



Doctors for Global Health Reporter

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EDUCATING THE CHILDREN

By Monica Sanchez

Fascinating research into how the human brain develops is proving what social activists have been claiming for years: Early intervention is crucial to the development of disadvantaged children. In fact, the insights coming out of the hallowed halls of science give 'early' a whole new meaning. Researchers have learned that the brain doesn't just learn a lot in the first three years, it actually changes its physical structure in response to stimulation.

As the *Los Angeles Times* reported in "Deciphering the Miracles of the Mind" (October 16, 1996), "So powerful is the enriching effect of learning on the physical structure of the brain's cells that the brain of an active college graduate may have up to 40 percent more neural connections than that of a high school dropout...The brain is so hungry for stimulation that, with proper attention early enough in life, scientists can raise a disadvantaged child's IQ 30 points, cut the risk of some forms of mental retardation in half and correct common learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Conversely, denied proper stimulation, the brain atrophies, its neural connections withering like drying leaves."

Yet in El Salvador, education is sorely lacking. In 1992, the Ministry of Education admitted only 15 percent of children between the ages of four and six attended preschool. In 1996, UNICEF reported that between 1975 and 1995 there was a marked decrease in the use of funds for education. Teachers attend classes approximately 2.9 days per week, while actual instruction time averages 2.5 to 4 hours a week. About 30 percent of children between 10 and 19 years of age are in the work force, and 12 percent of these children have never received any form of formal education.

The DGH/MDS Early Childhood Stimulation and Development Project is trying to fill this gap in the communities it serves. The project, which began in 1994, is the result of DGH/MDS' standard practice of participatory investigation—exploring the needs of the community with the

residents themselves. In December of 1993, the residents of Estancia, a *cantón*, or region, in the District of Morazán, requested that MDM initiate preschool education. With the help of Diakonia-Sweden and in coordination with the Jesuit University of Central America (UCA), MDM responded in 1994 with a mental health program that took the form of four "kinders," formally named Centros Integrales de Desarrollo Infantil (CIDIs—Centers for Integral Child Development). In 1995, with the continued support of Diakonia-Sweden, in addition to MDS, two more kinders were added.

The CIDIs serve multiple purposes. Improving the chil-

Continued on page 4



DGH PROFILE: DR. VICENTE GAVIDIA

By Jonathan Harris

As Vicente Gavidia, MD, drives to his job in San Salvador each morning, he passes the buildings and streets he has known since he was a boy growing up in the city, aware that much has changed.

The 43 year-old project coordinator for UNICEF remembers a time when the surrounding forests spread into the city and the nearby volcano was blanketed with green. "It was a smaller city then," he remembered during a winter visit to Atlanta for a DGH board meeting. "Now one third of all El Salvadorans live there."

Some things, however, remain the same. Gavidia remembers feeling dissatisfied since adolescence with the state of the world and the terrible living conditions in which most of his fellow countrymen languished. His undergraduate education reinforced these sentiments by teaching him the socio-political reasons for the problems he deplored. Feeling that as a doctor he could make the most difference in the lives of those around him, Gavidia decided to study medicine.



Dr. Gavidia in Morazán. The MDS t-shirt he is wearing was designed by Arthur Seiji Hayashi, a recent student volunteer. It has been sold to MDS/DGH supporters around the world.

“We need doctors who can take care of diarrhea, not specialists.”

Then during most of the 1980s, Gavidia worked for the Ministry of Health in Nicaragua, where he learned how to best direct his career to the service of others through Community Medicine—working closely with the communities that needed him most. Upon his return to El Salvador, he worked with health promoters in the outskirts of the capital. Soon after, he joined PRODERE, the United Nations program for ex-refugees and others displaced by the war. As part of his work with PRODERE, Gavidia coordinated with many non-governmental health organizations, including MDM-El Salvador. In fact, PRODERE worked with Lanny Smith and the other MDM-El Salvador volunteers on projects such as building a clinic in El Tablón and funding the health promoters. When the PRODERE project ended in 1994, Gavidia and other Salvadoran professionals began to think about how to stop relying entirely on foreign funding. That is how Medicos Por El Derecho a La Salud (MDS) was first born.

Now, besides his full time job coordinating UNICEF’s health, nutrition and advocacy program in three departments of El Salvador, Gavidia works with MDS. He is presently the non-profit group’s vice-president and served as acting president while Dr. Maruca Figueroa was in England studying tropical medicine. He also serves on DGH’s Advisory Council.

“We have lawyers, doctors, psychologists, nutritionists, engineers and other professionals forming a core group of about 15 members,” he said of MDS volunteers. “We also have a small council of advisors,” including a former director of the national university.

MDS, in turn, inspired the formation of DGH, which now works to channel funds and volunteers to their joint projects. “We work together in the construction of clinics, working with the health promoters, and providing essential medicines: vitamins, antibiotics, and pain killers,” Gavidia explained. MDS is also promoting mental health in local schools and studying the factors that make it difficult for rural residents to obtain proper health care.

Unfortunately, finding the funding necessary to bring all these plans to fruition is a constant struggle. Matters could get even more difficult for the MDS community health care project as co-partner Médecins du Monde (MDM) contemplates pulling out of El Salvador for good. “The European Union might extend its support one more year, but then MDM might leave the country,” Gavidia said. Should MDM leave, MDS hopes to finance the continuing work themselves in partnership with DGH and other organizations. “We know the project well,” Gavidia said. “MDS is going to take responsibility for it, perhaps this year.”

Increasing the difficulty of the task is a law recently passed by the right-wing Arena Party that aims to keep a tighter rein on non-governmental organizations (NGOs). “The government wants to exert more control over the NGOs,” Gavidia explained. “They believe that NGOs are very close to the opposition. They think they can control the opposition better if they control the NGOs.”

