wire walls and beyond the Plaza to the surrounding mountains and bright blue sky, the setting could not have been any lovelier at a fancy hotel.

The great day dawned and it was "varsity out" for the female portion of our staff. Some of us did the decorating job while the rest whipped everything together in the kitchen. The village children were peeking in doors and windows and through the chicken wire walls.

They would watch and giggle and scoot back home to report the goings on to their mothers. Then they scurried back again to do more spying. They were having a great time until their teachers came along to hustle them into the school.

The great hour arrived, but not our guests. Ten minutes after the hour, fifteen minutes after the hour, twenty minutes after the hour -- no one! Then twenty-five minutes after the hour the women began to stream into the Plaza from all directions. It was as if someone had given a signal.

They all came dressed in their finest clothes covered with their best aprons. Even a shabby dress could be clean and pressed with the flatiron of hot coals and covered with a pretty apron.

Men were also showing up at the Plaza, and some were moving toward the door to watch. Some of us were destined to spend a good part of the day shooing away the men. We were determined the women should have the opportunity to talk very frankly with one another without the inhibition of eavesdropping men.

The day opened with singing a few songs the women had learned at the Consult. The visiting leadership team introduced themselves with a bit of background information and asked each woman to give her name, age, number of children, number of years she went to school and any other information she would like to share. It clearly was difficult for many of the ladies to speak out in a large group, but with the men removed from the scene they did it. They did not object to any of the questions. In a society where the elders are honored and respected for their wisdom, people don't mind saying how old they are.

As the day progressed the team told stories of great women and of women in other Projects. The guided conversations moved step by step to a deeper level with ever increasing openness and participation. The women began to share thoughts and feelings with each other in a new way. They talked about their babies dying, or husbands who got mean when they drank, or about the struggle it was to be alone with the children for three months every year during the dry season when the husband couldn't plant and couldn't find work in the area and had to go work on one of the coastal plantations.

They also began to share their dreams. One young girl stated her passionate desire to be a nurse. An older woman confessed that she would just like to be able to write her own name before she died. That seemed to release a whole lot of women to say they wanted to learn how to read and write. The day blossomed into a torrent of ideas, emotions and sharing of dreams.

For me the finest moment came at the end of the closing conversation. A woman of about forty years of age stood and spoke. She said that all of her life she had been afraid to stand up in a group and say what she thought. She went on to state that she would never again be afraid to speak out. She was as good as her word. She became one of the leaders in the community. The same women who had arrived quietly, with varying degrees of nervousness, and probably a little suspicion, left with smiles and talking with great animation.

The ultimate demonstration of power and strength in the village women was really in their ability to "hang in there". They survived pregnancies, poverty, water hauling, scrubbing clothes in the river and hauling them for miles, street sweeping, house building, endless tortilla making, long treks on foot

through the mountains with heavy loads, dying babies and parasites. They went through all of that with grace and faith and smiles. They endured.

It always seemed to me that the women in the community were quicker than the men to engage in the work of the project. It couldn't have been because they had more time than the men, they didn't. Maybe they were already used to chopping their time into little compartments and spreading it around so that it was less difficult for them to add one more thing. I don't know what it was; but they were certainly a powerful force in the community.

PHONE MEMO

DONNAMARIE:

XEROX PHONED —

YOUR APPT. IS NEXT
WED — 9:00 A.M.
VERIFY TUES. APT.
IN CASE MR. TURTON
DOESN'T GET BACK
IN TOWN.

I.B.

The "get up and go, let's do it right on schedule" North American must make certain adjustments in the style of doing business in Latin America if he or she is to survive with sanity. In respect to the passage of time, even in the business world, there is a certain flexibility in the way things are done in the nations south of the USA. Even on the most urgent business, even when dealing with total strangers, the courtesies are honored. Before getting down to business the Latin American considers it only right to work through an entire list of pleasantries. They would include the offering and acceptance of a cup of coffee, as well as polite "chit-chat". Even phone calls and letters include God's blessing, best wishes, inquiries about health and a discussion of the weather before turning to business matters.

It surely must be frustrating at times for the multinational business executives, who must swing their style back and forth from one business call to the next. Just picture starting your phone greetings, "Joe, how are you?...Great. About that shipment that left your warehouse on the tenth of the month..." **versus:** "My esteemed friend, Juan Lopez Castillo, how are you?... And your family?... Has your grandmother finally adjusted to her false teeth?... Are you experiencing less pain from your ulcer?... How good. And you and your lovely wife enjoyed the Bahamas last month I assume... I see from the papers that your country is seeing signs of economic improvement... I must apologize for bothering

you with this, but with all due respect I have some question regarding that shipment."

I've wondered if anyone ever loses track of which type person they are talking to and switches to the wrong style. There is a special humanness about doing business in the Latin American way that is worth taking a little extra time.

Here is a suggestion for the "punctuality freaks" (and I confess to being one) in a land where a time named almost always has a silent "more or less" attached to it. If someone says they will meet you at 10:00, that **may** mean noon. When you are told an appointment will be possible next week, that **might** mean two or three weeks. It is all part of a philosophy of relaxation, letting things happen when they happen. Perhaps this philosophy is conducive to ulcer prevention. On the other hand this is a bit of a strain under certain circumstances, such as when you are holding a burst pipe together while waiting for the plumber!

As I see it, there is no good or bad in how each person relates to time, but it is important to communicate your meaning clearly. In the Project, since we came from various "time philosophies", we set appointments with each other by asking, "Your time, or my time?"

A reservoir on the mountain top did not an entire water system make! There was no sparkling spring bubbling up to fill the tank a well was needed. There were none of those fancy trench digging machines and cranes to lay down miles of water pipe for a delivery system. Hours of back-breaking hand labor were required. And there were no faucets around town to control water usage once we had it. In other words, there was still one hell of a lot of work to do before anyone was going to just trot down to the corner to fill up a jug with pure, cool water!

Endless hours, for seemingly endless months, were put in by villagers and staff alike, digging trenches, laying plastic pipe that had been donated by government and private agencies. Teams were organized by sectors and we had "work days" periodically to give a hard push with lots of people. On those days we served soft drinks to all workers and sometimes had lunch afterwards for all to celebrate the victory of work accomplished together. It was such a long haul we had to keep inventing ways to keep spirits and hopes up -- to keep the image of that water before everyone.

Conversations with a top-notch well drilling company in Guatemala City had been discouraging, as we could see no way to raise sufficient money to meet their prices. Consequently, Conacaste was on a waiting list for the services of the one and only government well-drilling rig and crew. After months of waiting we noticed that Conacaste was next in line.



Meanwhile, a friend in the USA had found three different well-drillers who were willing to come at their own expense to help us in whatever way they could. They gave both technical advice and an expensive drill bit, for use on the Guatemalan rig. The Guatemala/USA crew hit water at 100 feet and the North Americans advised stopping it there, as it was adequate water (though just barely), and they felt there wasn't a very good chance of doing better. There was the danger of losing the water altogether if we went deeper. The Guatemalan drilling crew decided to gamble on the chance for a greater output. Unfortunately, they lost the gamble and the water! So we were back to square one on the well job.

In addition to working directly on the well, the Americans were assisting in other aspects of the water system. A water engineer from the Iowa State Health Department had come with the well drillers. They all worked with us on the design of the system, as well as advising us as to how we could purify the water as necessary. A major issue was to decide exactly where to locate each of the five water "stations" in town, and the creation of a design for efficiency, convenience and good drainage. Each of the five sectors in town was to have a "station" with six or seven faucets. No one in town should have to walk more than two blocks to get water -- preferably worked out so that any up hill climb would be with the "empties", down hill when full.

The men were great. They worked out the basic design and explained how it would function. They said they would search for donations of pipes, fittings and faucets for the stations, and mail them to us with the design and all the pieces numbered. Then one of the men looked at me and said, "And you can

explain it all to the villagers, Donnamarie. It will be something like 'paint by number.'" I said to myself, "Oh, sure ... why not?" What a joke! It was a little hard to picture myself doing plumbing and construction by following a number code, and then explaining it to a bunch of grown men in my bad Spanish, but I was willing to try most anything for the sake of running water!

All the volunteers were great, and helpful, but it became clear to those of us in the Project that one of the men, Buck White, was deeply affected by his time in the village. Buck owned a well drilling company in Iowa. I guess he was typical of the well-fed, comfortable living American. He was also a church going man and taught an adult Sunday School class. He and his wife and children were active participants in the life of their small town church in Gladbrook, Iowa. You can generally figure that folks who spend a lot of their own money to live in very uncomfortable situations in order to help others must be compassionate human beings! And when compassionate people are set down in the midst of suffering, they can be so addressed by it that they suffer great pain themselves. Buck was clearly feeling the pain of being in Conacaste. And I was personally responsible for inadvertently leading Buck into an especially painful experience.

Buck wanted to get some good overview pictures of Conacaste, so I agreed to lead him to the highest spot over the village where he could get some good photos. We took the long, easy way up. We took the road up to the water tank, then we cut across a cornfield (the **vertical** type -- was a shock the Iowans never did get over) and on up the steep back side of the peak over the village. It is a breathtaking view (and climb) and Buck had a

great time with the camera. Then I suggested that if he was game, we could take the fast way down, straight forward over the edge, weaving our way down through the "yards" of all the little houses clinging tenaciously to the side of the mountain. It is not too difficult and I figured he could see some of the homes, and that the folks would be pleased to meet him. All was going very well, until we stumbled into the yard of a retarded young woman who had babies, but really wasn't capable of giving them decent care, even in the most basic ways. There on the ground, right at our feet was a baby. She was lying right in the dirt, naked and scrawny, covered with feces and dirt and snot and flies! That poor little child was about the saddest most sickening sight you could imagine. Buck looked very shocked. It nauseated me, even with my "hardening", but it was not the kind of thing you ever really get used to.

Buck kept asking questions. "How can you all stay here? ... How can you do without meat? ... Can you really help these people? ... Why are you doing this?" He found reasons for lots of errands in the city (escape?). He declared that those of us who lived in the Project were just 'Saints', and he promised he was going to tell his Sunday School class all about our work, and they were going to help us! We knew Buck was completely sincere, but frankly, we didn't count on a great lot of help from his friends in Iowa. We had learned from experience how easy it is to slip right back into comfortable old patterns and forget the experience of 1,000 miles away in another kind of life. It is only natural.

We had a lot of fun with Buck, but the best time was one day at lunch. Lunch was always served buffet style. Whoever was assigned to lunch preparation would see that it was all set

out by 12:15. People could wander in over the next hour, as they finished their work. Now Buck had not been exactly ecstatic over our food. He found the limited variety and lack of meat and deserts a little spartan. Consequently, those of us who were already seated and eating one day, were more than a little surprised to hear Buck give a great big, happy, "ahhhhh" as he served himself from the buffet. We were even more surprised to see him sit down with two plates, one of which was heaped with a creamy pile of refried beans. He had not previously shown much interest in beans. We all liked them very much, especially the kind we were having that day. Kellogg Company had donated cases of Instant Beans (like instant potatoes). They were tasty, and a great time-saver. We sauteed onion in margarine and mixed it into the powered beans with water and heated them up -- I had never seen them sold in the States, so I was surprised Buck even knew about them. He ate everything on the first plate, set it aside, and pulled the plate of beans before him, with a big smile. He proceeded to dig into them with a spoon ... took a great mouthful ... looked horrified, and gagged. I have never seen greater disappointment on anyone's face. He said, "I thought it was chocolate pudding!" We didn't stop laughing for a long time! We didn't intend to be mean, we just couldn't help laughing at the incredible expression on his face.

The day finally came when Buck and the others left. They had all been helpful in many ways, we'd had a good time, and we were sorry to see them go. Still, they said they would start the search for the donation of materials for the water stations, so we saw them off with hopeful hearts.

Everyone labored on digging trenches and laying pipe, on and on and on. We had decided where to put the water stations, we just needed our materials and instructions. So we waited and waited and waited Finally we telephoned Iowa. They said the economy was bad, and it was hard to find donors, but they'd get the stuff. And so we waited and we waited and we waited some more.

As Buck later explained, he was sitting in church one Sunday, and the minister gave a sermon about how people so often have good intentions which they neglect to fulfill. I don't know all the details, but he said it filled him with guilt, as he thought about the promise made to the Conacaste Project. He jumped up at the end of that church service, determined to do something about it. That very day began the organization of an extraordinary happening in Iowa.

After some conversations and meetings it was decided that a group of people from Iowa would go to Conacaste. They would bring with them all the materials and tools necessary to do the planned work. Not only would they help construct the water stations, they decided to build playground equipment for the children, and provide fabric and sewing classes for the women. What's more, they decided the Project should be open to others who wanted to participate, not just their own church members. Individuals going would provide their own plane fare and have a clear plan of their contribution to the work force. Money was to be raised for the new well and provide the pump and transformer for it! By the time the group was ready to leave for Guatemala, they had been publicized in the Iowa newspapers and on radio and television. Money came in from all directions. It came from individuals, other

churches, agencies and businesses. The materials and tools piled up to an astonishing quantity and value. Some people were so determined to go to Guatemala, they took second mortgages on their homes. Homemakers took part-time jobs. One woman took a loan, knowing she would have to get a job when she returned in order to pay it off.

In Conacaste the excitement began to match that of Iowa. It was really going to happen! The "shopping lists" were created, letters and phone calls were flying back and forth, and in Guatemala we were digging up streets for the pipes like a bunch of moles gone mad! The Iowa group was to arrive on the weekend after Thanksgiving and planned to be in Guatemala for two weeks.

The Iowa Story had begun. In the end it would affect a lot of people in Guatemala who didn't live in Conacaste, though we never would have guessed it at the time. A chain reaction had been set off that would surprise us all.

SUPPLIES/EQUIPMENT--CONACASTE WATER PROJECT

ITEM	WT.-lbs	EST. VALUE
Pots & Pans	200	\$200
Clothing	200	150
Misc. School Supplies	100	100
Sewing Supplies	50	150
Seeds	100	100
63' of 3/4" Galv. Pipe	71	63
84' of 1/4" Galv. Pipe	71	50
Fittings	150	650
Welding Rod & Supplies including Angle Iron	30	50
Cutting Oil and Pipe Dope	50	40
For the well:		
Pump 500TI-17DC	130	1826
100' of #8/3 Sub Cable	40	222
Well Cap	10	---
Misc. Elect. Wire 1000'	20	2100
Tools:		
Hand Tools	200	1000
Electric Equipment	150	500
Distillers	70	600
Personal Baggage		
Meat & Cheese	25	50
Transformer		
Pop Corn	6	

It happened that during the time the Iowans were bustling around getting ready for their adventure, I returned to the Institute of Cultural Affairs in Chicago to take eight weeks of courses known as The Global Academy, a highly disciplined, intensive set of university level humanities courses and pedagogy. Just incidently, I was also making the necessary preparations for my wedding to George West. As Director of the Project it was necessary for George to remain in Guatemala until the wedding. We had decided to be married in Chicago so that more of our friends and family could participate. I was to finish Academy at Thanksgiving time, see the Iowans off to Guatemala, and finish wedding preparations. Then the Iowans would return two weeks later; George would arrive in Chicago a week after that; and the wedding would be on December 21st. It was assumed that during the Academy I would help the Iowans out if they ran into any snags and do any needed co-ordination.

Phone calls from Buck White and Dick Mark (Dick was a longtime ICA associate from Iowa who was helping organize the trip) were pulling me out of classes and bed with increasing frequency as the time drew nearer for the group to leave. To top it off it had been hinted that a ticket might be donated for me to go along. It was a possibility that both thrilled and terrified me, since that would leave only one week to get ready for the wedding when we returned to Chicago. Still, I was dying to participate in the Iowa/Conacaste Project.

In Iowa, things had been moving like gangbusters! They were reporting a mountain of donated goods which they were busily packing. The plan was that all 27 people would drive to Chicago in camper trucks and a pickup, stay one night at

ICA, and leave from O'Hare airport the next morning on Eastern Airlines. They would celebrate Thanksgiving in Iowa, travel to Chicago on Friday, and fly to Guatemala on Saturday. Everything was falling into place as the big day rapidly approached.

Then they "dropped the bomb on me"! Suddenly, something none of us had thought of dawned with terrible clarity! The Saturday before they were to leave, a frantic phone call came in to me from Buck White in Iowa. Among the materials they were bringing were a giant spool of electrical line, pipes and fittings, tools, two submersible pumps, a huge electric transformer, literally tons of stuff. And until that moment no one had remembered that there was no way to pay for the transport of the materials! That mountain of goods was in **addition** to the luggage for all those people.

If the volunteers used the money they had raised in order to dig the well, to ship the equipment, there wouldn't be any money left to drill for water, so there would be no point in going! If they went without their tools and materials, they wouldn't be able to do anything, so no point in going! If they sent the materials and all stayed home, we villagers and ICA staff weren't equipped or capable of doing all that they had planned ourselves, because we didn't have all the skills of the volunteers. We were in a real "Catch-22".

I could hardly believe what Buck White said to me on the phone! "Donnamarie, we are counting on you to convince Eastern Airlines to take all this stuff for us, free! We **know** you can do it!" It sure was great that **they** knew I could do it, because I sure didn't know it! To make matters worse, I immediately realized that with Thanksgiving coming I was left with only Monday, Tuesday, and part of Wednesday, to find anyone at

Eastern. It would be the holiday weekend, and none of the executives would be working.

I tried hard to sit on my hysteria and think--and think--and THINK! I didn't know a soul at Eastern, at any level. After many phone calls and much running around, I determined that I didn't know anyone who knew anyone at Eastern, a depressing discovery. To add to my gloom, various people kept assuring me that the airlines **never** did anything like that -- never made any exceptions -- never did any special favors. (I have since discovered that to be untrue, at least with several airlines.)

By Monday noon I was in a state of near terror. Drastic action was required, that was clear! All I could think of was to (figuratively speaking) reach into a grab bag of Eastern employees and rummage around until I found the "right" executive. "Right" was the one with sufficient compassion, caring, guts and (last but not least) **power** to put all that equipment on a plane and get it to Guatemala!

Where to begin? I decided to call the reservation office in downtown Chicago and ask a clerk for help. My story to the woman who answered the phone was simple: "I need to talk to someone at Eastern who has some clout. I have a real emergency problem to solve, regarding movement of materials with a large group of folks who are flying to Guatemala next Saturday on Eastern." She couldn't have been nicer, or more helpful. She got the handbook with the names of executives in the office in Oak Brook and started reading through the list. We discarded some of the job titles as being too remote from the situation to be useful. The final target I selected was the slot called Passenger Sales, Mr. Toby (A. W.) Jones. He was elected to be my victim! I was determined that if he wasn't the right person to do the job, at least I had to convince him to lead me to the right person. At that point, I didn't care if I had to

weep and plead my way through a dozen of the Eastern staff.

It took a few hours to make contact, but by late Monday afternoon I had the gentleman on the phone to ask for an appointment. He was most agreeable, willing to see me, but couldn't figure out when. He was tied up for the rest of that day, wouldn't be in the office on Wednesday, and would be tied up in a meeting starting at 9:00 AM on, on Tuesday. I told him that I get up **very** early in the morning and asked how early he started work. He said that he was an early riser, and that if I was willing to get out to his office by 7:30 the next morning, he would see me. "YES, YES." That meant leaving before 6:00 AM to allow for the morning traffic. I would have been willing to meet the man out in the middle of Lake Michigan on a boat at 4:00 AM, if he required it! He was our glimmer of hope.

Twenty minutes before the appointed hour I was sitting in my car in the parking lot of the Eastern offices, with an adrenalin level that surely must have made medical history! If Eastern didn't say "yes" or help us somehow, I couldn't begin to imagine what we would do.

Toby Jones was just as pleasant in person as he had been on the phone, which helped a little. We settled down with our coffee, and I filled him in on the Project, the work of ICA, the work with the DePauw students, and finally the whole story of what the folks in Iowa were doing, and our terrible dilemma. This man wasn't any slouch, he was a "quick study" and grasped all the implications right away. He gasped and began to think it through out loud, "That is just impossible, but we must find a way to do it; all their work will be for nothing otherwise. I can't think how we can do it, but there **must** be some way! We can't send the things by freight, because they would arrive too late. The only possibility is to send it all with them as luggage. That is no problem as far as

Miami, because it is a big plane, but from Miami to Guatemala we use only the 727s. If there is a full plane -- well, you know how the Guatemalans shop in Miami and buy a lot, so the luggage hold is crammed! First let me call and find out if the plane is full." The plane was solidly booked, of course, that close to Christmas! The Latinos that shop in the States pass thru Guatemala, as it is a hub, the changing point for all the Central American countries. Naturally the planes would be full.

I was sitting there in absolute despair, frantic, with a rapidly sinking heart, when Toby Jones turned to me and said: "We'll find a way to do it, somehow!" He got on the phone and talked to people in Chicago and Miami. After many calls he hung up from one and said, "Okay, here's what we do. Everything must go with the people as luggage." (Doesn't everyone take transformers, pumps, and pipes on vacation with them?) He proceeded to give me careful instructions to relay to the folks in Iowa. There were precise, maximum measurements and weight requirements that could not be exceeded, or Eastern would be in trouble with the unions. Foot lockers and duffle bags were the best containers. Check-in at O'Hare would give priority to the Iowans "luggage" and count the pieces through. The transformer and reel of electrical line presented a separate problem because they were too large to pass through the opening into the luggage hold of the smaller plane. Those would go as far as Miami on the Eastern jet and then be sent by freight on a larger Pan Am plane to Guatemala. We just had to hope and pray they would arrive four or five days after the group. That was harder to control because they would be on a different airline.

There was no way to adequately thank Mr. Jones, but I said it in every way I could think of. Once the folks in Iowa had their instructions, they had to buy additional footlockers and

redistribute the weight, but it was all feasible. The only freight charges would be for the transformers and reel of wire from Miami to Guatemala City.

And joy of joys, there was a ticket for me! But I was not to let George know in advance. I was to be a surprise package from Iowa.

What a thrill it was when we arrived at the Eastern check-in that Saturday morning. We were given real VIP treatment. To the credit of the Eastern staff, they remained "cool as cucumbers" as they checked in a seemingly endless supply of what surely must have represented the wierdest array of luggage they had ever seen. Twenty-two footlockers, twenty duffle bags, luggage for 28 people, the transformer and a reel of electrical line passed through that counter. Each piece had a number label, corresponding to a list which itemized what was in each container. If number 18 should get lost, at least we would immediately know exactly which items were missing. Eastern was not about to lose anything, however. I have never seen better care taken with a group of airline passengers and their luggage.

The "graduation" from Academy, arrangement-making with Eastern and Iowa, and furthering the wedding plans, had about wiped me out that last week. I collapsed onto the plane, but what a treat it was to be with that excited, happy group of people!

When we landed in Guatemala "my gang" insisted I should be the last person off the plane, so we could really surprise George. When I walked into the customs area, they were all standing in a semi-circle around George, watching his face. If he had been more alert, he might have noticed their odd behavior. I got about four feet from him before he even saw me; THEN, what a smile. We put on a bit of a show for our audience!

'Til my dying day, I shall break out in a cold sweat at the thought of the tragic disappointment possible if Toby Jones and Eastern Airlines hadn't decided to help 1500 villagers in Guatemala to obtain pure drinking water. I don't suppose they had any idea they were saving the lives of babies and making life better for future generations.

A whole lot of people for a whole lot of reasons had a hearty thanks to give to our "Eastern Angel".

THE IOWA TEAM

Barb Boll	Phil Koester
Howard Bro	Lyle Lage
Morris Bruene	Thelma Lage
Ken Choquette	Howard Lord
Arnold Christensen	Wilma Lord
Vic Clark	Dick Mark
Dwayne Garber	Peggy Mark
Bob Gethman	John Mark
Jim Hubbs	Carolyn Moe
Jack Johnson	Mel Reichardt
Tim Johnson	Connie Schneider
Jenett Johnson	Howard White
Bob Knaack	Sharon White
Melvin Knaack	Chuck Willer
Bonnie Kock	Kurt Willer
	Phyllis Willer

The people from Iowa may have represented only a very small area geographically, but they sure did represent a wide scope of talents and professions. I can call to mind a realtor, farmers, an electrician, homemakers, a minister, a well-driller, and educators. The age range extended from fourteen to sixty-eight. It was the sixty-eight year old who was the first one up in the morning, fixing coffee for everyone.

Whatever their age or background, they had a common goal. While the water system was the major target in everyone's mind, they had also created some side programs. One of them was an amazing playground project. A great jungle gym had been designed by one of the men and brought to Guatemala in pieces. A couple of the men put it together like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. We took great pictures of it, solidly loaded with kids. The men then erected a playground size swing set in the Plaza for the older children. After the Iowans left I often saw adults on it, sitting side by side, swinging gently as they visited.

Next they constructed a very solid teeter-totter beside the grade school where there was not sufficient space for other equipment. All the play equipment was a miracle of design and construction. The playground equipment would bring joy to the hearts of the preschool children for years to come!

Two of the women came prepared to give sewing classes and arrived with yards and yards of donated fabrics, thread, pins and needles,

and patterns of all kinds and sizes. Their enthusiasm was destined to be put through something of a traumatic test. We had been adamant with our advanced instructions that **nothing** was to be given away free for the sake of the self-esteem of the people. Yard goods, as I recall, were to be sold for ten cents a yard, and the ladies were required to work on their sewing project in the class. The sewing center was set up in the front class room of the grade school which was not in session at the time. Someone had been given the assignment of helping the ladies set up, introducing them to the community women who showed up, and translating the description of how they would operate. Then that staff member had to move on to help some of the other volunteers with their communication problems. We were spread a little thin and had to run all over the village to help with translation. There weren't all that many of us with even the minimal bilingual skills. Other than one fluent, Colombian born bilingual in the Iowa group, it was mostly up to the few on our staff. Consequently, we kept moving around trying to be of help wherever help was most needed at a given moment.

I was walking down the road near the school when one of the sewing instructors came running after me calling for help. She looked pretty upset and nervous, close to tears it seemed! We hurried into the school, and it didn't take me a fraction of a second to understand why she was upset! If you have ever had the misfortune to be present at a major annual sale in a women's clothing store you may have some picture of the chaos. It was TERRIFYING!! Our village women were like women all over the rest of the world. When they found a great bargain, they went after it tooth and nail! The old killer instinct just bubbled right up. It was

even hard for me to look at those piles of pretty fabrics at ten cents a yard and not respond to the bargain instinct, so imagine what it was for people at that poverty level. The ladies from Iowa didn't have a prayer of explaining or controlling that situation with **sign language**! I figured it might take a while for those innocent, gentle women to recover from that scene.

Something else our women had to deal with was the different skill levels in village sewing. There were a couple of village women with excellent tailoring skills. They, of course, wanted to get their material and hurry home, not having any interest in mixing in with the unskilled in classes. In addition to providing the instruction, the Iowans were trying to guard against the possibility of anyone running out to resell fabrics at a profit. Some village women were able to sew fairly well but had never used a pattern and were a bit skeptical of that system. Of course there were the masses of women who, when they hemmed a dress, would likely as not do it with huge running stitches of black thread on a pink dress. Our instructors needed some help.

Eventually the sewing center got sorted out and calmed down and became a real service to the community. I suspect it took considerable time for the instructors to stop quivering.

Meanwhile, the major job of the water system was moving forward on all fronts. A small team of men worked their way through the sectors, constructing a water station in each with a few of the local sector men working with them. It was not a quick, easy job. It required a lot of plumbing and cement work. A nice finishing touch at each station was the embedding in cement a pretty, blue ceramic

tile. On the tile was the Project symbol of the Conacaste tree and the inauguration date of the water system. Conacaste is the name of a tree of beautiful and strong wood; thus the community slogan referred to the "people of good wood". The tile was a demonstration of the positive attitude on the part of the Iowa group regarding completion. A member of the Iowa team had designed and made the tiles. As the water stations were completed, each sector was finishing up the remaining pipe laying and hookup. The sectors were doing whatever was necessary for their water connection with the exception of Sector I. Sector I had been a bit on the lazy and uncooperative side during the long ditch digging period. For some reason we never did understand, in that section of Conacaste they seemed especially prone to try to finagle someone else to do the work. They seemed to believe in this instance that the Project staff and the people from Iowa were going to stop what they were doing, and dig that last forty or fifty feet of ditch in Sector I and install the pipes that would connect them up to the system. Every day or two one of our staff would remind them that they might want to get started on that stretch if they wanted a water station, but no action was forthcoming. Came the day, finally, when someone went to them and said, "The fourth water station will be completed by tonight. If your sector is not ready in the morning, you will not have a water station. No one else is going to do it for you. If in the future you want to get added on to the system, you will have to pay for it and build your own station and convince all the rest of the town to do without water while you hook up. You will have to decide!" By noon they had decided all right! The line of men out working on that street was so close together, they had to be

careful not to whack each other with their picks and shovels. Now they were digging like a bunch of moles gone mad! They got their water station.

While all that activity was going on with digging and water station construction, Buck White and colleagues had been negotiating with DAHO POZO well drilling company. They had obtained an excellent price and had the company's multi-million dollar rig in Conacaste carving out a well. That fantastic machine went into the ground, like a spoon into soft butter, with incredible speed. The owners of the drill had even been talked into doing a second well for us on credit at the agricultural training/demonstration farm. They were so impressed by what the Iowans were doing for Guatemala and by what Eastern Airline had done for Iowa and Guatemala, how could they say "no"?

At the same time conversations had been going on with INDE, the national electric company. They were critical of the success of the water project because an extension electrical line had to be run out to the well area, the transformer put in place and all of it connected to the new well. If you will remember, in our previous work with INDE it had taken a year to get electricity in the village and another six months just to get the meters. It was nerve racking to think about how fast we needed to get action on this one. We weren't taking into account the chain reaction of miracles that had been set off. Each chunk of unselfish generosity had generated the next. The Iowans had been impressed by the work of ICA; villagers by DePauw on the reservoir and pipe laying; Eastern Airline by the Iowa group; DAHO POZO well company by the Iowans and Eastern; and INDE by them all! It was an unbelievable chain reaction. At the end of the

two week Iowa visit we pumped water up into the big tank, and we were ready for the inauguration and celebration of the water stations.

What a celebration that was! Of all the celebrations I remember during the almost six years in the Project, and there were several major ones, I think the one with our friends from Iowa was perhaps the most moving and beautiful. I have always felt sorry that it wasn't possible for the DePauw team to have been there to share in that event with the Iowans. In our minds, they were with us in spirit.

The big celebration was to be held in the evening. During that day, each sector decorated their water station. They cut and dragged in huge branches of palms, tying them into lovely arches. Flowers were fastened into the palms and made into chains and bouquets. Each sector tried to outdo the others. Each sector had selected a spokesperson, and a "madrina", a beauty queen or princess chosen primarily by popularity.

As darkness fell the crowds began to gather in the Plaza. Our Master of Ceremonies was one of the villagers from the Project staff. He had developed a great flair and style for the role of M.C. Men came forth with blazing torches held on high. The five mdrinas stepped forth in long, colorful dresses, with flowers in their hair, leading the procession to the first water station. There must have been several hundred excited people in the procession, not the least of which were the Iowans. The procession gathered people and emotion as it moved through the town. At each water station a speech was given by the sector representative, a few words in response from an Iowan, a song was sung, the madrina christened the water station and the water was turned on.

It would be impossible to capture the emotion of that evening. I saw tears stream down the faces of individuals, both Guatemalan and foreigners. My own eyes were a bit moist, I must confess. There was a profound sense of brotherhood, joy and victory. So many people had been involved in the creation of this great moment. I vividly recall the minister from Iowa, walking in front of me at one point, shaking his head from side to side and saying over and over, "There has never been such a time!"

After all five stations had been formally inaugurated, the procession moved back to the Plaza for a night of refreshments and dancing to the joyous music of the marimba band. I don't think there is any happier music than that of the marimba. It is THE sign and symbol of celebration to the Guatemalan. It was a night of glory for all of us. **Everyone** received the gift of joyous sharing.

So with overflowing hearts and exhausted bodies we collapsed onto the plane to return for the celebration of Christmas. And for me, it was finally time to get down to the business of preparing for our wedding. It was a glorious season.

Over the first five years I developed a reputation for missing earthquakes or not noticing them. In this part of the world quivers shakes and hearty rumbles of earthly indigestion are a regular occurrence. People were constantly commenting on the latest shake-up, and I was constantly looking stupid and saying, "What earthquake? When?" It scared me a little because I wondered sometimes if a wall would have to fall on me before I noticed.

I was sitting in a movie once when all of a sudden the audience began to leap out of their seats and run up the aisles. Now the movie was bad, but it wasn't **that** bad! As I sat there bewildered, my companion said, "Feel those vibrations? It's an earthquake!" To tell the truth I never did feel a thing.

More often I would manage to be in the wrong place, or the right place depending on your viewpoint, to experience a quake. The village would have a ground grumbler when I was in the city, and the city would have a window rattler while I was in the country. Often there are smaller ones that aren't felt except very locally. Nevertheless the great majority of quakes I simply slept through.

I did have the awesome experience one day of getting caught in a tenth floor office as the building began to sway. It was a weird feeling. We all looked at each other wide-eyed, and instinctively spread our feet apart for balance as if we were on shipboard. There was no where to go. You **never** want to be caught on the stairs or the elevators. Tall buildings in earthquake territories are designed to sway in tremors. If they were

shook up by that and mom, I'm sorry you got our latest earthquake. It didn't last long enough to do any real damage. George and I were in the city that night...we ran out to the patio during it. I have to say it was sort of an exciting experience. Just try to take a lot of damage somewhere! I'd just as soon relax and not worry about us so much. Where ever we are in the world nature could go on the rampage about I think I forgot to tell you in my last letter.

rigid, they would snap and break up fast. I don't have any idea how long or how far they can sway before they've "had it". It depends on the engineering of each building, I guess. At any rate as I watched heavy office furniture slide six to eight inches in first one direction, then the other, back and forth and back and forth, it did give me pause for reflection. There is no decision to make in a tall building. You can only wait and hope. That time it was hardly more than a "burp" from mother earth, nothing serious.

Eventually I was bound to experience the real thing. One night in the city my husband and I were reading in bed. The bed consisted of a mattress on the terrazzo floor. Suddenly I had the strange sensation under me of waves rolling into the shore. The floor seemed to be undulating! The casement windows were rattling and the walls were moving. We stared at each other, frozen in an uncomprehending state for what seemed at least a full minute. Then we made a wild dash for the back patio. Someone later remarked that we had made a wise choice as electrical lines can come down on you in the street. We stood clinging to each other in the middle of the patio as far from the walls as we could get, shaking and swaying along with the flowers, shrubs and clotheslines.

The remarkable thing, as I thought about it later, was my reaction. The old adrenaline had sent the blood pumping through my veins like a river when the dam breaks. My reaction was of intense excitement, and my fear took the form of almost hypnotic fascination. I assume that if the quake had continued and the walls had started falling, I would have then felt the expected total terror. In one sense I had not been afraid!

A Guatemalan friend later asked how long I thought the quake had lasted. I replied, "I suppose it wasn't more than four or five minutes, but it seemed like twenty." He threw his head back and roared with laughter. Then he informed me that if the quake had lasted even three minutes at that strength, it would have destroyed much of the city. Actually it had lasted 30 to 40 **seconds!**

Many people remark as they disembark from planes or boats how great it is to be back on solid earth again. We all tend to trust that feeling of firm ground under our feet. What a sensation it is to have the firm ground heave itself up and about. There is something in addition to fear that many people experience. There is a certain excitement and thrill related, I believe, to the witnessing of such unleashed power and mystery.

And just how powerful was that one particular earthquake? The scientists told us in the newspapers the next day. It measured **six** on the Richter scale!

ESTEBAN GUCH

Quien fallecio el año del Señor 1981

Esteban showed up in Conacaste "on loan" from another non-ICA Project in order to help us with the construction of a large bakery oven. He had had previous experience in the construction of ovens. We were impressed by his capacity for hard work and his tenacity. He was not what you would call a loquacious young man, but when he spoke he appeared to be intelligent with a serious turn of mind. Esteban was a lean, sinewy build with the well-used muscles of a farmer. He was relatively tall for a Guatemalan, with a medium-dark, brown skin, and thick black hair framing a somewhat long face with high cheekbones and a longish nose. He sported a mustache which I suspect he may have grown to partially hide a scar on his upper lip. He was clearly of the Mayan Indian heritage, something of a novelty in Conacaste, a community of Ladinos.

Esteban had been with us about three weeks when he finished the oven and was ready to leave. We had been sufficiently impressed with his work to invite him to remain with us on a more permanent basis. After several conversations and some careful thought, he accepted the offer.

Estaban stayed; he worked; and ultimately, he fell in love with another staff member. She was a young woman of Conacaste who had worked with us from the time of the Consult and who was raising her little boy alone. Their romance had its ups and downs. One of the more dramatic downs occurred after a quarrel the couple had. His beloved had said she would not marry him and had walked out. I had been

working in a neighboring room, and suddenly someone shouted that Esteban was in the bathroom with a carving knife, threatening to kill himself. He must have wanted to be stopped, otherwise I never would have been able to out-wrestle him for the knife. It was not really an unusual event for Latin America. Great emotional drama in the arena of romance is quite usual. One of the village women told me that sometimes there were almost what amounted to epidemics of young men throwing themselves off the very high bridge that we crossed to leave the city, killing themselves because of unrequited love!

Well our lovers talked things out and finally did make the decision to be married. From the viewpoint of their families and the village, it would be a mixed marriage. Historically, the Guatemalan Indians were proud of their Mayan heritage, continuing to embrace the old customs. Marriages tended to stay within the village or tribal area. The Ladinos on the other hand tended to be prejudiced against the Indians, but the degree of prejudice varied by area and situation. It was worse in the city than the country. I never witnessed any hostility or unfriendliness in Conacaste toward the couple, but that doesn't mean it didn't exist at all. There were no problems we were aware of, and certainly nothing that affected their work in the Project. Esteban seemed to be well-liked in the village. At any rate it did take a certain degree of courage for the couple to go against cultural traditions.