MDS hopes to ensure a better future for all El Salvadorans, who are still threatened by a ready supply of weapons and violence, through education. Educating young people, especially students, about human rights is one of the group’s most ambitious goals. “We are going to prepare a human rights course and offer it at the University through the medical school,” Gavidia said. MDS would also like to involve community leaders in these classes. The goal is to generate increased interest in practical medicine, especially among Salvadoran medical students, encouraging them to work among the people who need basic health care the most. “I have many friends who are doctors but they only work with the middle class, not the poor,” Gavidia said.

Dr. Gavidia decided to become a doctor himself when a college classmate, who later became a guerrilla leader and was killed in the civil war, convinced him that the country was in desperate need of doctors to cure common ailments. “She told me: We need doctors who can take care of diarrhea, not specialists,” Gavidia remembers. Now he hopes to offer the same guidance to other students.

SUPPORT THE CIDIS: BUY A MATATA

By Lanny Smith


or CIDIs (see *Educating the Children* on page 1). You can help support our work by buying and helping us sell matatas. When you buy a matata you are helping a Salvadoran Indigenous family support itself through its own culture and contributing to the education, mental health, cultural preservation, human rights, and nutrition of over 180 children, aged two to seven, who live in an isolated, rural area of extreme poverty that is still recovering from 12 years of frequent bombings during the civil war.

Matatas are made from a strong, versatile natural fiber recovered from the maguey plant (also known as henequin or mezcal). This fiber is also used to make hammocks and, historically, ropes for ships. Alas, its use is being replaced by nylon and other cheaper synthetic products. The cultivation and proper harvesting of the maguey plant is becoming a lost art.

Matatas make great book bags for school or work; environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic or paper bags at the grocery store; attractive handbags for anything, from cosmetics to beach articles; and great gifts for anyone interested in preserving Indigenous culture and promoting Human Rights.

Caring for your matata: The fibers used to make your matata are extremely

strong and should withstand many years of use. If you anticipate using the matata in wet conditions, you can keep the dye from running by soaking it in cold salt water.

Matatas are \$12 a piece, plus shipping. To order, call our office at 404-377-3566. 

by selling matatas at a Latino Festival in Syracuse, NY.



Shirley Novak and Barbara DeFrancqueville raised money for the kinders

DGH Announcements

► **A DAM THREAT.** It has come to our attention that an archeologist and a specialist in population relocation have been studying the beautiful valley of Estancia, one of the regions where DGH/MDS works. They have said they are trying to determine the effects of creating a dam on the Torola river. If built, the dam would destroy one of the last remaining indigenous communities in El Salvador and leave the recently built clinic and CIDIs buried under 300 meters of water.

The motive for the dam would be to sell electricity to the neighboring country of Honduras. While they would not disclose who financed their visit, they did acknowledge that they each have worked for the World Bank in the past.

Interestingly enough, following World Bank recommendations, electricity in El Salvador was privatized this past March (meaning government utilities were sold to private interests). Reportedly, electricity rates soared to four times their previous cost for private citizens, while going down for industries, including sweat shops like the maquiladoras.

We will keep you informed of this potential threat as we get more information.

► **DGH POETRY CONTEST.** To commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, DGH is sponsoring a poetry contest on the theme "Promoting health and human rights with those who have difficulty making their voices heard."

All entries must be received by August 16, 1998. Winners will be notified three months later. The first prize is round-trip airfare and basic living expenses for up to two months, for the winner's choice of either: a) Intensive Spanish study in the Centro del Estudio de Español in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala; or b) Volunteering with MDS in Rural Morazán, El Salvador. There will also be three 2nd, five 3rd and five 4th place winners.

Entry is open to all persons. Students are specially welcome. Entries must be original and never been published, submitted for publication or entered in another contest.

In you are interested, see our web site or contact the DGH office for contest guidelines.

► **GENERAL ASSEMBLY DATES CHANGED.** Due to increased attendance, the next General Assembly will be held August 14 to 16, at

Fort Yargo State Park's "Will-A-Way" Group Camp, in the Metro Atlanta area. There we will have a meeting space and bunks (bring your own bedding) Friday and Saturday nights, and park kitchen staff will prepare our meals. Check in anytime after 2:00 p.m. Friday and check out by 10:00 a.m. Sunday. A swimming pool, canoes and fishing (requires a fishing license) are available for free-time recreation. The cost is \$50 per person for the conference, room, food and recreation equipment. A one-time \$2 Park Pass will be required for each vehicle. We will work out some transportation arrangements to help persons coming in to the Atlanta airport or bus station.

► **A WORD OF THANKS.** DGH would like to thank the following organizations, which sponsored Dr. Jennifer Kasper's 18-month stay in El Salvador: CHRIA—Committee for Health Rights in the Americas/The Training Exchange, 474 Valencia Street, No. 120, San Francisco, CA, 94103; and The San Carlos Foundation, 1065 Creston Road, Berkeley, CA, 94708. Dr. Kasper's expertise as a pediatrician was invaluable in the development and implementation of a pediatric training curriculum for the general health promoters and the midwives.

EDUCATING THE CHILDREN

(Continued from page 1)

dren's nutrition is one priority, since over 50 percent of them suffer from malnutrition. Not only are they in need of increased quantities of food, but also of protein and micronutrients, such as iron and iodine. Deficiencies such as these impede a child's ability to learn. It is not surprising, therefore, that these children have delayed cognitive growth in comparison to children in urban settings. The World Food Program of the United Nations, in coordination with the Ministry of Health, donates beans, corn, rice, and cooking oil, and the French Embassy has provided soybeans. This allows the kinders to combat malnutrition by giving the students one hot, nutritious, soy-based meal every day.