To my sorrow, I missed participating in the wedding as I was in the United States at the time, but the event was described to me when I returned. The wedding was held at Esteban's home near Chimaltenango, and everybody seemed to have been very impressed by the loveliness

of it. All of the staff told me about the charming people and the good time they had that day. I'm sure it was a different experience as the Indian personality and style are not the same as the Ladino. Several months later, I had the opportunity to meet Esteban's parents and talk with them a bit when they visited Conacaste. They were small in stature, but giants in terms of their dignity and style. I liked them very much!

The day came when Esteban and his wife had a baby girl. Esteban was the epitome of the proud papa. I don't think his feet touched the ground for weeks! He just glowed at everyone.

In time the responsibility and cost of two children, plus the desire of Esteban's family that he join them in farming, brought them to the decision to return to Chimaltenango, leaving their volunteer work in the Project. We were sorry for their decision, but we certainly understood.

We were a bit concerned about the area of the country they were returning to. Violence had been on the increase around Chimaltenango, both guerrilla activity and government reprisal. But most of us operate by putting such fears in the back of our minds to maintain our sanity and by deciding that terrible things will happen to other people, people we don't know.

So I had tucked away my anxieties. I had vague plans to get up to Chimaltenango for a visit some day. It was upon our return from a meeting in Venezuela several months later that I was given the shocking news of what had happened to Esteban and his family while we were gone.

My husband, George, had come directly back to Guatemala from Venezuela and Panama while I had stopped in Costa Rica for three days. Consequently George had received the news ahead

of me, and was kind enough and smart enough to withhold the story from me until we were in a private situation. After reuniting at the airport, and dinner at a restaurant, George told me what had happened. I burst into tears from the shock and horror of the news, a reaction George had accurately foreseen.

It seems that Esteban was with his parents and one sister in their house when a group of armed men showed up. His wife and the two babies were in the other house a little distance away. No one will ever know who the men were, why they were there, or why they did what they did! They opened fire with their guns. They slaughtered Esteban, his mother and his father and left his sister for dead. Actually she was wounded, played dead, and lived through it. When Esteban's wife heard the shooting, she was smart enough to stay hidden with the babies. The men stole the family's vehicle and took off fast. The killers could have been guerrillas, radical right fanatics or common criminals. The family had not been involved in any kind of political activities insofar as we knew. The reason will probably remain a mystery forever.

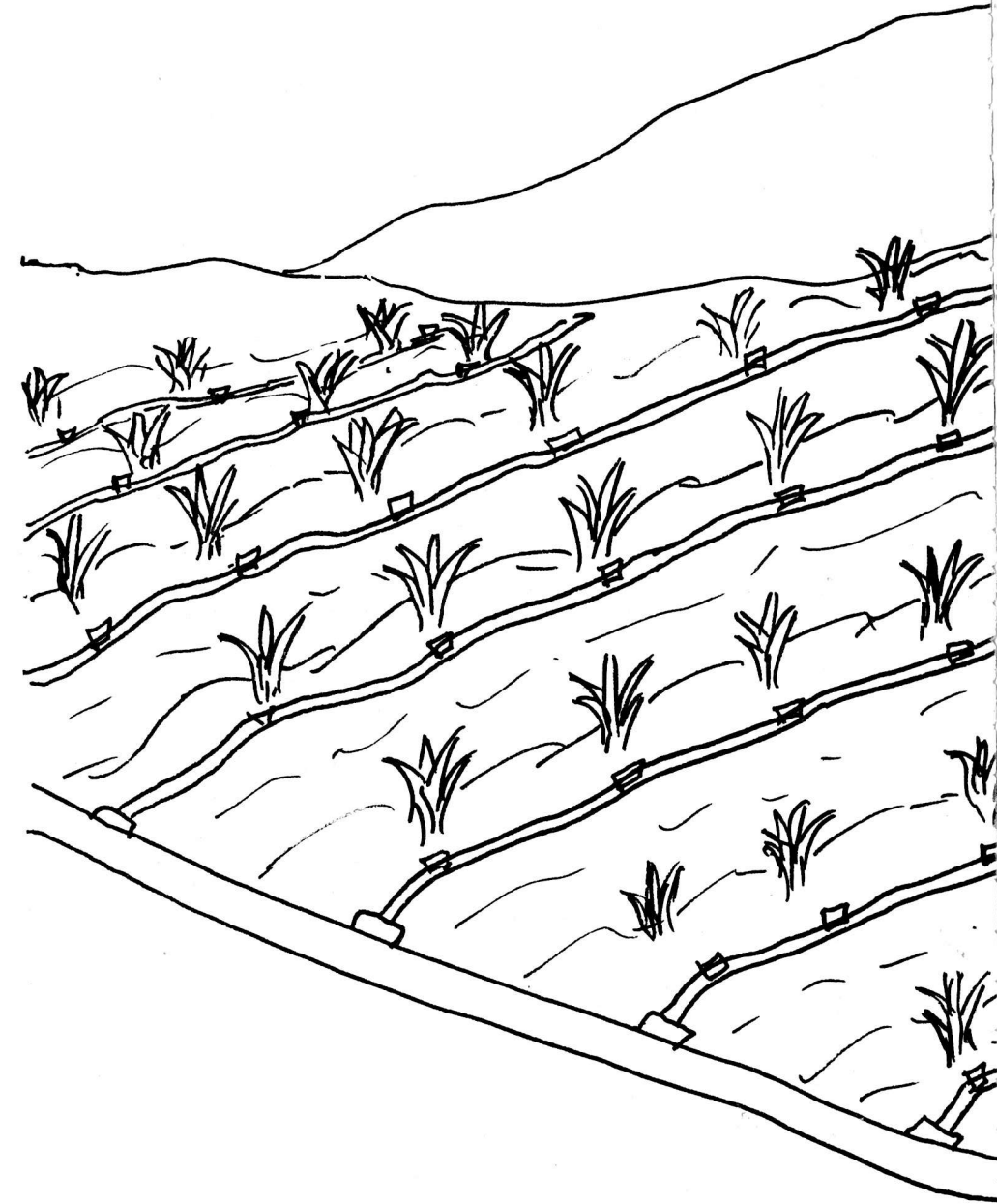
What kind of person was Esteban? Well he was serious much of the time, but when he laughed he twinkled. Underneath a quiet and dignified exterior there was a lot of emotion. He was capable of laughing hard and crying hard. The day I wrenched the knife out of his hands when he was threatening to kill himself, he fell into my arms and sobbed. He had a wondrous way with children; he really enjoyed all kids. He had accepted his wife's first child as his own, clearly without reservation.

I liked Esteban. We had some good times together. I especially remember the laughs we had trying to find our way around Mexico City on the subways during a two week assignment

working with our staff up there. We were lost more than we were found! Our relationship reminded me of an elderly couple I had known during my childhood in Evanston. The woman was practically blind, and her husband could barely walk. She used to laugh and tell me what a fine pair they were because "she was their legs and he was their eyes". She had to prop him and help him walk while he described what was in their path. Esteban and I operated a bit that way. My Spanish was a joke, and Esteban didn't have a lot of sophistication as far as getting around in a big city was concerned. But we developed a kind of symbiotic relationship that made us a winning team.

It is a tragedy and a waste to wipe out the life of a young man in his mid-twenties, just as he is beginning a marriage and parenthood. I can still see Esteban proudly carrying his baby girl through the Plaza, showing her off and beaming from ear to ear. All he asked was to give his family and his fellow countrymen the chance for a little better life. He had no special politics; he wasn't a revolutionary. What makes it so sad, so tragic, is that Esteban is a symbol of all the ordinary folks, trying to live a decent life in peace while their own governments as well as foreigners use them like pawns on the chessboard. This kind of tragedy has happened a thousand times over in Guatemala and elsewhere. This time it was in our own back yard -- really real! The tears and the pain of it were ours. Esteban had tried to do some good; he tried to help his fellow humans, if only just a little, by working in the Project.

I guess that is all that is left for us to do -- the only way to honor his memory -- our memorial to all the Estebans.



Hot on the heels of electricity and drinking water in the community plan was the desire for irrigation in the fields. Subsistence farming was the economic base in Conacaste. Most of the families in the village owned a small piece of land and clung to survival by farming the life out of it. Not only was the originally rich volcanic soil wearing out, it was being used to feed more and more people. The parcels of land were carved into ever smaller pieces as each generation in the family was given a share.

Electricity and pure drinking water were certainly key to improving both the quantity and quality of life in Conacaste. No one would question the need to deal with those things first when working to bring the world's disenfranchised into the mainstream of life on this planet. However, if you don't also deal with the deep-down, underlying contradictions in the situation, you have done nothing more than delay the inevitable disaster. What ICA contributed to a successful Project was the social development which gradually increased the self-confidence of the people. They rediscovered their history and began to believe they were capable of directing their future. Thus they could put new tools and methods to good use. It is necessary to give more than food to starving people. The poverty stricken must have seed, land, training and equipment if they are to survive and contribute to society.

In a land of year-round perfect growing climate, the richest and best farmer in the community had made a top income of \$800 for a year of work. Generally \$500 would be

considered a wonderful income for the year. That was what the families who were doing pretty well had to take care of all their needs. Each family saved enough corn and beans from their crops to survive on and sold the little bit extra. When the rains were too little, too late or too much, they were in deep trouble. It took ninety days to get the corn in and out of the ground. Then they had sixty to ninety days to plant and harvest the beans, chiles and tomatoes. For six or seven months of the year it didn't rain, so during the dry season a farmer couldn't plant unless he had irrigation.

A few farmers with wells on their land had a pump and plastic tubing which they used to do flood irrigation. They could get quite good results, but it took great amounts of water which meant a lot of gasoline to run the pumps. They didn't make a lot of money for all their effort. And there was always the possibility the well would run dry or close up in an earthquake.

At the end of the Consult I had gone back to the States to rent my house and wrap up business. Considering my employment history, I expected to be assigned to work either in the arenas of health or small business when I returned to Conacaste. Imagine my shock to discover that I was assigned to work on irrigation! I knew absolutely nothing about the planting of crops. The man assigned to be my partner, Don Richards, was about as knowledgeable as I was. When we protested our ignorance of agricultural matters, it was explained that we would be doing research regarding options in irrigation equipment and techniques, meeting with the farmers and setting up a small demonstration system on one farmer's parcela, a tiny farm, within three months. We not only had to learn about

irrigation systems, we had to talk a company into donating materials for the demonstration. Then we had to explain what we were learning to the farmers in our broken Spanish! If Don and I had taken ourselves too seriously, we might have been overwhelmed and given up. Fortunately Don had a great sense of humor, and I had my boundless optimistic attitude. So we had a good laugh over our situation and plunged in.

Believe me when I say that I learned more about irrigation systems than I ever thought I wanted to know. I'll have to admit I developed a genuine interest and got excited about what could happen with irrigation in a dry land. The Israelis had turned desert into lush gardens with it.

We learned there are three basic types of irrigation. First, there is the flood type which I've already described. Second, there is the sprinkler type which is heavily used in the States. As you drive by sprinkler irrigation, you see long pipes stretching across the fields above the crops with evenly spaced sprinklers on top of the pipe. Like flood irrigation, sprinklers use enormous quantities of water. Much of the water evaporates as it whirls through the air. Also there are limits on the time of day one may irrigate because of the danger of leaf burn from watering in a blazing hot sun.

The third kind of irrigation is called drip or trickle irrigation and seemed the best for Conacaste. It uses about half as much water. Narrow, flexible tubing laying directly on the ground snakes up and down the rows of the field. Every 24-30 inches there are little valves in the top of the tubing. Water drips or trickles out of each little valve with an equal amount of pressure no matter how far it is from the water source. A pump keeps the

water moving and is equipped with filters to keep the water clear of any debris that might clog the valves. The water goes directly to the base of the plants, rather than sprinkling all over, encouraging weeds and causing extra work. Not only that, but liquid fertilizers can be added to the water in precisely measured amounts to feed every plant equally. What's more, it doesn't matter what hour of the day you water because the water and nutrients go straight to the roots.

When I heard about drip irrigation, it sounded so perfect for Guatemala. Don and I thought we had really found the right answer -- until all the "experts" punctured holes in our dream solution. One after another they kept telling us it would be impossible for our uneducated villagers to manage such sophisticated equipment. They explained how the filters had to be closely watched and cleaned regularly, fertilizers measured carefully by formula and added at the right time, and valves checked. We could see that it was more complicated than the other types of systems, and gradually we began to knuckle under. I later realized they probably didn't know a whole lot more about it than I did.

One of the companies agreed to donate a pump, some pipe and two sprinklers. A village farmer who had a well agreed to do the demonstration on a tiny part of his land near the road where it would be easily in view of all passers-by. We actually came in ahead of schedule with our mini-demonstration, but what had we really proved? Only that if someone gives you the equipment, you can scrape up the money for gasoline, and plants will grow much better with adequate water. We may have convinced a few doubting Thomases they wanted an irrigation system.

Our big breakthrough came when we met an Israeli man, Yigal Harpaz. He was working with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) in Guatemala. He had been looking two years for the right place to demonstrate drip irrigation, a superior method of irrigation for Guatemala he believed. He claimed it was total nonsense to say that the farmers could not be trained to use the technology and use it well! What's more he offered to prove it. He had an Israeli friend, Moishe, working for the irrigation firm TOPKE. Moishe was an expert in drip irrigation. The two men came out to visit with us in Concaste and look over the farms. Thus began what came to be a seemingly endless saga built around the attaining of drip irrigation and the formation of a farmers cooperative capable of receiving it.

We knew there would be a lot of work to do, but what we thought then was barely the tip of the iceberg. As I look back I can hardly believe our naivete. We were overwhelmed with questions. Where would the water come from? How could an irrigation project be financed? How could it be managed? How could the farmers be adequately trained en masse? Could we find a way to guarantee no farmer would lose his land? Our minds rolled on and on with the potential explosion of possibility. Still we had thought so small. We had been all set to write a proposal to IADB for \$50,000 for a sprinkle irrigation system. Now our Israeli friends were urging us to submit a proposal of \$500,000 for drip irrigation.

First of all we had to select and convince a farmer to be the guinea pig to prove to IADB our villagers were equal to the challenge. After seemingly endless discussions, Senor Manuel Samayoa was the man elected to prove the point. TOPKE was to loan the equipment plus the expertise of Moishe and his helper to give

three months of training to Senor Samayoa. One half of one manzana, slightly larger than one acre, was to be used as the demonstration plot. It was decided to do one crop of corn in order to measure production against the usual village yield. Another part was to be planted in snow peas, which was an experiment at that altitude and temperature. A third part was to be put into broccoli, which was a first-ever crop for Guatemala.

For the first three months one of the TOPKE staff was by the side of Senor Samayoa almost daily. For the second three months they didn't go near him and his crops. At the end of the six months the evaluation of crop results exceeded our wildest expectations. In the midst of the dry season Senor Samayoa had more than tripled the average corn yield. The snow peas had done moderately well in spite of the fact that the altitude was a little low and the temperature a little high for them. The broccoli was a roaring success. The Samayoas had taken the truck of broccoli directly to hotels and restaurants who snatched it up and said they would gladly buy whatever they could produce. Senor Samayoa didn't need any convincing in regard to drip irrigation.

Meanwhile during all the planting, growing, harvesting and selling, Yigal and Moishe were helping us to write the proposal to IADB and getting it accepted. In addition the IADB man helped us get approval for the project from the Guatemalan government. Also TOPKE had calculated the volume of water needed if it was taken from the river, and the Guatemalan government had done the feasibility study. It had been determined that there was adequate water even during the dry season to use the river as our source.

Bringing water from the river to Conacaste was not a simple matter. It meant the construction of a pumping system at the river, running pipelines under the highway and up over a mountain, three and a half kilometers down and up into a reservoir on a slightly lower mountain. From the reservoir it could travel downhill by gravity to farms. It was no small undertaking.

It was not only a question of money, design, construction and training of men to use the system. Both IADB and the Guatemalan government wanted every conceivable safeguard built into the plan. We were totally in agreement with the requirements, but it was a tough job to figure out all the possible pitfalls that could occur and the solutions to avoiding them.

We began doing research into similar types of projects that had failed. They had certain things in common. Failure could be predicted where people had been given land and money enough for a first crop and loans for irrigation equipment, but not adequate for continuing training and support systems. Also a farmer needed to know something about money management and planning ahead. Most of the people had to worry about scraping up the money for food or bus fare for as far ahead as next week; sometimes it was a matter of how to get through tomorrow. It was unreasonable to expect them to take a good-sized amount of money from a crop, make payment on equipment, set aside sufficient funds for all expenses for the next crop and build in a contingency fund for possible disasters without training. It clearly was necessary to build all the structures into the loan to protect inexperienced people from failure.

Many people struggled for months to create the proposal for IADB. It was a plan that IADB, the government and the ICA staff all felt had an excellent chance to succeed.

The basic components of the proposal were

1. The farmers using the irrigation system were required to join the Conacaste Agricultural Cooperative.
2. The Cooperative would own the central irrigation system.
3. IADB would make the \$500,000 loan for construction of the system.
4. Loans for the individual farmers would be for the equipment in the fields, the connection to the central system, and start up costs for the first crop.
5. All purchases of seed and fertilizer would be made through the cooperative.
6. All sale of the crops would be made through the cooperative. Cash would go to the farmer only after deductions for loan repayment, and emergency fund. The emergency fund was to be built up for possible crop failures.

Repayment of the 1% loan to the cooperative for the central system was to be deferred for ten years. The most exciting aspect of the IADB loan was that the loans were going directly to the people, rather than to their government, for the first time ever. When loans were made through governments, even if they were scrupulously honest, the interest rates were too high for the villagers. In the case of the Conacaste loan, it meant the ICA staff had to be responsible for the money management, training and setting up of systems and financial accountability for the first couple of years, or until such time as the Bank and ICA agreed the farmers were ready to take over.

The hard part of the agreement was that the Bank would not allow one dime to go to ICA although they were requiring that we take on an enormous work load and all the responsibility. We agreed to the conditions because the possibility of victory in such a brand new kind of project with so much potential was too tempting to pass up. Three years later when we totaled up our staff person hours, we realized it cost us more than \$500,000 in staff time and operating expense to implement the loan!

We did convince the Bank to approve a grant to hire two experienced Guatemalans to do all the required steps to become a legal cooperative and do the bookkeeping. They would train the farmers in how to operate the co-op. This was important as no one on our staff pretended to be a farmer or know anything about co-op formation and management or irrigation. A third Guatemalan was hired on a part-time basis to do training in the fields in irrigation farming.

We discovered the truth in the old saying "One thing leads to another". We soon realized there was another long list of factors related to the irrigation project that required attention. Thirty or so farms increasing their production would not be of much value to the community unless they diversified. We had to research what types of crops to grow.

We decided that in order to get answers to these questions, we would have to get into the farming business. We needed to do practical experimentation with new crops for one thing. For another we had **two** companies who were eager to bid on the community's irrigation system. They were both ready to loan us equipment to train the farmers and get them excited about drip irrigation. It would be a

real coup to be the first company to demonstrate this success.

In order for companies to be able to bid for the construction of the irrigation system, we had to provide detailed specifications. Since none of us were engineers we had to search for professionals to guide us in writing specifications. We had the good luck to have the general manager of Miles Laboratory in Guatemala City, Lic. Sergio Barrientos as one of our supporters. He held three different engineering degrees himself and had several engineers on his staff. They worked with us for untold hours, polishing details and working out all the glitches.

When the irrigation specifications were done, the required notice was put in the newspapers and four companies came forth to pay the fee for a set of specifications. Three of the companies came back with their bids on the deadline date. Once we read the bids, we were in a bit of a dilemma. The Tecnica Hidraulica bid was somewhat lower than that of TOPKE. Both companies had loaned us equipment and technical assistance. TOPKE had been there first and had been very generous and good to work with. However, TOPKE had lost two of their technicians whom we had been working with closely and thought were exceptionally fine. The combination of price and the two technicians convinced us we needed to go with Tecnica since the equipment seemed of equal quality. It was a tough decision to make because we felt very grateful to TOPKE for all their help.

One of the important ancillary requirements in the specifications was that the company winning the construction **must** give first hiring opportunities for unskilled labor to Conacaste residents. That had the advantage of bringing some of the money through the company

and right back into Conacaste. For a long time most of the labor consisted of digging ditches for pipeline. The pipes had to run over hill and dale the three and one-half kilometers from the river to the reservoir site. Then large pipes went out in opposite directions from the reservoir down the side of the road, branching off to various areas surrounding the village.

It was our good fortune that a North American volunteer, John Foss, appeared with the decision to work with us for at least six months. John had some experience in construction and so he was quickly assigned to track the construction work so we could keep a constant finger on the pulse of progress.

In the second year of the Project, when we were in the process of submitting our proposal to IADB one of our staff members from Venezuela, Inga Bessin, stopped by Guatemala on her way to an assignment in Chicago and just never left! She was the only truly multilingual person we had on the staff. She had been born in Germany and moved to Venezuela with her parents as a young girl, where she was put in an English language school. She could slide in and out of all three languages with total ease. You might say that it was her misfortune and our good fortune that she had such great language skills. Every one of the millions of words in letters and reports to IADB had to be written in both English and Spanish. Inga was the only person capable of doing that. Consequently, she carried a work load that could kill a normal person.

Meanwhile George West seemed to slide into the role of mediator, problem solver and guide. He found himself in the middle of the various personality conflicts and arguments inherent in the exhaustion that comes with everyone pushing against deadlines. I'll never know why he didn't develop ulcers.

All the staff had moments of tension, frustration and despair. Each of us knew some moment when we broke into anger or tears. We pushed minds and bodies to the point of rebellion.

It needs to be said that to put forth the expenditure of time and effort that we did would be insane if one saw it only in the context of making a better life for a small village. What made it something else was our big picture -- our long view. We had a dream. A dream of training people to train people to train more people. We were about creating demonstrations of possibilities. We were about changing lives so those lives could create a better future for the whole world.

Well, dreams and big pictures and long views are wonderful, but sometimes it is hard to keep them clearly in mind. It was on just such a day when my spirit was in the sub-basement that I got catapulted to the stratosphere.

John Foss was the one who dramatically changed my state of mind. He came in from the reservoir construction site glowing with laughter. Three or four of the men from the Agricultural Coop were watching the mixing and laying of the new cement in the reservoir. The construction foreman had been ignoring the village men's questions and had been just generally rude. Suddenly, Jose Farjardo stepped up and questioned the foreman regarding whether the cement was exactly right for pouring. The foreman turned and blasted him with words, "Why don't you just get out of here? You have no business being here. I work for the ICA." Well, Jose let him have it with both barrels. He stepped right up to him and said, "You don't work for the ICA; you work for me. You work for us! ICA could go away tomorrow, or next week or next year. The

farmers of Conacaste will be here working to pay for this system. We will pay for the irrigation. YOU work for US!!"

I got goosebumps from just hearing about all that spirit breaking loose from Jose and the other villagers that backed him up. I knew then that even if the water never ran in those irrigation pipes we had WON.

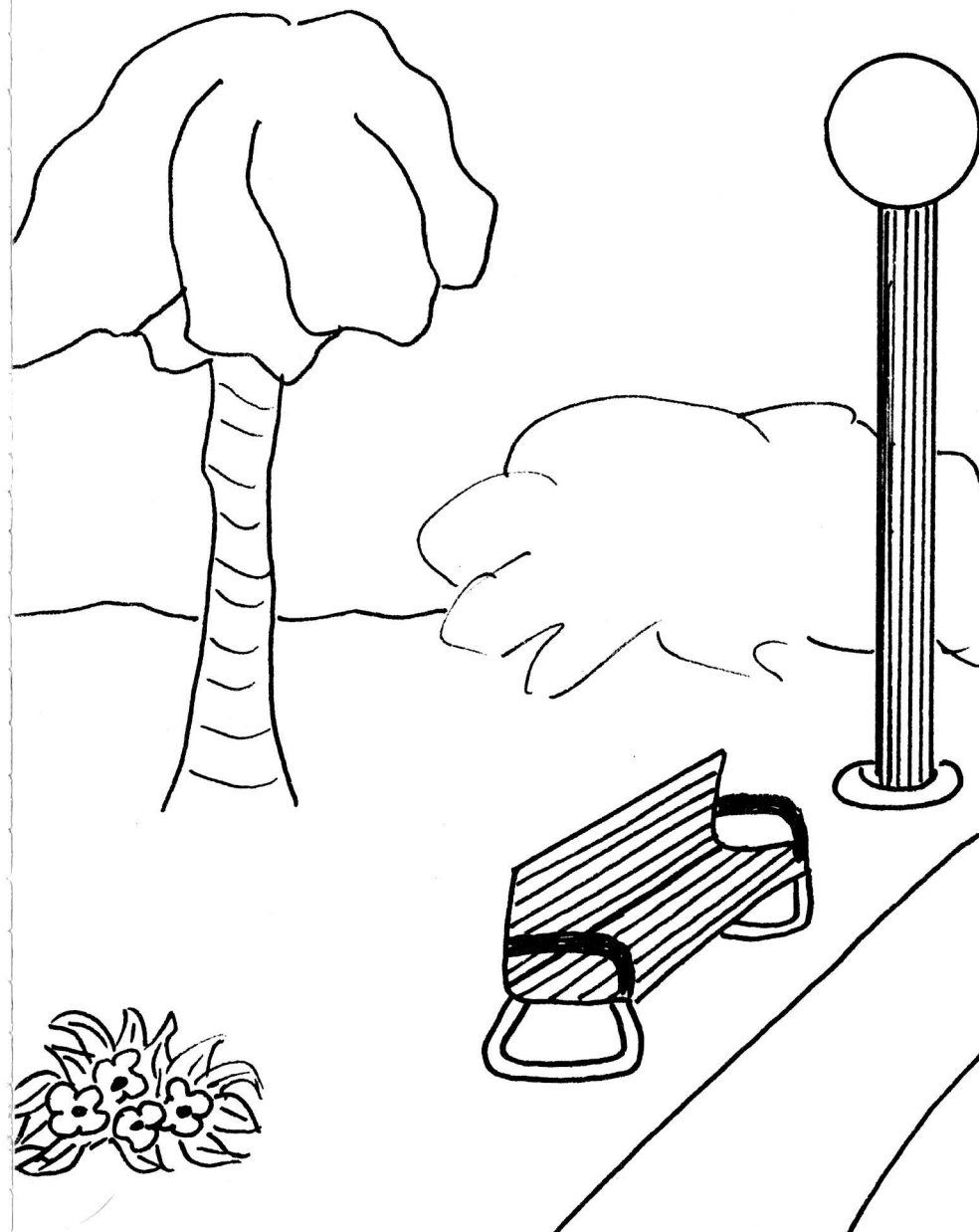
But of course, eventually the water did run in those pipes. The first three farmers to bring in crops with drip irrigation in the dry season bought their equipment and drew water from the demo farm well even before the central system was completed. They gave the most incredible, dramatic proof of the value of irrigation that could ever be dreamed of. Their production was phenomenal. As I recall it was something like seven times the previous average yield in tomatoes. To top it off, they hit it lucky at the market too. The first farmer grossed \$7,000, the second farmer \$9,000 and the third made around \$6,000. Talk about excitement in that village. That is what you could call up a bit from \$500 a year. And they could do two more crops yet that year! Even after deducting all past and future expenses, they were left with more money than they had ever dreamed of having.

There were delays in completion of the central system because of design complications with the filters at the river. In spite of that, by 1986 there were eighty members of the Conacaste Agricultural Cooperative. Although they have just begun with irrigation, the majority of the farmers have had a net income of about \$1,400 per crop, a thrilling improvement in their economic situation.

If I could collect the names of each person who put themselves into bringing the drip irrigation system into being and carve them into the cement around the edge of the

reservoir I might have to go twice around. There were so many who gave of their brains, their brawn or their money. They were people from IADB, Guatemalan businesses, our staff, the villagers, and just plain friends. But I have to say there was one person without which the miracle never would have happened, and that person was Inga Bessin.

Quinta Calle - Zona 1 - Guatemala, Guatemala



For the first two years of the Project the village was my base of work with some day trips each week into the city. By the third year my responsibilities had shifted to the development of funds and the nurturing of our Project relationships with friends and supporters in the city. That made it necessary to find a place to live in the city as daily commuting was too time-consuming. Generally I was four or five days in the city with weekends in Conacaste.

Our criteria in searching for housing in the city was very basic: first came the cost factor; second a central, convenient location; and finally, safety. By the third year I was married to George West, but he was needed much of the time in the village. The selection criteria was made in terms of a woman alone in the city.

An abundance of housing for individuals and couples who need temporary homes is available, because Guatemala City has a generous supply of large Universities. It is possible to rent a room plus have the optional services of cleaning, bed linens, meals and personal laundry hand scrubbed by the maid. These guest houses range from downright grubby to luxurious.

The first place I rented was fine; but when it was necessary for me to be in the United States for two months, we couldn't continue paying rent so we lost it. The second place we had was fine, but if we had given the landlady a broom she would have been able to fly, she was that unpleasant! Number three was the magic number. Our landlady was a nice person,

and when she had to change houses, we moved with her just a few blocks away. The room cost \$75.00 a month and any meals we wished to buy cost \$1.00 each.

We found ourselves living in an honest-to-God, real old-fashioned neighborhood. I don't believe my old neighborhood in Evanston, Illinois was any safer and it was not as convenient, nor anywhere near as **interesting**.

Our neighborhood was in Zone 1, the heart of the city, three blocks from the Palace and Central Plaza. At least eight different bus lines provided service from within two blocks of our door. We were in the bright yellow house, the sixth from the corner. On the corners were the ice-cream/hot dog place, the National Music Conservatory, a delightful small park and an uninteresting private house.

As far as I have been able to determine, there are no such things as zoning laws in Guatemala City. It is not unusual to see an elegant private home, a shoe repair shop, a tailor, a slum shanty, a church, a restaurant, a gas station, a cement block factory, a grocery store, another elegant home and a funeral parlor, all existing in a line, side by side. Nobody seems to have the slightest concern about that situation, nor does it seem to have any consequence in terms of property values. Hence, the neighborhoods can be really interesting; ours sure was!

Maybe the most important thing to say about the neighborhood was that it was so full of LIFE! It was a veritable stage for unending activity, drama, and entertainment. Just having the Music Conservatory in the neighborhood might have been enough to provide all that action, but that was only the tip of the iceberg! Right next to the ice cream store was the barber shop.

Next to that was one of the more truly weird businesses the neighborhood had to offer. When I first saw it, I thought maybe it was some kind of collection depot for old newspapers for recycling perhaps. As was the case with the majority of businesses in the city, there was no front wall, just a metal garage door to pull down and secure with a padlock through rings embedded in the cement. There was a glass showcase/counter set back a couple of feet from the front opening. You could barely see it as it was buried in papers. The case was stuffed with stacks of paper; paper was stacked on the counter, beside the counter, behind the counter, on the floor and grouped in bunches and in plastic bags. To stand back and look at the whole place was to experience the effect of one gigantic wastebasket about the size of a two car garage.

Upon closer inspection it was revealed that in addition to the stacks, there were two strange, wire racks on each side of the front where groups of papers were suspended by heavy metal clips, something like clothespins. Always in the midst of this mess, constantly shuffling papers and rearranging the stack, was the owner, easily as disreputable-looking as his store.

For a long time I passed by with nothing more than a glance since the place didn't show any signs of providing any kind of service or product that we needed. What finally stirred my curiosity was the growing awareness that there was a lot of business going on in that odd place, and a lot of the people were young. So at last I wandered over to see what the action was all about. Lo and behold it was a store to sell sheet music and song books. On one of those vertical racks was all the current rock and country music. On another rack was all the classical music. Some of the stacks of

music appeared to be new; but much of it was secondhand, complete with finger marks and spilled coffee. I should have guessed what the place was since it was practically on the doorstep of the Music Conservatory!

Next to the music store was an apartment building with a street frontage of about fifteen feet. Then came Cafe Pastel, a tiny little restaurant the size of a garage. It was open in the front with a terrazzo floor, tiny round tables with pretty cloths and lots of hanging plants. The main attraction of the place was a glass showcase right at the front that was kept filled with fresh-baked goodies like pineapple upside-down cakes, cookies and chocolate cake. It was a terrible temptation to the passerby.

After that came our house, a sunny yellow with the typical deep window ledges encased in black wrought iron grill work. It was common to see babies or family pets perched up on such ledges, enjoying the sun and watching the activity in the street.

On the other side of our house was a very **active** place; twenty-four hours a day it was a funeral home! My initial reaction to the idea of living next to a funeral home was negative, but I quickly changed my mind. It was in fact a great asset. To my surprise it provided excellent security! The front of the place had an open arch and double-doors to the office that were never closed. So the employees saw and heard everything going on in the street. Late at night would undoubtedly get very boring for them so the slightest sound outside would send them jumping up to go look. They always saw us go in and out, and they knew folks in the neighborhood so they could immediately spot any strangers or hanky-panky going on. Consequently no one in the block had to worry much about anyone fooling around with

their car or motorcycle. And I knew if I was coming in late at night alone and had anyone bothering me, as soon as I crossed into the park at the corner, one yell would have brought three or four men on the run to help me! They were there all the time as a free service, just the natural, friendly thing to do. And they **were** friendly. Once, when we had been gone for quite a spell and arrived at the house in a taxi from the airport, they all ran out to grin and wave at us, the first to welcome us home.

Another helpful thing about that funeral home was their public phone. We didn't get a phone installed in the house for months, and there are not a lot of handy public phones in the city. The only problem with using the one next door was I found it a little disconcerting sometimes to find myself arranging a business appointment while staring into the face of a perfect stranger all laid out in state, so to speak. The phone was on the patio, but then everything opens onto the patio. So there we were!

It was interesting to see all the coffins delivered. That may sound strange, but it was a new experience for me to see coffins delivered by bus and pickup trucks. In the village, most of the coffins I had seen were crude, rough pine boxes, no bigger than absolutely necessary for the particular body. In the city the coffins were wood, but generally carved, stained dark, and highly polished. Sometimes they were rectangular, but more often a long oval with rounded corners. Many of the funeral homes had showrooms with coffins stacked on racks to the ceiling. The same as other businesses, they quite often had no front wall so I had seen lots of coffins. Death is not hidden away in Guatemala. In fact the hospitals are generally ringed in the

surrounding streets by funeral parlors! Out of my cultural background, I found that hard to handle.

As I worked at my desk at the front window of the house, I saw the coffins coming and going. I had seen many pickup trucks bring them in, but one day I became aware of another way of delivery. A big second-class passenger bus pulled in and parked in front of our door. Its sign read "Antigua", and there were passengers on it. Since we are not on that route and the terminal was nowhere near us, I was surprised. Then I looked up. The top of the bus was loaded with coffins, at least thirty of them! But naturally! The town of Antigua is famous for making beautiful hand carved furniture, so why should I be surprised if they make coffins also? They obviously couldn't keep a bus load of people waiting long, and they didn't. A crew of men flipped those coffins off like they were match-sticks. In five minutes the bus was gone, and it looked like the neighborhood was having a sidewalk sale on coffins!

On around the corner from the funeral home were a lot of handy-dandy services. There was a tailor, where you could have a suit made, your socks darned, buttons sewed on, or whatever else you needed done with needle and thread. Right next door to that was a shoe repair shop where you could get rubber heels for fifty cents or leather for one dollar. They were willing to repair purses or just about anything in leather as well as shoes.

Those two places were just tiny little "hole-in-the-wall" spots, but straight across the street was one that was more so. It was dark and grim and grubby. I've seen bigger closets. But it often provided a great source for fruits and vegetables at low prices. Tomatoes might run a penny a piece for example

or mangoes five cents. To get inside the place it was generally necessary to crawl over a lady who sat on the doorstep with a pan of coals, cooking tortillas or tamales. The door was a bit high so a small, wood box served as a step. It was all a bit precarious, but once inside there were huge baskets on the floor, full of whatever produce they had brought in that day. Some days they had a fine selection, other days, no.

At the next corner was a little store where you could get basic supplies from toilet paper to cold milk, beer or pop, bread, canned goods, or liquor.

Across the street from our house was a tiny ten foot by ten foot store owned by an old lady who took rather a fancy to us. I had the impression that having foreigners shop in her store somehow gave it class to her way of thinking. She must have been robbed at some time in her life, or else she was just naturally fearful, because her modest little store had bars and screens with little doors across the front of the counter. I couldn't imagine it doing a bit of good if a serious thief came, but I suppose it made her feel better. For us it was a very handy place to run and buy two eggs, a coke, or small cans of juice. It was pleasant because the old lady beamed from ear to ear when we spent twenty cents in her store. In fact we didn't have to buy anything to earn her smiles. She could see me in the window from across the street, and she would often wave and shout a greeting. She was grey-haired, plump and always alone in the store. I never saw her go anywhere. It seemed she had a boring life so I'm glad if we brightened it a smidge.

Next door there was a shabby house that had obviously never been rebuilt since the big earthquake of 1976. An Indian family lived

there who were interesting to watch. The little girl was about four years old and always dressed in the clothing traditional to her parents village. The skirt was an elaborate design in an array of brilliant colors, wrapped around her body and tied at the waist by a woven band. Her blouse had the traditional, identifying embroidery work. Sometimes she was barefoot, and sometimes she wore leather thongs. She was a miniature replica of her mother. She looked like she belonged in somebody's exotic doll collection. Normally she was all smiles and big, black eyes, but one day I happened to witness her putting on a real snit! She had apparently wandered further from home than her mother approved of. Mama had given her a swat on the tail and marched her home with a good scolding. For the next thirty minutes she proceeded to let the whole neighborhood know her feelings regarding the indignity and injustice of life. She sat on the doorstep yowling and screeching and sobbing. Camille was never played with greater drama.

Her little toddler brother was fascinated by her. He was a cutie also. His outfit generally consisted of a shirt, nothing else. He was usually barefoot and bare-bottomed, a handy way to handle the toilet training stage.

The mother of the children had her own little business going making tortillas. A big pile of firewood would show up on the sidewalk, and the whole family would haul it inside. The black smoke would start rolling out all the cracks, crevices and two doors of their house every day by mid-morning. You could hear the slap, slap of her hands, shaping the tortillas. People would start drifting into the house with their baskets, bowls and cloths to buy their tortillas for the noon meal.