Another priority of the project is to provide the mental stimulation that researchers are discovering is so vital to the brain's development. Students in the CIDs are divided into two groups: one for ages 2 to 4 and the other for ages 4 to 7 (the 4-year-olds are placed according to their level). The younger group's curriculum consists mostly of games that help teach concepts such as colors and shapes, as well as songs that improve language skills. The older group is taught the basics of math and the Spanish alphabet. The CIDs also help maintain the local indigenous culture by instructing the older group in *Ullua*,

Teachers at the local public school have commented that children who have attended CIDs are miles ahead of the other students, both in academic readiness and social skills.

the language of the Lenca, the local indigenous people who are descendants of the Mayas.

The kinders are particularly important in helping the children overcome 12 years of civil war. According to UNESCO, children in former conflictive zones are experiencing many mental health problems, including difficulties maintaining interpersonal relationships, auto-medication, depression, anxiety, psychosomatic illnesses and learning problems. For this reason, each kinder is run by two mental health promoters. They are chosen by their community, evaluated by more experienced promoters and trained by volunteer specialists in child education. They then receive

one week of continuing education every six weeks, have an intensive two-week course at the University of El Salvador every summer and take adult education classes throughout the year. In addition, trained psychiatrists teach them to help troubled children with techniques such as play and touch therapy.

In 1994, the kinders were held in inadequate structures and improvised locations (under trees and on the "front porches" of private homes), so the communities asked that appropriate buildings be constructed to provide a safe, secure place where the children could receive an optimal education and learn to their fullest potential. In 1996, MDS was able to begin to answer this

request. Through the financial support of the European Union, MDM, and MDS, technical support from FUCRIDES, and help with transport of materials by PAHO, work was started on two buildings: one in La Presa and the other in Copante (two of the six small hamlets or caserios served by the project). The British Embassy recently provided the financial aid necessary to finish the building in La Presa. The second building is well underway, but requires more funding to be completed. The remaining caserios are waiting expectantly for the construction of CIDI buildings in their communities. They have even donated a parcel of land for this purpose. MDS has responded with the construction of provisional *gallerias*, simple structures consisting of a roof for protection against rain and sun and small storage sheds.

The CIDI buildings are designed to assist the overall goal of sustainability—the old concept of teaching someone to fish instead of giving him fish—by facilitating the education of the parents as well as the children, which strengthens community organization. For example, 65 percent of the population of these communities is illiterate and they lack access to books to better their education. Consequently, the CIDs have a library with books for all ages, an early education room where mothers and fathers are shown how they can enrich their child's development from the moment of birth, and a kitchen where the mothers take turns cooking the children's daily meal.

Currently there are 182 children in the kinders. After graduation they go on to study in the public elementary school. Teachers at this school have commented that children who have attended CIDs are miles ahead of the other students, both in academic readiness and social skills. 🐦



"Every person has the right to an education. This education should be free, basic and fundamental...The object of this education is to provide a complete development of the human personality and to strengthen respect for human rights and fundamental liberties; it will favor understanding, tolerance and friendship between nations as well as ethnic and religious groups."

**— Universal Declaration
of Human Rights**

Fertile Minds

By J. Madeleine Nash

Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. Rat-a-tat-tat. If scientists could eavesdrop on the brain of a human embryo 10, maybe 12 weeks after conception, they would hear an astonishing racket. Inside the womb, long before light first strikes the retina of the eye or the earliest dreamy images flicker through the cortex, nerve cells in the developing brain crackle with purposeful activity. Like teenagers with telephones, cells in one neighborhood of the brain are calling friends in another, and these cells are calling their friends, and they keep calling one another over and over again, "almost," says neurobiologist Carla Shatz of the University of California, Berkeley, "as if they were autodialing."

But these neurons—as the long, wiry cells that carry electrical messages through the nervous system and the brain are called—are not transmitting signals in scattershot fashion. That would produce a featureless static, the sort of noise picked up by a radio tuned between stations. On the contrary, evidence is growing that the staccato bursts of electricity that form those distinctive rat-a-tat-tats arise from coordinated waves of neural activity, and that those pulsing waves, like currents shifting sand on the ocean floor, actually change the shape of the brain, carving mental circuits into patterns that over time will enable the newborn infant to perceive a father's voice, a mother's touch, a shiny mobile twirling over the crib.

Of all the discoveries that have poured out of neuroscience labs in recent years, the finding that the electrical activity of brain cells changes the physical structure of the brain is perhaps the most breathtaking. For the rhythmic firing of neurons is no longer assumed to be a by-product of building the brain but essential to the process, and it begins, scientists have established, well before birth. A brain is not a computer. Nature does not cobble it together, then turn it on. No, the brain begins working long before it is finished. And the same processes that wire the brain before birth, neuroscientists are finding, also drive the explosion of learning that occurs immediately afterward.

At birth a baby's brain contains 100 billion neurons, roughly as many nerve cells as there

are stars in the Milky Way. Also in place are a trillion glial cells, named after the Greek word for glue, which form a kind of honeycomb that protects and nourishes the neurons. But while the brain contains virtually all the nerve cells it will ever have, the pattern of wiring between them has yet to stabilize. Up to this point, says Shatz, "what the brain has done is lay out circuits that are its best guess about what's required for vision, for language, for whatever." And now it is up to neural activity—no longer spontaneous, but driven by a flood of sensory experiences—to take this rough blueprint and progressively refine it.