There was most often a cacophony of sound rolling out of the Conservatory: vocal, piano, horns, marimbas, and drums -- all at the same time. A lot of music came out of the little park across the street too. Nervous students getting in the last moment of practice before the auditions. There were flutes, guitars and horns, singly and in little groups. I loved walking through the park always, but it was especially great when the musicians were active.

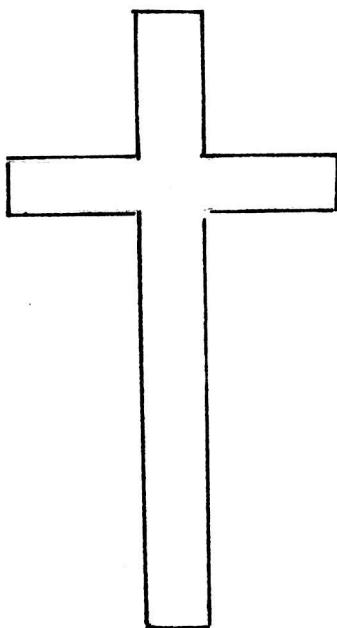
The park was right on the corner with a diagonal walk cutting across it. Right in the center the walk made a circle around the bust of a hero. The bust was on a five foot pedestal with a ring of flowering plants encircling the base, which in turn was circled by a black, wrought iron fence. There were a remarkable number of trees for the size of the park, lots of benches for the abundance of lovers of all ages and descriptions, plus a line of benches facing the street for the folks waiting for buses or getting their shoes shined for 25 cents. The lights in the park were old-fashioned and charming. Grass was always in a state of struggle as no one was about to stay off it. People stepped on, slept on it (often all night) and picnicked on it so that during the dry season it almost died altogether, only to amaze one by bursting forth green once again after a couple of rains.

In many places in the world you can be fined for throwing your trash on the ground. In Guatemala I had the impression that the image is to throw your trash on the ground in order to provide jobs for more people, sort of a means of stimulating the economy. Our small park received its share of trash, but we had a small, round, grouchy man to keep the park clean, pruned and polished. He worked like a beaver to keep the place sparkling!

My most surprising view of the park came early one morning when the whole city had been preparing for the visit of the Pope. I stepped out the door to see magic had happened overnight. My beloved park looked like a fairyland. All its curbs were painted white, and every tree and post was painted white or gold up to about four feet off the ground. It was a delightful effect.

The best thing about the park was that it was lived in! For that matter I guess that would express my feeling about the entire neighborhood. It was like a carnival all the time, a swirl of diversity. Bus loads of kids came into concerts at the Conservatory. The Indian lady came daily with her assortment of vegetables, coming right into each house with her baskets and sitting on the floor spreading her goods out for your selection. The man pushing his ice cream cart with all its little bells. The trash men coming into the house with a drop cloth, dumping in the trash and bundling it up to haul out to the cart, Santa Claus style. There was the flower lady who came down the street with her huge basket each morning. And all the vendors singing the songs of their glorious wares. The man who pedaled up on his bicycle cart with huge containers of fresh milk and chunks of white cheese with the women rushing out to the street to meet him with their pitchers and jugs.

I enjoyed stepping out the door each morning into the neighborhood most of all because of the way people treated each other -- smiling and extending courtesies that made it feel like a real community.



In the very early days of the Project, some of us on the staff who were from nations other than Guatemala got into a conversation about how it might be really possible to "get inside" the people of a nation and culture other than your own. George West was part of that discussion and expressed his theory that one of the best ways to understand how any particular group of people think about life is to study how they think about **death**. He pointed out that the attitudes people have regarding death directly and forcefully affect how they live their lives. He also suggested we research who the nation holds up as heroes and who their martyrs are (which also relates to how they died). He wasn't suggesting that we rush out to observe people going to funerals, although that might be one thing to do in the way of research.

I have always been grateful to have participated in that conversation because it caused me to be sensitive to and aware of situations, celebrations and clues in conversation with my Guatemalan friends, that might have otherwise "gone over my head". It also caused me to ask questions that I otherwise might not have thought to ask -- questions that gave some revealing answers.

One of our early observations was that a lot of the Latin American heroes (not just in Guatemala) were people who might be labeled "losers" by North Americans. They were the valiant leaders who had struggled mightily to save their nation from invaders, but had lost. **HOWEVER**, they invariably had been beloved leaders, great warriors, and most important,

had died nobly in an effort to save their nation. Dying nobly was the important clue! We began to see that everywhere in the literature, music, films, every aspect of life emphasized the embracing of death with noble dignity. Whether one died on a battlefield or in a city hospital or in a mud hut in a village, it was clearly important to die with dignity.

I had a very interesting conversation with my Guatemalan friend Rolando, who had come from a poor family. He had worked hard, managed to attain a good education and had worked his way up to a fine job with middle class status. We got into the particular conversation when I asked questions about the Dia de los Santos (Saints' Day) that is celebrated on November 1st. Those of us who were extra-nationals had gone over to the cemetery nearest to the Project (in Sanarate) to try to figure out what was really going on in that celebration.

Every year in the week before the Dia de los Santos our Guatemalan staff members would request time off to go to the cemetery to paint the tombs of deceased family members. The cemeteries all over Guatemala were bee hives of activity as people poured in with brushes and buckets of paint. Most of the tombs were above-ground cement vaults in the style of those in New Orleans in the States. I've never been sure why they were above-ground because they certainly do not have the New Orleans problem of soggy earth -- quite the contrary. It may have to do with rocky, difficult to dig soil. At any rate, that is the prevailing custom. The bodies are slipped in the end of the tomb and the opening is sealed with cement, where names, dates, etc. are written. Some of the tombs are single, while some may be very large and have space for several family members. You may remember that in my

description of arrival in Guatemala I talked about the gorgeous all-white tombs that marked the side of the mountain at the edge of the city. Apparently, white was the rule for the cemetery, but almost every other cemetery I saw in Guatemala was a gay potpourri of color. The cemetery in Sanarate had tombs of hot pink, bright aqua, lemon yellow, mint green and any other happy color you could think of. A few tombs were painted white, but not many. In addition atop the gay colors many of the tombs had niches for flowers. Generally they were filled with plastic flowers. Some of the graves were in the ground, but even they usually were covered completely by a cement slab which could be painted. The cemeteries were very cheerful looking places.

At the same time all the painting was going on, people coming out of the city on buses were loaded down with flowers, both in bunches and wreaths. All of the wreaths were plastic, but the bouquets were both alive and plastic.

On the day of the holiday itself there was an absolutely massive migration of people around the country. Everyone seemed to be returning to visit the graves of their family. Some of us decided to go visiting too, to see if we could figure out what was really going on.

Vendors were gathered at the Sanarate cemetery entrance to sell food and flowers and mementos. We moved on in and wandered around. I can only describe the scene as having the atmosphere of a quiet picnic party. People were gathered around the tombs. Individuals took turns talking to the deceased. They seemed to be filling them in on all the family news of the previous year. For the most part, people appeared to be cheerful and relaxed. In addition to visiting with each other and the deceased they were busy decorating the tombs

with flowers and wreaths and in some cases paper streamers as well. One exception that I spotted was a woman who stood in front of a tomb and sobbed. She was the only person I saw who was crying, and when I wandered close enough to read the inscription on the tomb I understood why. It had been only a few days since the death of her loved one.

One sight that gave me a rather strange feeling (because it was so out of step with my background) was the picnic lunches that were being spread out on the ground; in the case of the ground graves, many families spread their picnic right on the slab and used the grave as a table. I guess when you think in terms of sharing the meal with the deceased, it isn't so strange.

In the conversation with my friend, Rolando, he explained that this "visitation" with the dead is a very important ritual for the Catholics of the nation. It is a ritual to "feed" the dead and talk to the dead (tell them how the crops went, etc.). Even the food is of a special kind. They have a traditional platter of food called "Fiambre" which consists of cold meats and cheeses and vegetables. I had noticed many signs up in city restaurants advertising Fiambre for the Dia de los Santos. In addition to the Fiambre it was the custom to eat special sweets of Indian (indigenous) origin.

Rolando also pointed out to me that if someone dies in an automobile accident, a cross is placed by the side of the road at the death-site and the family also visits there and decorates the cross. The family wants to be sure they have not missed their loved one in case the soul has not moved from the death site to the grave with the body. (On bad curves, or where a bus has gone off the road there are sometimes twenty or thirty crosses, a real

incentive for safe driving). I had the impression from our conversation that in addition to honoring the soul, more superstitious people believe that the soul could cause them some trouble if they don't honor it properly.

Probably the most important point Rolando made regarding the Guatemalan attitude toward death was his explanation of how very important it is to his people that they die with **great dignity**. One accepts his fate and composes his mind, body and loved ones for the inevitable. Rolando insists that they have no fear of natural death! I think I have to accept his statement as truth when I think of what I witnessed of death and the reaction to it in our village of Conacaste

Whenever I found myself in conversation with a seriously ill person and tried to talk them into going to the hospital for help, almost invariably the **first** response was a firm, "Well, but it is quite possibly my time to die, and I wish to die in my home with my family around me." I never sensed any fear inherent in that statement. We foreigners seemed to be the ones who were fearful.

When anyone died in the village everyone in the village was welcome to come in the evening for an all-night vigil. (It was OK if you didn't feel able to stay up the entire night.) The village laymen who looked after the Catholic Church always led the community in saying the Rosary as the first part of the event. Those of us who were not Catholic followed along as best we could, in order to honor the family of the dead.

The deceased was in a plastic body bag in a closed, pine-box coffin (closed in the interest of sensitivity to those present, since it was a warm climate and there was no embalming). Chairs and benches were set up facing a great

display of fresh flowers, greens and palm leaves surrounding a photograph of the deceased, with lighted candles in front. This might be in the front room of the home but was often outside. If it was outside, the men often did a quick construction job, creating a roofed area of palms. Whether inside with a floor of cement or dirt, or outside, it was the custom to spread a thick carpet of pine needles. Sometimes plaster figures of the Saints were borrowed from the church to enhance the "altar" arrangement.

Once the rosary was completed (this could take an hour or more), the ladies of the household, assisted by women friends from the community served coffee and tamales to everyone present. (This took a long time, as it was often necessary to retrieve plates and silver to wash for the next people.) Once the rosary and eating was done, people played card games or visited quietly. Generally, very little crying went on, even from the most immediate family. The exception might be in the case of the death of a child or rather young person -- then most likely only from the closest of relations. People expressed sadness that someone they liked was gone and might mention how much they would miss them. Or they might worry out loud about how they would manage without them -- a practical question when that came from a widow with small children and no income. Somehow there always seemed to be a thread of fatalism that wove consistently through the entire society. I never experienced anything but acceptance, **real** acceptance of the death.

The next morning the coffin would be carried to the church for a special service. Again the villagers would say the rosary and prayers and sing some songs, all led by a laymen, since almost no family in our village

could afford to pay the priest to come over from Sanarate to say a mass. Then some of the village men would pick up the coffin and lead off the procession to the cemetery by Sanarate. Villagers would join in the procession as it passed. The family, and a good many villagers would walk the entire seven kilometers up and down the winding mountain road, in what was frequently 90 - 100 degree heat. Later on in the Project as the economy improved and more vehicles were available, families sometimes hired a pickup truck to carry the coffin. Even if one was not joining in the procession, it was expected that everyone would come out in front of their house to stand respectfully by the side of the road as the coffin and procession passed. When the church bell tolled we would always leap up from whatever meeting or work we were involved in to line up in front of the house. And we would send at least one person to join the procession as a matter of courtesy. We could not have expected the villagers to respect the work of the Project if we had not been ready to respect their customs and courtesies.

On the one year anniversary of each death, an event was held at the family home, quite similar to that of the night of death but somewhat more celebrative, closing off the official year of mourning. Again it was important that those of us working in the Project attend for at least part of the evening. We discovered that Latin Americans celebrate fervently and frequently, and death is no exception.

When I tried to sort out all that I had heard and seen regarding the cultural attitudes about death, my mind went spinning off in different directions. On the positive side their fatalism, religious faith, customs and celebrations all seemed to serve to help

individuals to be at peace with themselves and remove much of the fear of death. This appeared to enable them to accept and survive in situations of poverty and stressful living conditions.

On the negative side, the very acceptance and fatalism they embraced made it harder to believe themselves capable of changing their situation. You can readily see what the implications of that attitude were for the work of the Project. All that we were doing was focused on getting folks to stop waiting for someone or something else to do things to them or for them. We were nurturing them along toward making decisions to take responsibility, make plans and shape their own future. The attitudes of the culture made some aspects of our work more difficult.

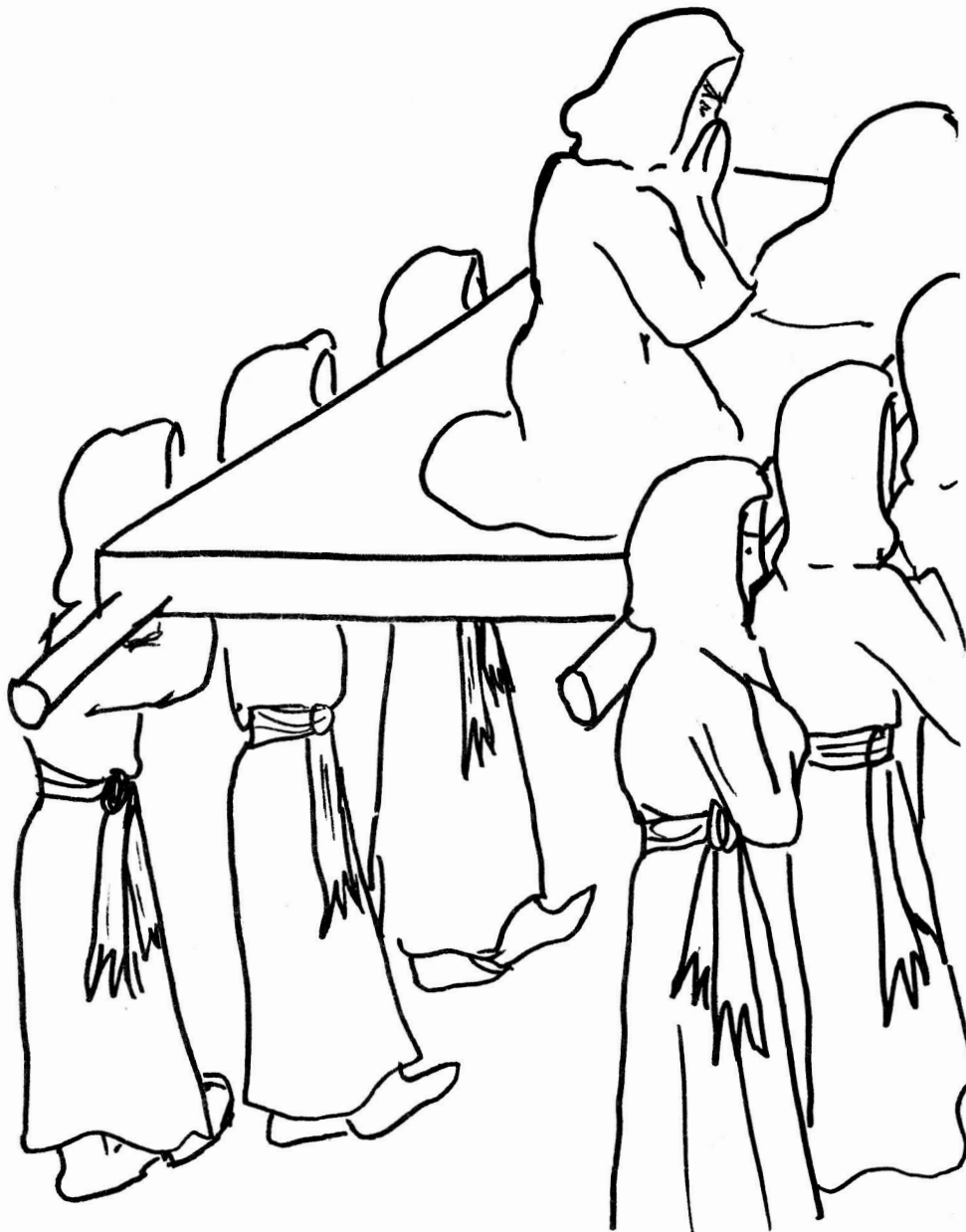
It occurred to me that in the United States, most of us work hard at looking younger. Staying youthful has become a goal for great masses of North Americans. It finally dawned on me that all of the face-lifts, diets, health clubs and cosmetics -- all of the youth worship, has to do with our fear of death! Each of us in our own way is doing a little "self-deception number"; "It's not going to happen to me." Well, we know it's going to happen, but not really.

In Guatemala because of their attitudes about death, among the living the people they respect are those of maturity and experience. The villagers do not idolize youth.

For me the most helpful thing about understanding (to some degree at least) the "death philosophy" of the people was that it enabled me to communicate and work with my neighbors more effectively. I finally understood what they were really saying to me in the various situations we found ourselves in. I never stopped trying to convince people

to save a life; but knowing how they felt, respect for their position (and a certain degree of admiration) gave me clues as to how to approach each situation more effectively and with less danger of giving offense.

It took a while, but finally we discovered that our Guatemalan friends took very much to heart the phrases in the Bible that speak of whence we came and where we go ... dust unto dust ...



If I could name only one thing that Latin Americans have a special talent for, it would be their gift for celebration. In Guatemala it seemed that every time we turned around there was another holiday, another celebration. Not only did we have the expected array of world-wide religious holidays, Independence Day and national heroes to honor, but every little village was named after a saint which they celebrated with a **week** long fair. At the very least, we were expected to attend and participate in the fairs of Conacaste, Sanarate, and Monte Grande, since they were all in our municipality.

To select just one celebration as extra special out of the great numbers we had to choose from might seem presumptuous, but I would dare to name Semana Santa which literally translated means Saint's Week. It is the week before and through Easter.

I think it is safe to say that almost every living soul in the nation **went** somewhere for at least part, if not **all**, of Semana Santa. We had some hair raising experiences travelling that time of year. I especially remember the end of one Semana Santa when George and I were returning from Puerto Barrios by bus. Information regarding times and numbers of buses leaving had been sketchy. We had no choice but to wait and see. Next to one of the bus stations was a restaurant where we sat and had a cold drink while we waited and hoped. A lady who wanted to practice her English struck up a conversation with us. She was there to put her son on a bus for Guatemala City where he was enrolled in secondary school.

While we visited the waiting crowd was expanding at an alarming rate. Our new acquaintance noticed this and announced we would never make it on the bus when it finally did arrive. She had an idea. She invited us to bring our things and get in her car with them. We drove out to a toll booth at the city limits and sat down by the side of the road to wait. What that smart lady had remembered was that the buses, coming into town to load up, would all have to stop to pay the toll. That would give us a chance to talk our way on to the bus. We had waited about 20-30 minutes when up rolled one of the cross country buses with reclining seats and wide windows that slide open sideways. It was great luck to have big windows as we would be crossing desert area in midday heat, and there was no air conditioning! We managed to talk the driver into letting the three of us get on the bus there. We said our good-byes and thank-yous to the lady and relaxed in bus seats that were exceptionally comfortable and luxurious for Guatemala.