During the first years of life, the brain undergoes a series of extraordinary changes. Starting shortly after birth, a baby's brain, in a display of biological exuberance, produces trillions more connections between neurons than it can possibly use. Then, through a process that resembles Darwinian competition, the brain eliminates connections, or synapses, that are seldom or never used. The excess synapses in a child's brain undergo a draconian pruning, starting around the age of 10 or earlier, leaving behind a mind whose patterns of emotion and thought are, for better or worse, unique.

Deprived of a stimulating environment, a child's brain suffers. Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine, for example, have found that children who don't play much or are rarely touched develop brains 20% to 30% smaller than normal for their age. Laboratory animals provide another provocative parallel. Not only do young rats reared in toy-strewn cages exhibit more complex behavior than rats confined to sterile, uninteresting boxes, researchers at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign have found, but the brains of these rats contain as many as 25% more synapses per neuron. Rich experiences, in other words, really do produce rich brains.

The new insights into brain development are more than just interesting science. They have profound implications for parents and policymakers. In an age when mothers and fathers are increasingly pressed for time—and

may already be feeling guilty about how many hours they spend away from their children—the results coming out of the labs are likely to increase concerns about leaving very young children in the care of others. For the data underscore the importance of hands-on parenting, of finding the time to cuddle a baby, talk with a toddler and provide infants with stimulating experiences.

The new insights have begun to infuse new passion into the political debate over early education and day care. There is an urgent need, say child-development experts, for preschool programs designed to boost the brain power of youngsters born into impoverished rural and inner-city households. Without such programs, they warn, the current drive

Researchers found that the electrical activity of brain cells, which is triggered by outside stimulation, actually changes the physical structure of the brain.

to curtail welfare costs by pushing mothers with infants and toddlers into the work force may well backfire. "There is a time scale to brain development, and the most important year is the first," notes Frank Newman, presi-

dent of the Education Commission of the States. By the age of three, a child who is neglected or abused bears marks that, if not indelible, are exceedingly difficult to erase.

But the new research offers hope as well. Scientists have found that the brain during the first years of life is so malleable that very young children who suffer strokes or injuries that wipe out an entire hemisphere can still mature into highly functional adults. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly clear that well-designed preschool programs can help many children overcome glaring deficits in their home environment. With appropriate therapy, say researchers, even serious disorders like dyslexia may be treatable. While inherited problems may place certain children at greater risk than others, says Dr. Harry Chugani, a pediatric neurologist at Wayne State University in Detroit, that is no excuse for ignoring the environment's power to remodel the brain. "We may not do much to change what happens before birth, but we can change what happens after a baby is born," he observes.

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Human Rights

Say not the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.

For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.

And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front the sun climbs slow, how slowly!
But westward, look, the land is bright!

— Excerpted from *SAY NOT THE STRUGGLE*,
by Arthur Hugh Clough, 1819-1861.

Let not young souls be smothered
out before
They do quaint deeds and
fully flaunt their pride.
It is the world's one crime its
babes grow dull.
Not that they sow, but that
they seldom reap;
Not that they die, but that
they die like sheep.

— Excerpted from *THE LEADEN-EYED*, by
Vachel Lindsay, 1879-1931.

I died for beauty, but was scarce
Adjusted in the tomb,
When one who died for truth was lain
In an adjoining room.

He questioned softly why I failed?
"For beauty," I replied.
"And I for truth—the two are one;
We brethren are," he said.

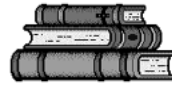
And so, as kinsman met at night,
We talked between the rooms,
Until the moss had reached our lips,
And covered up our names.

— *I DIED FOR BEAUTY*, by Emily
Dickinson, 1828-1909.

The true purpose of education
is to cherish and unfold the
seed of immortality already
sown within us; to develop, to
their fullest extent, the capaci-
ties of every kind with which we
have been endowed.

—Anna Jameson, 1794-1860

At DGH and MDS we are clear that there is an intrinsic relation between art, health, education and Human Rights. Several DGH Advisory Council (AC) members and friends are artists, and art in its various forms inspires our daily work. Hence we have decided to include this part of the newsletter, where we share some of the art of various forms that has influenced our lives. This is also a call for you to share with us the art that you have found wonderful and liberating. It would be one of the best contributions you could make with us.



In Print

REVOLUTION IN EL SALVADOR, By Tommie Sue Montgomery, PhD, Westview Pr, 1995, ISBN 0-8133-0071-1. Written by a DGH AC member, this book is a well-written guide toward understanding the causes, origins and changes within the recent (1980-92) revolution in El Salvador.

THE MASSACRE AT EL MOZOTE, By Mark Danner, Vintage Books, 1993, ISBN 0-679-75525-X. A definitive book on the cover-up of the massacre at El Mozote, which is helpful in understanding the role of the US government in the war in El Salvador.

WITNESS TO WAR, By Charles Clements, MD, Bantam Books, 1984, ISBN 0-553-05064-8. Written by a DGH AC member, this book is required reading for DGH volunteers in El Salvador. It is dangerous for a medical student at exam time because it is so intriguing one normally reads it in a single seating. It contains the war-time observations of a US physician—who is also a veteran of the Vietnam war—during his year treating civilians in FMLN-controlled areas of El Salvador.

HELPING HEALTH WORKERS LEARN, By David Werner and Bill Bower, The Hesperian Foundation, 1982, ISBN 0-942364-10-4. This book is required reading for our DGH international Volunteers. It is a Bible of Community Health Work.

MY TRAVELS AROUND THE WORLD, By Nawal El Saadawi,

MD, Mandarin Paperbacks, 1991, ISBN 0-7493-9122-7. Observations and experiences of a woman physician from Egypt, recommended by DGH AC member Lenore Azaroff. I found this book very helpful in better understanding the world from a Southern perspective.