As we rolled back the bus station, we were amazed to see how large and anxious the crowd had grown. It made us really grateful to be already ensconced on the bus. Little did we know how lucky we were! The second the bus stopped it was completely and solidly enclosed by the crowd. Bodies were pressed against the sides like stamps on an envelope! The bus driver looked nervous to me, and I shouldn't wonder. He did not immediately open the door. People were not to be deterred by a closed door however. They simply started climbing in the windows! Much to our amazement groups had apparently elected their most athletic member to climb aboard to save them seats. With a hand-up and a shove from behind, a woman wriggled in our window head-first and tumbled

into our laps. Then she went scrambling to claim the seats across the aisle that the young man coming in that window was about to grab. It was an incredible free-for-all that was scary to us. We hung on to our seats and each other as we watched wide-eyed. When the driver opened the door another whole dimension was added to the competition. There were a few arguments regarding territorial stake outs, of course, but fewer than I would have expected. Everyone was jockeying around to squeeze out a bit of space somewhere. If they couldn't squeeze three or four into a seat, they grabbed one of the small wooden stools from the overhead rack and plopped down in the aisle. Within ten minutes the bus was solidly packed, and we were ready to go. For me the most amazing part of that scene was that people remained surprising pleasant and decent in the midst of all the chaos.

While Semana Santa was a vacation time for everyone in the country, those of Christian persuasion considered it the major celebration of the church. It was a time for all kinds of pilgrimages. For Guatemala a great percentage of the pilgrims would gather in the ancient city of Antigua where one of the world's more famous reenactments of the crucifixion took place each year. Because it was so famous and in such a gorgeous place, not only huge numbers of Guatemalans came each year, but hordes of tourists also. Because we knew that it was a terrible mob scene, most of us working in the Project spent our Semana Santas elsewhere for the first two years we were in the country. But by the third year we decided to go find out what all the excitement was about. We had all been in Antigua many times, but George and I had never been there for Easter.

Of all the picturesque places there are to see in Guatemala, Antigua is certainly among the top ten. It is a beautiful town of Spanish architecture and cobbled-stoned streets, ringed by spectacular volcanos. Whether you arrive by bus, car or motorcycle it is exciting because you come careening down the most incredible, long, steep mountain road conceivable. The outside edge of the road had signs that warn you to brake with your gears. As you land in the valley you slide off the smooth modern pavement onto cobblestones. The story-book quality of the scene that greets you might have been created by Disney.

Antigua was the first capitol of Guatemala. It was almost totally destroyed by an earthquake. Guatemalans are not people who give up easily, so Antigua was rebuilt. Then it was destroyed by mud slides when one of the volcano cones, filled with water from torrential rainstorms, gave way and slid down to bury much of the town. They dug out and restored the town, but this time it was decided to move the capitol to its present location in Guatemala City. The terrible earthquake of 1976 did a lot of damage to Antigua as well as many other parts of the country. Restoration of Antigua seems to be a continuous task, but certainly a worthwhile one.

There are beautiful hotels in Antigua, some of them large and modern, many others that are small and built around flower filled patios in the old-world style of the Spanish. But for those of us on severely limited budgets there are the pensiones, a type of boarding house or inn. We had discovered a delightful pension during the course of our stays in Antigua for Spanish tutoring. The landlady was a lovely person and at \$5.00 per day per person plus \$1.50 for a huge breakfast, the price was right!

At Semana Santa the whole city of Antigua becomes the stage, and the "show" is spread over days. Jesus washes the feet of the disciples on the steps in front of the great Cathedral in the Plaza. A Roman soldier on horseback and dressed in toga and breast armor stops to read the proclamation of the crucifixion. Jesus kneeling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is carried through the streets on Thursday evening. On Friday Jesus, the thieves and the Romans reenact the long march to Calvary. On Saturday the processions of penitents continue and at night the glass coffin, rimmed in gold with tiny white lights, carries the figure of Christ around the city. On Sunday morning two separate processions move to meet each other in the Plaza. One procession is composed entirely of men and carries the Christ. The other is all women and they bring the Virgin Mary.

Guatemala adds a unique art form called carpets to the drama of the crucifixion. These carpets are elaborate designs made of colored sawdust, flower petals, grains, seeds, chopped greens, and pine needles. It is interesting and fun to watch the creation of the carpets of Semana Santa in Antigua.

In our pension the landlady's family came for both a family reunion and to create carpets in front of the house for the processions. In the front patio stacked around the tile walks that bordered the flower garden were wash tubs and plastic bags and boxes with the ingredients for making carpets. In addition there were two-by-four planks and wood stencils, necessary tools for the job. And what a job it was!

After blocking off the street with sawhorses some of the family swept the cobblestones. A frame of two-by-fours laid on the street marked the form and edges of their carpet. It was about twenty feet long and twelve feet wide. In order to create a smooth surface on top of cobblestones on which to "draw" the design, a three inch bed of natural color sawdust was spread and smoothed inside the framework of wood. Then the surface was "painted" with a layer of dark green sawdust. It took them a long time to be satisfied that it was level and smooth enough. When they finally had agreement that it was ready, they moved on to begin work on the border. The design, repeated over and over, was elaborate and multicolored. There was enough of the same stencil to have four people start at each corner and work to the right adding colored sawdust into the border. Others came behind adding the background of flower petals, followed by still others adding seeds to the intricate design. Hours later they would remove all stencils and put on the outer edge trim of whole blossoms.

Meanwhile work began on the huge floral designs in the center and toward each end. Planks were laid across the outer two-by-fours so people could crawl on them, being careful not to disturb the perfect, smooth surface. It was a back breaking labor of love that continued through the entire night. By 6:00 on Friday morning, it was possible to stroll through the streets of Antigua to see the carpets ready and waiting for the processions. We didn't miss that chance!

Each carpet that we came to seemed more beautiful than the last. Generally those with the most delicate, intricate designs were made entirely in colored sawdust. Larger designs were made of a greater variety of ingredients

and used whole flower blossoms. One amazing carpet extended for thirty feet then on around the corner for another fifteen to twenty feet, forming an "L" shape. The variety of colors, styles, designs and themes seemed to be endless. It was a feast for the eyes. Some of the "artists" were still putting finishing touches on their carpets even as the first procession of the day was forming.

Once we had feasted our eyes sufficiently on the carpets, we hurried on to see the procession. A hundred Roman soldiers led off dressed in royal blue or crimson red velvet togas, with matching plumes forming crests on the tops of their helmets. Some rode on gorgeous horses, but most of them marched in a long line at each side of the street. After the soldiers came the penitents, men dressed in purple robes. Any devout citizen who wished to pay the small fee, supply his own costume and march for endless hours could participate in that way. Each penitent carried a tall wood staff topped with a metal cross. In the middle of the street the drama was played out by soldiers with whips and the thieves clad only in rags with their crosses roped on their shoulders. Then, spaced wide intervals came the larger than life plaster characters. All of the figures and scenes were set on large platforms of polished mahogany carried on the shoulders of more purple-robed penitents.

Little platforms with just a single figure could be carried by three men on each side. The largest with several figures or a whole scene with plants and rocks required fifty men on each side. Even with many sharing the load, it was necessary to substitute often. Men would slip from the sideline of penitents to replace someone. It was done one at a time to avoid any drastic weight change on the other bearers. One man guided from the front center

position and one at back center. Going around corners with the long platforms required a coordinated dance routine of swaying, rocking, little sidesteps and a few steps backward and forward.

The guides were dressed all in white with a purple sash and a purple headband holding their headcloth in place. All of the men in purple robes had white sashes, white headcloths and purple headbands. The Virgin Mary's platform was accompanied only by women who wore black dresses and black lace mantillas. The lines down the sides of the street wore whatever they chose, but the women covered their heads with black mantillas. The day before the women wore white; now they were heading for the crucifixion so they had switched to black.

As the procession headed toward the first carpet I held my breath. Those along the sides of the procession on foot or on horses passed easily between the edge of the carpets and the curb. The small platforms also moved easily along the sides. But when the big platform with Jesus came, it was carried straight down the middle. Given its size, no other choice was possible, and besides the carpets were designed for Jesus to "walk" on followed by the Virgin Mary. So as we watched, all those hours of labor were wiped out!

It took me a while to notice that when the entire procession had passed, the artists rushed out into the street with brooms to clean up the mess and **start all over again** to get ready for the next procession. The people in our pension made five different carpets for Semana Santa! When people wanted to make a carpet quickly, they would lay a thick base of pine needles, then do very large designs using whole flower blossoms and large pods. Sometimes that type would be made in a different shape also -- perhaps round or oval. Of course, the

first set of carpets were more elaborate because of the amount of time used to make them, but they were all beautiful.

Another facet was the band made up of low beating drums and wailing brass. My mind always moved to the image of the New Orleans funerals as I listened to the music. One band marched behind the major platform carrying Jesus and sometimes there was a smaller one behind the platform of the Virgin. I can't say I really liked the music, and yet it was appropriate for the occasion.

Watching people participate in the Semana Santa celebration in Antigua was an education. I watched an old woman push through the line of penitents to wave burning incense in front of the Jesus figure as she wept and asked for mercy and help. I watched fathers and sons, mothers and daughters walking for miles and miles as a symbol of their faith. The processions wound through the city hour after hour after hour. I pushed my way into crowds that swept me along into the plazas and cathedrals to view the carpets there in front of the altars and to light candles and to buy tortillas, sweets and balloons. It was a wonderful life experience.

On Saturday afternoon I finally plopped myself down on a curb at the edge of the main plaza in a state of sheer exhaustion. The procession had moved on and so had most of the crowd. Lots of people were still wandering at random with their ice cream cones and cotton candy. As I sat there gazing around, an Indian family decided I had found a good spot in the shade and "set up housekeeping" right beside me. In fact, they had me surrounded. I seemed to have been absorbed into their lives temporarily. The whole family worked at their

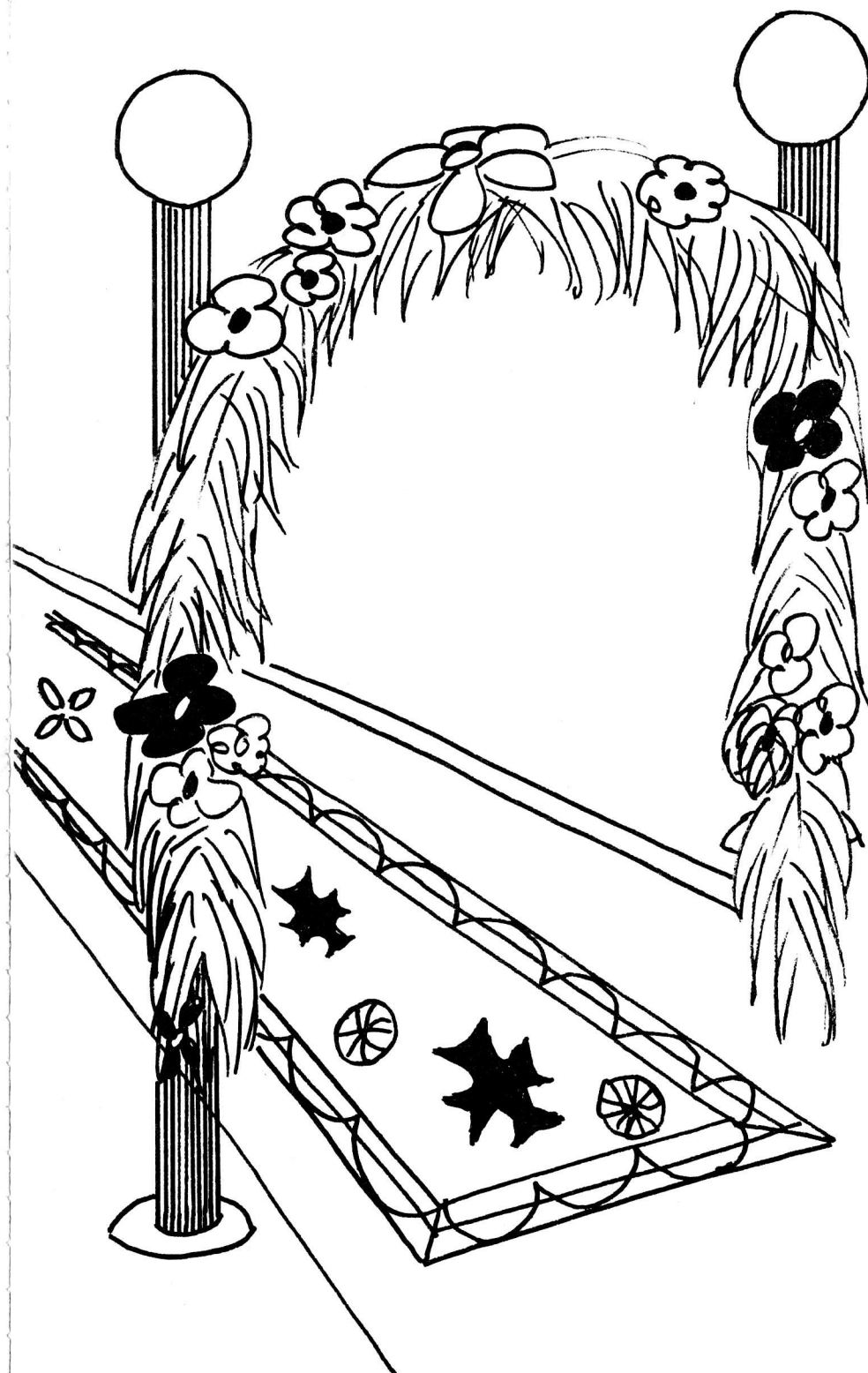
business of making balloon birds to sell. Only the nursing baby and a toddler were exempt from work. The rest blew up balloons, twisted and tied them, glued on wings and painted on eyes. They were sitting practically on top of me so it was hard not to notice what they said. As they were chatting about this and that, a meandering tourist, identified by the camera around her neck, the sun-lotion visible through the sides of her net bag and the sunglasses, map and brochures, caught my eye. She was a young woman and her attire was a bit unusual. She was wearing a man's felt hat, a shirt tied up around her middle and a garment which more or less covered her bottom. Even rather conservatively styled shorts are a bit startling to Guatemalans outside of Guatemala City and certain resort areas. What this young lady was wearing was white, **short**, draped shorts open up the side to the waist. I was wondering what Guatemalans would think of her outfit, when the father of the balloon-selling family answered my unasked question. I heard him snicker, poke his wife in the ribs and say, "Look! Look at that crazy lady wearing a diaper!" I laughed out loud before I could catch myself. I hadn't meant to let them know that I was hearing and understanding what they were saying. They didn't mind at all. The wife giggled. Their eyes twinkled and they seemed to find it fun to share their commentary. I spent the next half hour in pleasant idle conversation with the couple before I wandered on.

The procession on Saturday night was the most beautiful of all, with long lines of penitents carried candles and platforms sparkling with lights. The glass coffin outlined in tiny white lights was dramatically pretty. The streets and plaza were tightly jammed with people, which made the next morning

a rather shocking surprise. We went back to the plaza expecting the same huge crowds. After all, it was Easter morning and in the States, that had always been the biggest and most glorious part of the celebration. In our Congregational Church in Evanston, we had important services for Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, but the emphasis was on the glorious celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday morning. I always had the impression that my Roman Catholic friends and neighbors were in equal, if not even bigger, celebrations on Easter morning. Therefore, we were really startled to see a very small gathering of people in the Antigua Plaza on Easter Sunday. A small procession of men garbed in purple and white carrying Jesus moved to meet an even smaller procession of women now dressed all in white carrying the Virgin Mary. Priests and acolytes were swinging the censers of incense. A bishop gave blessings and went through a ritual which we were unable to hear or understand. As the processions joined and headed for the Cathedral, we headed for Guatemala City to attend services at a Guatemalan Protestant Church. We had seen an extreme example of emphasis on dying a noble death while the glory of the resurrection appeared to be much less important.

Attending the Easter services at the Protestant church in the city was not unlike my memories of Easters in Evanston except that everything was in Spanish. The glorious music included the Hallelujah Chorus, and the church was packed with people. Here the emphasis was on the resurrection. I wondered if the evangelizing Guatemalan "reborn Christians", who were predominantly converted Roman Catholics, were putting the emphasis on the resurrection or the events leading to it.

I do know that the Semana Santa we spent in Antigua was an experience I will always treasure. We had been immersed in beauty, humor, religious awe and a carnival atmosphere -- fabulous!



I am not a Roman Catholic, but as time approached for the arrival of Pope John Paul II in Guatemala City, I was ready to brave the crowds for a glimpse of him! It is hard to explain or recapture, but a fervor built up as the nation prepared for this visit in May, 1983.

Mayors and city planners who have a dream of cleaning up and rejuvenating their cities, should start by issuing an invitation to the Pope to visit them.

Once the visit was officially announced, buildings were repainted and refurbished at a rate beyond belief! Construction already underway was speeded up. Street and sidewalk repairs also seemed to get a shot in the arm. The giant cathedral with its exquisite trim on the main Plaza was repainted and rimmed and spotlighted with dramatic lighting. Clearly, private homes as well as the public buildings were getting the 'treatment'. The interesting thing was that this was going on in sections of the city and country where one could be 99% certain the Pope would never lay his eyes. The fix-up, clean-up and redo was going on EVERYWHERE!

As the arrival drew nearer, the frenzy increased. Groups of students, neighbors and street cleaners turned out with brushes and buckets to paint all the curbs white. Next the trees and light posts were painted either white or gold from the ground up to a height of four or five feet. Where there were long lines of trees or posts the colors were alternated. It was not uncommon in Guatemala to see trees in some of the parks with their trunks painted

white, but the addition of gold was something new, and so was the effect of seeing painted trees and posts wherever you looked.

Then huge banners, bunting and signs of welcome appeared on buildings all over town. Last, but certainly not least, came the construction of huge arches of palms and flowers stretching across the streets and boulevards at intervals along the Pope's processional route. And, as in Semana Santa, there were intricately designed carpets of flowers, petals, seeds, grains and colored sawdust. Decorating the streets where the Pope would pass was an incredible labor of love.

Even if one were not interested in seeing John Paul, it was worth a trip to Guatemala City just to watch all the people who came to see him. Obviously it was not only the Catholics who were turning out for the occasion. Every conceivable kind of human being showed up in the capitol. The police were warning to be careful for the thieves that would work the crowd, and I suppose the police and army were very worried as they prepared for tight security. It would have been a special horror if any harm came to the Pope in Guatemala.

One surprising piece of information was that the Pope can't sleep just anywhere. He can't drop in to the nearest Holiday Inn or even go to sleep in the nearest Catholic parish house. He must stay either in a bishop's residence or the residence of the Apostolic Delegate to the host nation. Although John Paul was to travel to Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador, his 'sleep time' would be spent in either Costa Rica or Guatemala. The Pope was destined to be bounced around Central America like a ping pong ball after an initial stop in Lisbon, and concluding

with a trip to Haiti before returning to Italy. His schedule was enough to make the most sophisticated world-traveler blanch. From Lisbon he went to Costa Rica, then to Nicaragua on March 4, but back to Costa Rica for the night. On March 5, he went to Panama, then back to Costa Rica to sleep. On the sixth he went to El Salvador for the day and then he arrived that night in Guatemala. He was to spend the day and night in Guatemala and go to Honduras on the eighth for the day, returning to Guatemala to sleep. Departure ceremonies from Guatemala were to be held at the airport on the morning of the ninth. The Pope would stop at the airport in Belize only to say mass, before leaving Central America for Haiti. The Pope had visited Mexico before, but never Central America, so it was an historic occasion.

On the morning John Paul was to make his procession through the streets of the city, we were out bright and early. Huge masses of people were in the streets and the great Plaza in front of the Palace and Cathedral. The scene reminded me of a cross between Mardi Gras and the Rose Bowl parade. It was a gorgeous sunny day and the city was sparkling. Even the arbors of flowers in the park seemed to be showing off with an extra burst of color. Pope John Paul was to enter his 'Pope-mobile' in front of the Cathedral, circle the Plaza (two blocks in size) and turn down Sixth Avenue. We had decided it would be impossible to get near enough to see him in the Plaza, so we stationed ourselves on the sidewalk on Sixth Avenue in the first block off the Plaza. The street was very narrow there, with buildings right up to the edge of the sidewalk, so by the nature of the physical arrangement everyone was guaranteed a 'close look'.

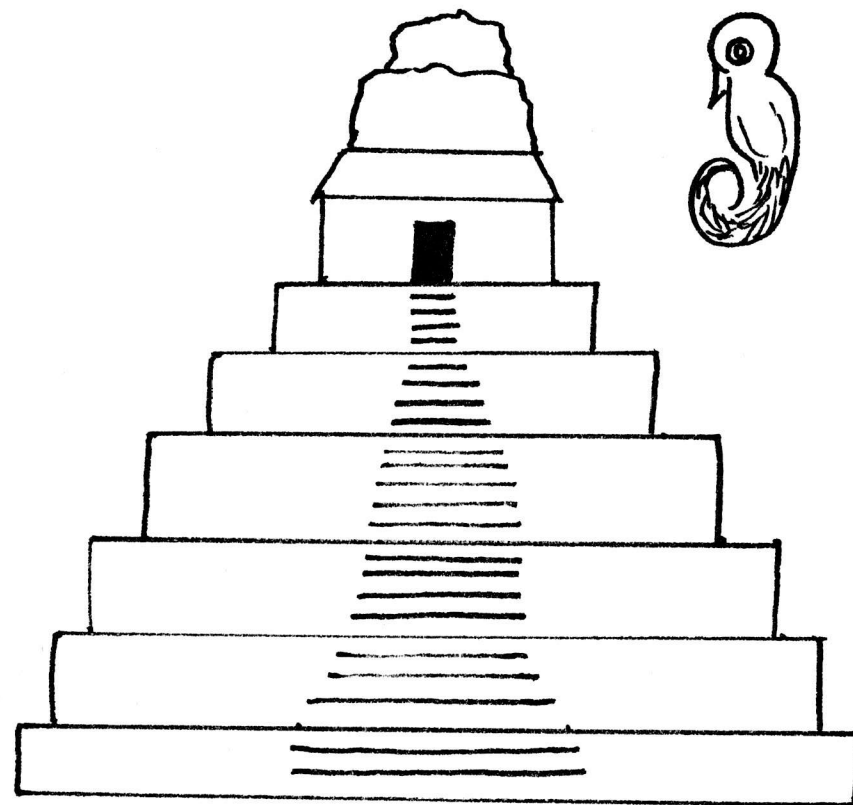
We knew when the Pope had started moving around the Plaza by the cheers which moved like a tidal wave of sound, around the Plaza, coming closer and closer to us. Then suddenly there he was, right in front of us, not fifteen feet away, standing in his 'Pope-mobile'. I had a glimpse of dazzling white robes, a smile on his face, a raised hand, as he whizzed by, tearing through the carpet of flowers. They must have been going almost thirty miles an hour, which is very fast for what is supposed to be a procession! I suppose it was an important part of the security design, but it was disappointing to have him fly by so quickly. Still, we were lucky to have been so close that we had a good look at him.

We had seen him at about 8:30 in the morning, and he was scheduled to say mass at the huge military parade ground at 9:30 AM. So we hurried off to join the crowds waiting for him there. Traffic was closed off on the major streets where the Pope had passed, and we walked down the middle of boulevards under the beautiful arches of palms and flowers. Thousands of people were flowing like a river toward the parade ground. We waded through the remains of the flower carpets. The vendors were everywhere, selling food and souvenirs. Some Guatemalan friends of ours were among them, planning to make their fortune out of this auspicious occasion. Unfortunately, instead of making a fortune I believe they lost money! They had stayed up all night making sandwiches of beans and cheese, simple fare they thought would appeal to all the peasants pouring in from the country. They were right about the type of food, but people brought their own food with them, and they dropped down on the ground wherever they could find a space to have a picnic.

Nothing could have prepared me for the sight of the parade ground. The grassy earth was covered with a carpet of human beings for what seemed like miles! I could see the wooden platform and altar that had been constructed, way off in the distance. People had spread out blankets in some sections and were sitting on the ground. Other areas were solid with people standing. Many people had radios on -- the only way to hear what John Paul was saying, because no sound system could reach over the distance.

Even an old tank, put to rest on the parade ground, was covered with people. They were leaning and sitting all over it. Someone told me later that a newspaper somewhere in the world had printed a picture of it with a caption that indicated tanks were necessary to 'keep the peace'. What a silly thought. As if that poor old rusty tank would have been of use for anything other than a bench!

We wove our way through the crowd but never could get close enough to really see the Pope very well again. It was fascinating to study the faces of the people. Many of them had expressions of rapture. Almost everyone seemed to have entered into the festive spirit of the day. It is thrilling to see vast crowds of folks with smiles on their faces. The world could use more days like that -- **everywhere!**



My propensity for missing earthquakes was only exceeded by my ability to avoid the political coup d'etats that are so much a part of life in Latin America. Not that coup d'etats are the whole story of political life in Guatemala. Historically the nation has a regular pattern of elections. Most often, the elections involved more than two political parties in competition.

During the Conacaste Project Consult, in June, 1978, Guatemala was preparing for the Inauguration on July 1 of the newly elected President, General Lucas. As usual, the losing parties had claimed that it had been a dishonest election, and tensions were running high. Consequently, we foreigners were "treated" to our first experience of a body frisk. Our Consult team studying the economic aspects of the village set forth by bus one day to visit factories and businesses in the area. We were a mix of villagers and foreign "experts", so we were a somewhat strange looking conglomeration of people. As we entered Guatemala City to tour a fabric factory, the police flagged us down, obviously having pegged us as suspicious looking. We were all ordered to disembark. All the men were lined up placing their hands on the side of the bus with feet spread apart. The women had their identification papers checked and were lightly and quickly frisked by policewomen, while the men were given a more thorough check by the male officers. We were permitted to return to the bus a few at a time, after it had been inspected. Some of us hauled one of our young male Peruvian colleagues back

from the window as he leaned out with a camera to photograph the continuing frisking procedure. It didn't seem smart to do anything that might embarrass or increase the nervousness of the police. In our naivete we went laughingly on our way.

The government managed to "keep the lid on" the tension. General Lucas kept control until March, 1982, almost his full term of office. National elections were held on March 23, 1982, and the new President-elect was General Angel Anibel Guevara Rodriquez, of the same political party as President Lucas. There were strong grumblings regarding the honesty of the election; but even so, we were not really prepared for our first experience of a coup d'etat.

George and I didn't experience it firsthand, because we were working in Mexico City at the time. The moment we heard the news of the coup, I phoned the U.S. Embassy in Mexico to explain about our international staff working in Guatemala and ask for an evaluation. They explained that our embassies don't talk directly to each other but through the State Department in Washington. They promised to contact Washington and call me back with an appraisal of the situation. They phoned back within a half hour. The information was a bit incomplete, but basically reassuring. The airport was closed but was expected to open the next day, and there appeared to be no violence and no reason why we couldn't return by bus as planned. They recommended we keep trying to call friends for firsthand information. After a couple of hours we were able to talk with friends in Guatemala City. They laughed at our anxiety and said everything was fine. People had gathered on the streets and rooftops near the palace to watch the changing of governments, as if they

were observing the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace! So on March 23, 1982, a triumvirate of young military men took charge of the government. On May 28, 1982, General Rios Montt, was declared Chief of State. Then on June 12, 1982, he was declared President. Most amazing to me was the fact that an entire government had been smoothly replaced in a few hours, and within a few months a man had been declared President. All that without violence or elections!!

From our perspective President Rios Montt was a considerable improvement over the Lucas regime. During the last six to eight months of the Lucas government the situation had become increasingly scary. The kidnapping, torturing and killing by the "White Hand Death Squad" had been on the increase, and if it was not formally a part of the Lucas government, it clearly was not being **stopped** by them. At the same time, the guerrilla activities had been on the increase. It was hard for ordinary folks to decide if they had more to fear from the left or the right. It was impossible to know, for sure, which atrocity was being committed by which side. Sometimes government soldiers would enter a village disguised as guerillas, and the guerillas often disguised themselves as soldiers in order to lay blame on the enemy. Meanwhile we were horrified to read and hear all the terrible stories of what was going on in Guatemala as it came back to us from the rest of the world through the news media. Much of it seemed twisted, and it was all stated with such absolute authority as **FACT!** It seemed that the folks in the States and Europe knew and understood what was going on, while the people who lived in Guatemala were in confusion.

For those of us working in the Project, those last few months under the Lucas regime were the scariest time we lived through. The Indians in the outlying villages were really caught in the middle. The guerrillas would knock on their door and tell them they must give them food and support, or they would be killed. Then the army would come along and tell the same people that if they gave support to the guerrillas, they would be shot! Some choice!

The majority of the people seemed to hold the cynical opinion that anyone in top government is going to rake off as much money for himself as possible. The Ladino population of our village did make an exception regarding one particular President from the past. That was President Jorge Ubico, who confiscated land from the **previous** President, which **he** had confiscated from the owner. The land had been a large finca (plantation), and the peasants who had worked for the landowner lived in one area of the finca, forming a village known as Conacaste. When President Jorge Ubico took over the land, he did something new and different with it -- he gave it away! In 1933 an announcement was posted that the peasants could file a claim for a piece of land. Don Juan Campos from Conacaste saw the notice and made haste to notify other men of the village so they could register for farm land. Consequently, the majority of families in Conacaste today own small parcels of land. Ownership means the land can be passed from father to son, and land can be sold to someone else in the village, if they will live there and use it! It is permitted to sell to someone outside the community, but **only** after it has been offered for sale to **every** land holder in Conacaste. Title is held through a special government agency which checks all the papers

and procedures every step of the way. It is a protection for the people who lack the education and sophistication to protect themselves from the unscrupulous and guard against return to the giant fincas controlled by a few very rich people. I have been told that Guatemala has the greatest percentage of land ownership by peasants of any country in Latin America. There still are some large fincas; but they generally provide jobs, homes, schools and health clinics for the resident workers. I know of one finca where the peasants threw out the guerrillas when they came around to cause trouble. They were satisfied with their situation and had a strong sense of loyalty to the owners of the finca.

You can well imagine that President Ubico was popular with the peasants of Guatemala and the middle class; but he certainly was not popular with the radical right political groups or the United States which labeled him as a Communist. President Ubico remained in office from 1930 to 1944 when he was overthrown in a coup for a more conservative government. Most Guatemalans believe that the North American government gave solid support to that action.

The humor to all the political activity is that most Guatemalans will shrug and tell you it doesn't make the slightest bit of difference which people are in charge. If you seriously study the history of government in their nation, it is easy to understand how they came to that attitude. All the people really want is to live in peace, to farm their small plot of land, and to give their children a better chance at life than they had! Sound familiar?

The guerrilla strategy is very clear and smart. They realize they don't need to fight an all-out war, and they brag about having plenty of patience and time. They do not hide who they are or what they are about. Several

small, relatively weak, guerrilla groups gathered in Cuba to unite forces and plan strategy. They openly announced the meeting and returned to Guatemala prepared to work more effectively. They were out to make people nervous and **destroy the economy**. In a country where a great portion of the economic base is dependent on tourist trade, that is a relatively easy job. Plant a few bombs around the city, tell plenty of horror stories around the world and the tourists are scared off pretty fast. When the tourists stop coming, the very first people hurt are those waiting tables and changing beds in the posh hotels and those earning their livelihood by the skill of their hands: weaving, carving wood, making silver jewelry and elegant leather goods. In other words, the people who form the backbone of the economy, but who are just ordinary folks without clout! Big businesses and governments can hold out for quite a while, but the "ordinary folk" go under pretty fast. So when the tourists stay away, they are doing exactly what the guerrillas want them to do.

When the bombs first started going off in the city, it was clear that they were not intended to kill people. They were arranged at places and times to destroy property and create fear and chaos, but the Communist revolutionaries were trying not to alienate the masses of people. They used explosives to blow out the windows of shopping centers and skyscrapers or knock out electrical service. They would break into prisons and release hardened criminals to create more problems for the government. This created more crime and chaos for the government to deal with, while putting them in the embarrassing position of not being able to announce the situation to the public.

To make an announcement of the extent of criminal activity might cause panic and would be tantamount to admitting a victory for the guerrillas. Shoot-outs, attacks on the power stations and car chases went on at night. Consequently during those bad months, the streets that had always been buzzing with activity in the evenings were deserted by 7:30 or 8:00 PM. In a city where it was about as cheap to eat out as at home, the restaurants and sidewalk food vendors had always done a booming business. During those bad times the restaurant business turned into a disaster!

The almost constantly delightful weather in Guatemala had always kept people outside to enjoy the parks, visiting and "people watching", and when you add the great numbers of movie theatres, you know that nights in the city had always been a whirl of humanity. When everybody started staying inside at night, it really affected the spirit of the city. The streets were spooky. We hurried inside too when we were in the city.

We took our risks and experienced some near-misses along with the rest of the population of the country. I remember walking along the city streets with my husband one day when a lovely house caught my eye. I tugged at George's sleeve and pointed it out to him, and then we noticed a plaque on the gate post that identified it as the Spanish Embassy. Just a little later that day it was the scene of shooting, fire, and the death of several people. It was also the death of the diplomatic relations between Spain and Guatemala.

Early one morning, George and I set out to meet with John Turton, the General Manager of Xerox. The Xerox offices were located on two floors of the twenty-story Chamber of Commerce building. It was one of the modern examples of

architecture in Guatemala City, located on its own triangular plot of land, with streets edging in on all three sides. In front was a busy boulevard merging by way of a traffic circle into two others. The streets at the sides of the building were more quiet and used for local traffic and parking. We had agreed to meet with Mr. Turton at 6:45 AM because we were to begin a seminar with the sales force at 7:30 AM. The main entrance would not be open that early so we had agreed to meet at the underground garage entrance at the back of the building and go up together in the elevator from the garage. We knew there would be no problem parking beside the building at that hour!

It happened that we arrived at the building early, a little past 6:30 AM. We were about to pull in beside the building and park when one of us had the bright idea to go down the boulevard for a cup of coffee. We had our fast cups of coffee and got back to the building. What a shock! Five minutes earlier a carload of explosives parked beside the building had blown up. The guerrillas had used one of their favorite tricks of parking an old car chock-full of explosives beside what they wanted to destroy or damage. By using a timing device the driver could deliver the bomb and be far away by the time it went off. The damage that can be done by a car load of explosives has to be seen to be believed. There was a huge crater in the street where the car had been. If we had been parked on either side of the building when it went off, there is very little chance we would have lived through it.

All the glass in the building had been blown out, and steel window frames had buckled. Windows and roofs had been exploded out of nearby smaller buildings also. We

parked across the other side of the boulevard and walked over to the building in a state of shock. We were terrified that John Turton might have been caught in the blast; but as we approached one of the officers, John came running up to us. He assured us he had arrived just after the blast. He then asked us to go up to the office with him to assess the situation. He had already obtained permission from the officials. So we started climbing up the eleven flights of stairs to the Xerox office. No way would we have trusted the elevator, if in fact it had been operable! I was wearing high-heeled, sandals, so I stepped v-e-r-y carefully. We were ankle deep in shards of glass all the way. The men with their sturdier shoes walked ahead of me. The trick was to put one foot forward, carefully, pushing glass to one side so you could lower the foot and repeat the process with the other. Unfortunately it was a windy day and with all the windows gone, it was a battle to hang on to briefcase and banister while shuffling through the glass without being blown over. The destruction was almost unbelievable to me. Office walls bulged out into the hall, water was running down the walls from burst pipes and giant plants ripped from their pots added dirt, leaves, branches and pot shards to the crushed glass. Paper was scattered all over the place too. If anyone had left important papers on their desk the night before, they were gone! Some of the inside doors had been blown clear out of the building; they were just gone!

Walking into the Xerox office was a special shock because we were so familiar with it. Just the week before we had sat in a meeting in the conference room with its wall of windows overlooking a gorgeous view of the city and mountains beyond. We had expected to meet

We selected a small, windowless, inside room and started shoving chairs into it. The salespeople were arriving so we all pitched in to set it up and bring some order out of the chaos. It was a long, narrow room, awkward and much too crowded; but in fact we had a very good first session. I was amazed at the attentiveness and participation while we all sat in the midst of the sounds of clean-up and repair. The courage and spirit of the Guatemalan staff was something to see! We sat in the middle of a bombed-out office and went on operating as if everything was quite normal. It struck me that each time people don't fall into hysterics, each time they pick up and go on in the midst of frightening and threatening situations, each time they take control of the situation, they are winning the battle against the terrorists. I firmly believe Guatemalans will be winners and survivors, as long as they maintain that stance.

For our part, we were heartily grateful that no one had been killed, and that we had decided to have a cup of coffee!!

A strange and interesting thing about all the violence going on in some places in the country was the fact that 54 kilometers from the city in Conacaste you would not have known these things were happening. It was hard to believe we could have been so lucky in our selection of a working location. Because the topography in our area was more desert-like with fewer trees, that meant it was not easy to find quick, hiding places. This made it less attractive to the guerrillas.

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Development Bank (IADB) for the drip irrigation. This special project within the Project had a variety of innovations and exciting possibilities which the Comité de Reconstrucción Nacional, embassies and business friends were watching with great interest. None of the people who might have been hostile toward it seemed to be noticing it, thank God! I thank God, because an agricultural man, working in another project was assassinated, and there were always numerous threats and killings of people working with the poor. Both the political left and right **could view** the creation of cooperatives and the stimulation and training of people to think for themselves, plan for themselves, and generally take responsibility for their own futures, as a threat to their power. Because we knew this, we always tried to maintain a low profile. As I used to tell the Political Attache at the American Embassy, we worked so hard at keeping a low profile, we were practically crawling on the ground! Although it was peaceful in our area, we were nervous about attracting any undue attention. It wasn't just a question of our own safety but a matter of not wanting to bring trouble to the village.