WRITINGS FOR A LIBERATION PSYCHOLOGY, By Ignacio Martín-Baró, Harvard University Press, 1994, ISBN 0-674-96246-X. The author was one of the six Jesuit priests killed, along with their house-keeper and her 14 year-old daughter, by US-trained members of the Salvadoran Army at the Jesuit Central American University in San Salvador on November 16, 1989. His methodology of community-based psychology inspired the work of MDS in the preventive mental health for children project in Morazán. This book has also strongly influenced our concept of "liberation medicine."

JAMKHED, By Mabelle and Rajanikant Arole, MacMillan Education, 1994, ISBN 0-333-57736-1. This is the chronicle of a successful Community-Based Integral Rural



In the Arts

Health Development Project, done with a minimum of overt politics and with a clear dedication to the liberation of women and the poor. Each page offers more ideas that may improve our work in Morazán.

WHERE THERE IS NO DOCTOR, By David Werner, *The Hesperian Foundation*, 1992, ISBN 0-942364-15-5. This book, a classic, is required reading for DGH international volunteers. Actually, it is useful for anyone, anywhere, to read and have available for reference at any time. It has probably saved more lives than any medical text written.

REBELLION FROM THE ROOTS, By John Ross, *Common Courage Press*, 1995, ISBN 1-56751-042-6. This is a strongly-written introduction to the war in Chiapas, Mexico—very worth reading.

FIFTY YEARS IS ENOUGH: THE CASE AGAINST THE WORLD BANK AND THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND, Edited by Kevin Danaher, *South End Press*, 1994, ISBN 0-89608-495-7. One of the major frustrations of working in the developing world is finding that economics has more to do with health than medical knowledge. This

book is a primer for understanding the intense destruction caused by the World Bank and IMF in the developing world.

THE BEAN TREES, By Barbara Kinsolver, *Harper Perennial*, 1988, ISBN 0-06-091554-4. Socially conscious literature that also makes good reading, as do all books written by this gifted author. With regularity a stunningly well-written phrase or paragraph sends one forward to thinking deeper on the meaning and beauty of life. This book deals with Guatemalan refugees in Tucson as well as the Sanctuary Movement.

JUBIABA, By Jorge Amado, *Avon Books*, 1984, ISBN 0-380-75479-7. This Brazilian author knows how to make the people and place he loves—the poor and the rich in spirit of Bahia—immortal.

THE LAST SONG OF MANUEL SENDERO, By Ariel Dorfman, *Penguin Books*, 1988, ISBN 0-14-00-8896-2. Recommended by AC member Daniel Bausch, this is "the ultimate solidarity book." From the beginning, suspend trying to understand what is happening and just read, and you will understand as you read. The intrinsic context is Chile, where in 1973 the US CIA sponsored a coup overthrowing a peacefully elected government and killing Dr. Salvador Allende, Pablo Neruda, Victor Jara and many others.

BELOVED, By Toni Morrison, 1987, ISBN 0-452-26446-4. Another Daniel Bausch recommendation, this is a powerful book

that explores the reality of slavery in the US in a way that helps us understand, as much as we are able, what it meant to be a slave.

THE TEMPLE OF MY FAMILIAR, By Alice Walker, *Harcourt Brace Jovanovich*, 1989, ISBN 0-15-188533-8. From Africa to Georgia, from England to Latin America, this book takes us on an exploration of liberation on multiple levels.



MAN FACING SOUTHEAST, 1986 Argentinian film with English subtitles. Directed by Eliseo Subiela and Inés Verrengo; Starring Rubens Correa and Hugo Soto. What is sanity in an insane world? This movie beautifully explores that question as a new patient mysteriously appears in a psychiatric ward. He claims to come from another planet to study humans and their behavior. He is gentle, but criticizes humans for their harsh treatment of one another. The assigned psychiatrist is himself unhappy, and affected by the patient's insight, as were those of us who rented it after the first DGH General Assembly.

DOWN CAME A BLACKBIRD, 1995 USA movie directed by Jonathan Sanger; Starring Raul Julia, Vanessa Redgrave. This story deals with the little seen topic of life after torture. It follows a journalist who was tortured while reporting in a foreign country as she finally comes to terms with the experience with the help of others who had lived through similar experiences.

MISSING, 1982 USA movie directed by Costa Gavras; Starring Jack Lemmon and Sissy Spacek. Based on the real-life experiences of Ed Horman, this is the story of an American father of conservative background who comes to a South American country to search for his missing son, a political activist. Ed joins his daughter-in-law Beth, who like her husband is politically polarized from the father, in prying through the bureaucracy and dangerous political intrigue in search of their son and husband. Slowly, the father comes to realize that his own beloved government is not telling him the truth.

The two works of art on these pages were painted by Mariu Suarez, the Colombian artist who drew the DGH logo. Both are done in oil and egg-tempera on canvas. Left: *Ascension* depicts the importance of using our common cultural heritage to rise to new heights of humanity and enlightenment (72"x60"). Right: *Wake Up!* challenges us to bear witness to the injustices perpetrated all around the world in the name of preserving "our way of life" (72"x58").



Our Unhealthy Environment

AIR POLLUTION. Some 500 cases of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) in the United States each year are associated with microscopic airborne particles of soot (particulate matter), a new study reports. Particulate matter (PM10) was found to be associated with nearly one out of every five of the SIDS deaths in 12 major metropolitan areas where SIDS and particulate air pollution are especially severe. The Los Angeles, New York and Chicago metropolitan areas lead the nation in SIDS cases linked to toxic, airborne soot, with an estimated 44, 28, and 27 SIDS cases (respectively) associated with particulate pollution in 1994.