More evidence of the danger possible to villagers working in organized development projects was made clear to us by the experience of our friend Padre Burke, who had worked in an Indian community for many years. The focus of his work was creating the least expensive and most attractive houses possible. They had developed some lovely models. Padre Burke also was interested in applying some of the ICA methodology in comprehensive community planning to his group. As a result of our interest in each other's work, we spent some time together exchanging ideas and information. It was obvious that his community had great respect

and affection for him. Apparently someone did not like that fact. One night the mutilated body of one of the project participants was dumped on Padre Burke's doorstep with a note attached, saying the priest would be next unless he left the country immediately. Padre Burke left Guatemala. It must have about broken his heart because he loved the nation and the people and considered Guatemala his home. We only learned of what had happened after he had gone.

Even though we did not sense ourselves to be in direct danger, we remained very much on the alert and did everything possible to protect ourselves. In addition to keeping a low profile, I checked in regularly at the American Embassy for a briefing on the situation as they perceived it. We were in constant conversation with our Guatemalan friends, especially in the business world. During our almost six years of working in Guatemala, the time from September 1981 to the coup in March 1982, was when we felt a violent, total revolution might begin at any moment. Consequently, we tried to keep the gas tank topped-off in our old VW pickup, and I went to the Mexican Consulate as frequently as necessary to keep the visas of everyone on the staff up to date. Mexico was the closest safe border if we ever felt the need to jump in the car and get out fast. Also we were already working in tandem with our Mexican staff, so it was a natural place for us to go. At that time our Conacaste staff consisted of people from Venezuela, the Philippines, Guatemala, the USA, and India. Technically that conglomeration of staff didn't qualify to go out on an American evacuation.

During that time there were admittedly, some scary moments. Some other projects did receive direct threats and most of them were

recalled by their organizations. The numbers of nongovernmental organizations dwindled severely. The Peace Corps pulled many assigned people out of areas they judged to be unsafe. This proved to be to our benefit, as we inherited a fine young man who was a great help on our training/demonstration farm.

Obviously the coup that put Rios Montt in power was of great interest to us. We watched hopefully and, for the most part, were not disappointed. If his religious fervor seemed a bit excessive to many people, it was balanced by his fervor for honesty in the government and nation which he promoted through posters, TV and newspapers. When the President created a State Council to give advice to the government, we were amazed at some of the foreign criticism leveled at him because the members were appointed rather than elected. A real effort had been made to have true representation of the people. Indians were represented in the government for the very first time! Indian representatives selected did need to have fluent Spanish in order to function effectively. Unfortunately great masses of Indians know only their own language and have no Spanish. A selection and election of qualified candidates and subsequent election would have taken months or years. There were some outstanding, nationally respected people on the Council, and we thought it was a great first step. Two of the men appointed by the President to serve on the Council were long-time friends and supporters of our Project. One was an attorney, Mr. Ricardo Umana, who had given untold hours of free legal service to the Project. The other was the nationally renowned director of the Children's Hospital, Dr. Asturias Valenzuela, who also

served many years with C.A.R.E. Both men served on the Council to the great sacrifice of their time from professions and families. It was a clear decision on their part to serve their nation.

One day I picked up a newspaper and on the front page was the news that the government was handing out thousands of guns and giving training so that villages that had been harassed by both guerrillas and radical right groups in the past could form homeguards to protect their communities. I got very excited by the thought that the government had decided to trust the people to that extent. After all, guns could have been turned against the government! I figured this was a fairly shrewd man because he was handing out beans to the hungry as well as bullets, and it seemed he had calculated his risks pretty carefully. Imagine my shock then when I returned to the United States and saw a film depicting this man as a monster, forcing villagers to form homeguards!

During that same period of time we came to work with a couple of friends of President Montt, who worked without pay, in tandem with the National Committee of Reconstruction (CRN) and nongovernmental agencies. They were working to resettle whole Indian villages and get food and medical services to outlying areas. We knew of their work, not only by what they told us, but what was reported to us by the American Embassy and the CRN.

The CRN is an agency that was created as a direct result of the great and horrible earthquake of 1976. That earthquake was such a devastating disaster that the whole world rushed to the aid of Guatemala. That was wonderful, but no nation can just blindly open the floodgates for people and things to pour in, totally without control. Someone had to take responsibility for the distribution of all

the donated goods and hold all the nongovernmental groups accountable for what they said they would do.

It has amazed me that the CRN never seems to be mentioned in the news outside of Guatemala. In my opinion it was one of the key components helping to stave off violent revolution. I personally wish the U.S. government would give money to the CRN and less to the military. The CRN managed to maintain a degree of political neutrality in the midst of all the political swirls and struggles. They are in a unique position. Groups like ours had the option of signing a contract of agreement with the CRN or working independently. That is, it was possible to remain in the country doing of development work without the official relationship with the CRN, but it might attract curiosity and suspicion from various quarters. All our Guatemalan friends and advisors, including our lawyer, Mr. Umana, recommended drawing up the agreement and signing it. Basically, the agreement described our plan for the coming year, stating exactly what we expected to accomplish, and when. In return, the CRN agreed to help and advise us. When we needed special kinds of expertise, they helped us find it. That was a tremendous help when you consider that a major part of the ICA development philosophy was to connect local people with the resources in their own nation. If the CRN knew of special services or goods available they informed us. When we had foreign groups coming in to work in the Project, bringing loads of donated materials and tools, we notified the CRN and they arranged ahead so that all of it could be whisked through Customs rapidly, duty free. When we had visas due for renewal, our request to the CRN brought forth a letter from them to the authorities so that we only had to drop off

the visas for the officials early in the morning and pick them up in the afternoon. No waiting in lines or hassle. You have to have worked in a foreign country to really appreciate the value of that service! As card carrying members of the CRN, if the police stopped us in one of their spot checks for weapons or explosives, the CRN card presented with the driver's license almost always saved us lots of time. We were given some preferential treatment in many small ways, but that didn't have to do with clout. Rather it had to do with a degree of respect and gratitude to people who were directly helping the poor.

The CRN had no funds to distribute and their own agency budget was very low. This fact no doubt helped to keep them such an honest group. The types who might be looking for places to rake off some money for themselves would not be attracted to the CRN! The dedicated and caring people who wanted to serve their country were the ones who chose to work there. They were not working just with foreigners or private Guatemalan agencies; they were in constant contact with committees from villages who were trying to improve life in their own community. Anyone, peasant or gentry could walk in off the street and expect to be given courtesy, as well as needed information and advice. Thus the CRN has the respect and affection of all kinds of people, including both Indians and Ladinos. Obviously it behooves both politicians and guerrillas to think carefully about their public relationship to the CRN. Any open attack on the CRN might result in a very negative response from the huge numbers of people who turn to the CRN for practical help!

With President Rios Montt in the palace, life in the city moved back into the old style with a whirl of social life going on in the streets and parks. Nights in the city were gay again. It felt to me as if the whole nation exhaled a great sigh of relief and returned to normal conditions. Refugees were returning in large numbers and in May, June and July, 1983, amnesty was declared by the government for any guerrillas who wished to throw down their guns and go home to resume normal lives. Many took the government offer and returned to farms and families. We occasionally heard of stories of guerrilla action in distant villages, but violence was drastically reduced and there were no more bombs in the city. One obvious sign of optimism was the massive replacement of glass in Guatemala City. The city was really sparkling in the sunshine again. And the end of attacks on the power stations allowed it to regain the old nighttime sparkle, too.

One of the more unusual aspects of this time period was the instigation of Sunday afternoon "sermons", generally a couple of hours long, delivered by the President on TV to the entire nation. President Rios Montt was a "born-again" Christian, dedicated to evangelism. The Evangelico movement in Guatemala had been gaining strength and numbers in an obvious way, long before the coup d'etat, but with an Evangelico in the Palace they were really gaining momentum. Large groups of North American Evangelists were showing up in Guatemala. Great numbers of them were based at the Pan American Hotel in the city, moving out from there to "cover the country side", preaching and helping to build new churches in villages for the converted. They were bringing money into the country and without doubt were totally sincere and dedicated to their mission.

Unfortunately they were also a cause for criticism of the President, as some folks were displeased by his emphatic support and participation with the Evangelists considering it inappropriate at the very least. To top it off, President Montt sometimes made public statements that were bound to be found insulting by the Roman Catholic Church. In a nation with a strong relationship to Catholicism, that did not seem to be the way to insure staying in power. One Presidential statement that seemed a bit indelicate was in reference to a very large Evangelical gathering in the stadium in the city. The meeting did attract thousands and the President was understandably pleased, saying something to the effect that the Catholics couldn't pull together that huge a crowd. It was in the newspapers and did come across as a bit "braggy". Maybe the Pope thought so too because he came to Guatemala some months later and did win the "numbers game".

We heard stories through the grapevine that some of the generals went to the President to demand that he pull back on some of the religious proselytizing and associated activities if he wished to remain in the Palace. We understood that he had agreed to their demands but in fact nothing changed, and a few weeks later, on August 8, 1983, George and I were given our second experience of missing a coup d'etat!

Once again we were outside of Guatemala, getting the news report second hand from our colleagues over the telephone. Only this time our people from the Project had a small drama going on along side of the coup, a drama that might be most accurately equated to a Max Sennet film.

It is necessary to back up a bit, in order to tell the whole story. For many months consensus had been building in our staff that a computer would be a valuable aid to the work of the Project. We were close to being buried alive in paper as we tried to keep up with the reports required by the IADB for the loan. So a word processor and printer for all those copies in English and Spanish was a happy thought. The bookkeeping aspects of managing the loan, plus our own accounting, plus curriculum development, training programs, etc., made the thought of a nice little computer increasingly attractive. In addition, we felt it might be possible to earn some of our self-support through selling our word processing skills. After many months of incredible effort, the joyous news was announced that we were to be the proud owners of an Apple, a letter quality printer and several packages of donated software, all to be sent from the USA. Many people had contributed their efforts and money to make this possible. Once our prize package arrived in Customs it took longer than usual before the CRN was able to get permission for us to bring it in duty free. At last all the hurdles were overcome, and one of our people went to the airport to pick up the latest "addition to the staff" and bring it to our office in the city, just two blocks from the Palace. Interestingly enough our office was a donation from an office supply company that sold and serviced Apple computers, Jose Luis Betencourt, S.A. The owners, father and sons, had been good enough to offer us the use of their old offices when they moved into beautiful new quarters just around the corner. We had four nice-sized offices and bath upstairs, which was very adequate for our needs. It was decided to construct a second door directly into the staircase. The

Betencourts hired a carpenter to do the work. When the Apple arrived at our office, the numerous boxes were carried in the one and only door and up the stairs. That was Friday morning. What no one on our staff knew was that the carpenter had decided to work on Saturday. Our staff is almost never in the office on the weekend; they are all out in the village. Friday is always a busy day. The Apple was ensconced in one of the offices partially unpacked so that everyone could ooh and aah over it, and then just left there. On Saturday the carpenter came to do his work. He carved a hole in the wall for the new door, then nailed a few old boards across it and went home!

On Monday morning when some of our staff arrived at the office it had been stripped of everything of the slightest value. Not only was the Apple computer and all its parts gone, but our donated IBM electric typewriter, our brand new manual typewriter, our paper supplies, an extra set of car keys and our clothes were missing also. Just to add insult to injury, even our battered coffee pot and hot plate had vanished! The thieves weren't even going to let us have a cup of coffee!! In spite of hysteria in the midst of such tragedy, minds were kept glued together sufficiently to think straight. Two phone calls had to be made fast, one to the Police detectives and the other to find a locksmith who would come out and change all the locks on the car door, ignition and gas tank.

So it was that on August 8, 1983, while detectives were standing in our office taking a report on the robbery and a locksmith worked on the car, that suddenly everyone became aware of **something** going on! People were running away from the Plaza, and one man had a bloody head. It would have been especially hard not

to notice the helicopter since it flew down the street at roof level with soldiers hanging out the sides, automatic weapons at the ready, looking in the windows at my colleagues. Another coup d'etat was underway! The detectives turned pale, gasped, got very nervous and said, "Something is happening. We must go.", which is exactly what they did!

Our little group was left standing there in total confusion and an already nervous state. The locksmith had apparently removed the locks without problem until he got to the one to the ignition. That one proved just impossible so he had decided to remove the entire steering column and carry it with him back to his shop. The poor man was staggering into the edge of the Plaza with his strange and awkward package when he ran into soldiers coming at him. Unfortunately the soldiers thought he was carrying an automatic weapon and raised their guns to aim at him! **Fortunately** they did call him to halt and throw down his "weapon" rather than start shooting. Also fortunately, he did not die of fright.

Within a few hours a new government was settled into the Palace. Once again the power had flipped over by way of a coup d'etat and once again without killing anyone! By the time my colleagues told me the story on the telephone they were laughing at the absurdity of their situation. I had to laugh at the craziness, too; but once I was standing back in that office myself, I felt plenty sad and mad about those rotten thieves.

As for the new government, nothing seemed to change appreciably. The new Chief of State was General Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores. He closed down the state Council that same month of August, 1983. However, over the months,

preparations were made for elections, and on September 15, 1984, the new State Council convened with the newly elected representatives of every Department. Equitable representation was assured by having one representative for each Department plus one for each 100,000 of population. Facility in the Spanish language was made a prerequisite. There are Indian representatives, but no women. In all, it sounds very good to me.

On the subject of elections, I think it is very hard for citizens of the USA to grasp the complexity of the situation in Guatemala and other Latin American countries. I am certainly 100% for free elections for each and every nation in the world, but I have finally grasped that it is not necessarily an instant and magic solution to a nation's problems. A free and democratic election implies something more than voting without a gun to your head, or secret balloting or a selection of political options. It implies that each and every citizen has equal access to full information regarding the options.

In Guatemala in any given year the citizens are likely to have ten or more political parties to choose from. Like political parties everywhere, they all make lots of promises. And like their counterparts everywhere, they don't keep lots of promises, so the people have become very skeptical of the words of politicians.

Skeptical or no, a major problem in a Guatemalan election is communication. The fact is, a huge number of Guatemalan Citizens **don't speak Spanish!** Add to that the fact that a huge number of the citizens can't read or write -- both Indians and Ladinos. The Indian population of Guatemala has something like 22 different languages! The Guatemalan Counsel General in Chicago estimated that probably

about 50% of the Indians can read and write in **their own language**, but have a much lower literacy rate in Spanish. Of the Ladinos, he estimates that only about 30% of them are literate.

I have no way to evaluate the degree of honesty in the elections. I imagine cheating may go on because there are all kinds of possibilities when you use paper ballots and have to transport them to the capitol city and count them by hand. I should think the party in power probably has a better chance to control the situation. Finally, it would seem that backing from sufficient numbers in the military establishment is an imperative. Most of the Presidents have a history in the military although there have been civilian exceptions. Important positions in all agencies are almost always filled with military men.

But the most important issue in regard to elections, as I see it, is the fact that in one sense Guatemala is not one, cohesive nation. That is, the Indians, living in their villages, speaking their own language, wearing their own special clothing, following their particular ancient customs and maintaining their own tight-knit community, do not perceive themselves so much as Guatemalans, but rather, as Quiche, or whatever. So in a sense, you have more than 20 nations imaged in the minds of huge numbers of the people. The government has been working to change this variety of images, to that of **one nation** for all. Their task is not an easy one.

The image of the "right kind of leadership" in the Guatemalan mind appears to me to be very confused by the old patron image. The patron is the boss. His is the final word, the final wisdom and the final decision. And of course, if I turn myself over to the patron, I am in a

sense his slave. At the same time I can avoid making decisions and taking responsibility, which also allows me to blame the patron for everything that is wrong in my life. This patron image even carries over into the business world. I have had more than one General Manager tell me he has a terrible time getting his executives to make the decisions they should be making at their level. Many seem to do most anything they can to push the decisions up to the top person.

One of the things about working in a Human Development Project that continually amazes me is the way it is possible for the work of the Project to just keep on rolling along, even while monumental events are erupting all around. I guess we were so absorbed in life with the villagers that none of us noticed we were hanging out over the abyss! One thing for sure, living through coup d'etats, bombs and elections was great insurance against boredom.

"BUT WE ALREADY HAVE ELECTRICITY
AND WATER.....

The people of Conacaste created their own four-year comprehensive plan during the Consult when the Project began. Out of all the expressed hopes and dreams for their community, there was absolute consensus that electricity and potable water were the most urgent needs.

Consequently by the third year of the Project when the village had both electricity and readily available drinking water, we decided to do a survey of future priorities. Basically, that meant getting around to everybody's house to chat with them to find out where they thought the next big push should be.

Approximately 1500 people call Conacaste home. There are about 200 homes -- no big deal. The village is divided into five sectors, so it was easy for each of us on the staff to take part of a sector and sally forth in pursuit of the pressing priorities.

For my part, I was delighted to get back with the people I was working for, having recently spent most of my time on assignment in the city, seeking funds to keep the Project going. It was a lark to see the new babies and old grandparents, talk about the crops, the kids, newly acquired TV's, new construction, new romances and newly available work.

Whenever I returned to visit in the village homes after a time away, I was surprised again at the **range** of quality among houses, what they have in them, the **degrees** of poverty. I was surprised anew at the warmth of the welcome with which I was received into homes. I was surprised again at **how terribly poor** some of the people are. And I was surprised once more

by the beautiful, proud dignity of most of the villagers.

And so into the houses I went, houses of cement block, or adobe, or sticks and mud, or just sticks and a little cardboard. Houses with aluminum roofs, palm roofs, tile roofs. Houses with floors, houses without floors. Walls decorated with calendars, **many** calendars, calendars with scenes of Colorado, Mexican bullrings, gringo babies, dogs and cats, blonde movie stars, bare-breasted ladies and Saints with halos. Remaining wall space was covered with family pictures, the crucifix, bunches of garlic, printed prayers, messages from the Evangelicos, and ads for batteries.

At each house I was invited in and seated on something. If they didn't have chairs, it might be a wood packing box. Sometimes I perched on the edge of a bed or a hammock. Almost always I was offered some refreshment. Most often it was coffee, loaded with sugar that I didn't want and the people could not really afford. I drank the coffee not because I liked or wanted it, but because it was a gift generously given. I admired the children, expressed gratitude for the fine refreshment on such a thirsty, hot day, and then we would try to talk about their dreams for the future. Once again, I would re-discover how difficult it is for people with a long history of poverty to learn to dream and dare to dream out loud!

That lesson about daring to dream was driven home to me most emphatically in one particular house, one of the poorer homes in the community built entirely of sticks. My hostess greeted me with a warm, toothless smile as she dumped a child and cat off a wood box and seated me. As we visited, she made her tortillas and kicked the chickens and pigs out from under her feet. We talked about the change in the village, and she expressed her

pleasure in having a light in her house and clean water nearby. Then I asked her what she thought we should work on next. She looked completely baffled, so I tried asking the question another way. On my third try, she finally understood my question. She grinned, waved her arm to indicate her surroundings and said, "But we have electricity and water, what more could we ask for?!"

Indeed! What more could we ask for?!



Reflections

I am convinced the quality of life has improved for a tiny segment of the world's population. Conacaste is a demonstration of possibility to those who live in despair of ever seeing a better life. People are coming from Guatemala and other nations to Conacaste for leadership training schools. They return home to do their own projects. Villagers have been trained to train other villagers. A chain reaction has been started.

To my Guatemalan friends and all the people I worked with, I give deep-felt thanks for the opportunity to share in the adventure of building a foundation for the time when all of the earth truly belongs to all of the people.