Regulations recently announced by President Clinton would cut levels of the pollutant by about half over the next decade. Yet a number of influential members of Congress have vowed to overturn the decision with strong backing from industries that would bear the brunt of the pollution reduction.

—Joint report of *The Environmental Working Group* (www.ewg.org) and *Physicians for Social Responsibility* (www.psr.org).

ENDOCRINE DISRUPTERS. These chemicals have the ability to alter the body's hormone, or endocrine, system. Known and suspected endocrine disrupters include industrial chemicals like dioxin and PCBs, pesticides, such as DDT and chlordane, and other synthetic chemicals. Endocrine disrupters are found virtually everywhere. The use of pesticides and other synthetic chemicals since the 1950s has resulted in the widespread contamination of our air, water and soil. Today, most people and animals on earth have some level of endocrine disrupting chemicals stored in the fatty tissues of their bodies. Some plastics in everyday use—particularly polyvinyl chloride (PVC)—are believed to release these chemicals during their manufacture, use and disposal.

Evidence that these chemicals affect our health is growing: Children born to mothers exposed to PCBs before and during pregnancy

Continued on the following page

COLLOQUIUM ON HEALTH & THE ENVIRONMENT

By Audrey Lenhart

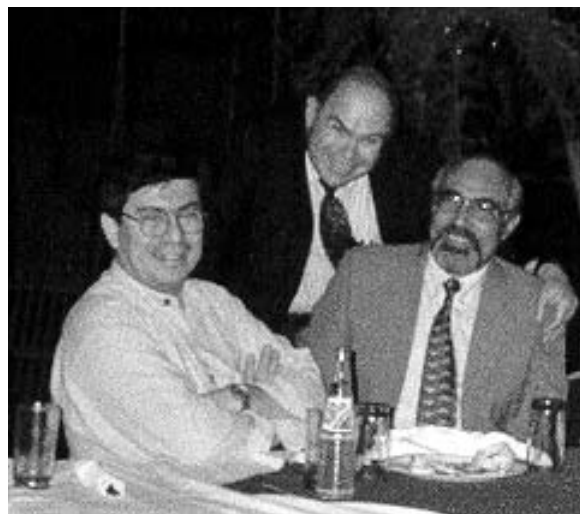
This past November, the University of El Salvador's Medical School was host to over 300 physicians, medical students, nurses, environmental activists, and a variety of other professionals from around the world, at the Seventh Annual El Salvador International Colloquium on Health. DGH and MDS were key sponsors of the event, which was held at the University's campus in San Salvador on November 7, 10 and 11 of 1997.

This year's theme, Health and the Environment, attracted a variety of speakers and panelists. Dr. Victor Sidel, Co-President of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Professor of Social Medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and DGH Advisory Council member, gave the keynote address. His speech, *The Importance of Social Justice, Environmental Protection and Peace for Sustainable Development and Health*, emphasized the detrimental effects that physical and environmental violence have on the health of people worldwide. He explained that, "Environment has a broad meaning, which encompasses not only the physical environment but also the social, cultural and economic environment...Indeed, it is widely recognized that the environment in which people live, rather than medical care, is the most important factor in the promotion and protection of health." He went on to remind those present of the World Health Assembly's resolution that, "The role of physicians and other health workers in the preservation and promotion of peace is the most significant factor for the attainment of health for all."

Also in attendance was Dr. Hector Silva, the Mayor of San Salvador. He participated in a roundtable discussion that debated the impact of globalization. Representatives from CESTA and the Unidad Ecológica Salvadoreña (two environmentally-oriented non-governmental organizations), joined him on the panel. All of the roundtable participants agreed that thus far the impact of globalization on the environment of El Salvador has been negative. As Dr. Sidel explained it, many developing countries, at the insistence of the United States and world financiers, have established systems of 'globalization' that, in the name of economic development, promote the grossly uneven distribution of income, leading to large amounts of poverty and, therefore, to poor health. These policies, which strive to boost private industry and investments at all costs, have led to the neglect of environmental control laws, thus increasing pollution as well as poverty. In fact, 94 percent of forested areas in El Salvador have been destroyed and air pollution in San Salvador is fast approaching the record-breaking conditions found in Mexico City.

Dr. Silva acknowledged the difficulties involved in passing and implementing laws concerned with environmental conservation. He proposed that El Salvador try to focus more on local problems and maximize resources at the local level to solve specific problems. However, he also emphasized that such local initiatives are becoming increasingly more difficult because El Salvador is part of a "globalized world," meaning that El Salvador's decisions concerning its environment no longer affect only the people of El Salvador, they also affect the multi-national interests of the foreign businesses in El Salvador—interests that are often in direct opposition to those of the local citizenry. Specifically, he cited World Bank policies that make the tax laws in El Salvador

no longer affect only the people of El Salvador, they also affect the multi-national interests of the foreign businesses in El Salvador—interests that are often in direct opposition to those of the local citizenry. Specifically, he cited World Bank policies that make the tax laws in El Salvador



Dinner to inaugurate the Colloquium. Pictured from left to right are: Dr. Mauricio Calero, Dr. Victor Sidel and Dr. Ignacio Paniagas, the President of MESARES, the Salvadoran branch of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

extremely unfair by giving large tax breaks to the wealthy, thus exacerbating the poverty associated with so many health problems.

Another hot topic discussed throughout the colloquium was industrial pollution—specifically air pollution—and its effects on public health. Participants discussed how factory workers often have little or no protection from chemicals and other pollutants inside factories, as well as the fact that factories themselves are not required to have equipment that monitors toxic output. As a result, air, soil, and water pollution from factories continues to increase dramatically. Furthermore, trash is not collected from the most populated areas of El Salvador, which creates very unsanitary conditions amongst those least able to afford health care. Where trash is collected in large quantities, it is burned, which drastically increases air pollution. In fact, the capital of El Salvador may soon have the dubious distinction of having the worst air quality in the world.

To illustrate the negative effect all this has had on health, it was noted that there has been an increase in patient consults in the areas of highest contamination. Most of these patients experience respiratory problems resulting from air pollution, or skin problems caused by a variety of environmental contaminants. In addition, Dr. Mauricio Calero, a Salvadoran physician living in Ontario, Canada, whose attendance was sponsored by DGH, painted a clear picture of the economic repercussions of such environmental degradation, including the cost of treating related diseases and work time lost.

Overall, the colloquium provided an effective forum for leading researchers and authorities to discuss the environmental crisis facing El Salvador and its public health implications—a problem also looming over most developing nations. The overriding sentiment was one of genuine concern. People seemed very engaged in the subject matter.

Unfortunately, the environmental crisis in El Salvador has only recently begun to receive the serious attention it requires and the problem continues to escalate. It is encouraging, however, that an organization as large and influential within El Salvador as the National University, chose 1997 to focus on environmental concerns in their annual colloquium. Dr. Lanny Smith, President of DGH, who was on the colloquium's planning committee, felt, "The colloquium was a resounding success, both in bringing people together and in helping to focus attention on the need for passage of environmental protection legislation." In fact, after much debate, a law was passed in early March of this year. While critics maintain that it falls far short of what is needed, it is an important first step. 🐸

DGH Mission Statement

A. Fund and accompany non-profit, non-governmental organizations which promote health, education, and Human Rights by helping these partners: 1) Bear witness for Human Rights (and against Human Rights violations), 2) Promote social justice, and 3) Carry out projects that promote health, education and Human Rights.

B. Educate and inspire others, especially students (of medicine, nursing, public health and other health fields, law, college, graduate schools, high school and elementary school) by providing them with "World Citizen" role models and orientation from a Human Rights perspective through lectures, presentations, hands-on experiences and other contexts.

C. Directly sponsor non-profit, non-governmental projects that use an approach to promoting Health and Human Rights similar to that used by MDS (through Community Oriented Primary Care and Human Rights Promotion: *Liberation Medicine*) or some other approach deemed compatible with the principles of DGH. This will provide some of the people inspired in section B (above) with a means of putting their volunteer spirit and ideas into action.

(Continued from the previous page)

cy show reduced IQs and other developmental delays; and human populations severely or chronically exposed to dioxin show increased incidences of cancers, immune deficiencies, and developmental problems.

—*Report of Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR). To receive action alerts about environmental health issues contact Karen Perry at PSR, 1101 14th Street NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005, 202-898-0150 x249, kperry@psr.org.*

CHEMICAL DUMPING. You would expect that a certain small amount of cancer would occur naturally. But surely the amount of cancer that we are seeing and the increases in cancer that we are seeing and experiencing, are not natural. They are caused by human interventions. They are caused by human foolishness in dumping and spreading carcinogenic materials into the environment.

For example, since there are 70,000 chemicals in use today in commercial quantities, and since roughly only a thousand of those have ever been studied in any detail, it will

take decades, maybe centuries, before we fully understand the characteristics of all the chemicals that are currently in use.

Then there is the problem of combinations of multiple chemicals. If you took the 1,000 chemicals that we use most often and wanted to study those in combinations of three, you can get something like 150 million different combinations of three. We study something like 10 to 20 chemicals each year. That's the capability of the entire federal government's research apparatus.

So where should the burden of proof lie? Should you and I have the burden to prove that chemical X, Y or Z is going to harm us? The chemical dumpers get to dump whatever they want, and you and I have to line up the dead bodies and prove that harm has occurred. Since we don't have a government that is interested in doing the research, the dumping continues.

—*Excerpt from an interview with Peter Montague, Ph.D., Environmental Research Foundation, in the HBO documentary Rachel's Daughters: Searching for the Causes of Breast Cancer.*

Torture 101

By Lisa Haugaard

The Pentagon revealed what activists opposed to the school have been alleging for years—that foreign military officers were taught to torture and murder to achieve their political objectives," says Rep. Joseph P. Kennedy II (D-MA), who has waged a three-year campaign to close the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA). Hoping to elude media attention, the Pentagon waited until late on a Friday to release training manuals used at the school and distributed throughout Latin America that instructed officers on the use of torture, murder and blackmail in the fight against left-wing opponents.

The most egregious passages in the declassified manuals advocated such tactics as executions of guerrillas, extortion, physical abuse and paying bounties for enemy dead. One of the manuals offers the following techniques to recruit a guerrilla as an intelligence source: blackmail, false arrest, imprisonment of the potential recruit's parents and execution of all other members of his guerrilla cell. Another manual contains detailed instructions for the making of Molotov cocktails.

The Pentagon released the manuals after a sustained public pressure campaign focused on the role of the CIA in Guatemala, which was the subject of a June report by the President's Intelligence Oversight Board. Since the Board's report mentioned the manuals, the Pentagon received requests to declassify them in their entirety.

The seven Spanish-language training manuals, totaling 1,100 pages, were prepared by the U.S. military and used between 1987 and 1991 for intelligence training courses in Latin America and at the School of the Americas. These manuals, with titles such as "Counter-intelligence" and "Revolutionary War and Communist Ideology," were based on lesson plans used by SOA instructors since 1982.

Along with the declassified manuals, the

YOUR TAX DOLLARS: TRAINING ASSASSINS

By Audrey Lenhart

trespassing. In January, 22 of them were sentenced to six months in prison and a \$3,000 fine. Six of them were friends of DGH. They were protesting the use of American tax dollars to train foreign military officers whose human rights records are among the worst in this hemisphere.

This was made clear in the March 1993 United Nations Truth Commission's *Report on El Salvador*, which cited over 60 Salvadoran officers for ordering, executing and concealing the major atrocities of ten years of civil war. At least 75 percent of the censured officers were trained at the SOA, located in Fort Benning, Georgia. In fact, most of the Salvadoran officers cited in the massacres at El Mozote, Las Hojas, San Sebastian and El Junquillo, were SOA alumni, as were those charged with the 1980 assassination of Archbishop Romero, the 1980 rape and murder of four U.S. churchwomen, and the 1989 murders of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter.

SOA was established in Panama in 1946 to promote regional stability and train U.S. soldiers in jungle warfare. It evolved to teach low intensity conflict, psychological operations (PSY-OPS), and intelligence gathering to some of the worst dictators, war criminals, and violators of human rights in Latin America. In their heydays of military abuse, Bolivia in the '60s, Nicaragua (under the Somozas) in the '70s, and El Salvador in the '80s, were all primary clients of the SOA. As the notoriety of its alumni grew, the school earned the nickname "Escuela de Golpes" (School of Coups). In 1984, when Panama ousted SOA under a provision of the Panama Canal treaty, the Panamanian daily *La Prensa* added another nom de guerre: "The School of Assassins."

Four years after relocation to Ft. Benning, SOA established a Hall of Fame to honor distinguished alumni. Honorees were flown from Latin America for award ceremonies attended by local VIPs, military brass, and occasional Congress members. For its premier Hall of Fame inductee, SOA chose ex-Bolivian dictator Hugo Banzer Suarez. Having come to power in a violent coup, he developed the "Banzer Plan" in the 1970s, which brutally suppressed tin miners and church workers and effectively silenced critics of his regime. Other recipients included: a drug trafficker (Gen. Humberto Regalado Hernandez), a notoriously corrupt dictator (Gen. Policarpo Paz Garcia), and a chief of intelligence who oversaw the assassination of thousands of

Pentagon released two dozen excerpts from the manuals that contain "objectionable and questionable material." Yet a preliminary examination of the manuals by Kennedy's office revealed other citations that describe techniques violating human rights. The "Interrogation" manual taught military officers to gag, bind and blindfold suspects, while the "Terrorism and Urban Guerrilla" guide explains how to build mail bombs.

Analysts at the National Security Archive, a Washington-based research organization, point to sections of at least two of the manuals that equate democratic, non-violent and even strictly electoral campaigning with terrorist activity. "It is important to note that many terrorists are very well trained in subversion of the democratic process and use

This past November, over 2,000 people demonstrated in front of Fort Benning, calling for the closing of the U.S. Army School of the Americas (SOA). Veteran protesters were arrested for

the system to advance their causes," one manual states. "This manipulation ends with the destruction of the democratic system. Discontent that can become political violence can have as its cause political, social and economic activities of terrorists operating within the democratic system." Another manual warns that rebels are active in political organizations, legislative initiatives and political education, and that they can "resort to subverting the government by electoral means." This sort of analysis encourages military officers to perceive democratic challenges to a government as threatening and worthy of a military response.

One manual describes '60s activist Tom Hayden, currently a California state senator, as "one of the masters of terrorist planning." It is

suspected dissidents (Gen. Manuel Antonio Callejas y Calleja).

The core of SOA's curriculum, Low Intensity Conflict, is a deliberately misnamed warfare strategy designed to maintain U.S. military influence in this hemisphere without using (or losing) large numbers of U.S. troops. Instead, U.S. military personnel, aided by a handful of guest instructors from various SOA client nations, train surrogate Latin American and Caribbean soldiers in "dirty little war" techniques, including: counterinsurgency and urban counterinsurgency; irregular warfare and commando operations; sniper and sapper techniques (laying mines); combat arms and special operations; and military intelligence and PSYOPS.

Former graduates describe their courses as including brutal interrogation and torture methods (read about the SOA training manuals in *Torture 101*). Such methods have often been put into action by Latin American militaries, with the full knowledge of the CIA and high ranking U.S. government officials. Students are trained in repression of subversives (with an emphasis on those associated with the church) and techniques of low-intensity conflict, such as murder, torture, and rape.

SOA graduates who go home and adequately perform their duties can look forward to returning to the SOA again and again, to receive more training, an assignment as guest instructor, or induction into the SOA Hall of Fame. In this way, SOA functions not only as a training and indoctrination center, but also as a reward to select soldiers for a job well done.

Like any elite school, SOA builds an old boys network. When it comes time for the U.S. to choose a faction in an internal power dispute abroad, it has highly placed allies whose politics it helped shape and whose loyalty it claims. The U.S. government has achieved significant economic leverage in Latin American countries by ensuring U.S. allies are ever present in these governments and that their militaries are well-equipped to handle any type of insurgency. The U.S. government has attempted to keep its training tactics as classified as possible because of the obvious implications such techniques would have on the opinions of American taxpayers. According to the Pentagon, it costs the U.S. government \$18.4 million a year to operate the School.

precisely this identification of activists for social change as terrorists that led death squads in Latin America to kill thousands of religious leaders, students, union members and human rights activists.

The school's opponents are not naive. They know that closing the school would not end U.S. training of Latin American militaries and intelligence services, since these activities can and do take place in other settings. Nonetheless, they believe that it would be an important symbolic victory.

Lisa Haugaard is legislative coordinator for the Latin American Working Group, a coalition of non-governmental organizations based in Washington, D.C.

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Every November, on the anniversary of the massacre of six Jesuit priests in El Salvador, hundreds gather in front of Fort Benning to protest the school that trained their killers.

ities of this hemisphere's most brutal armed forces—undermined the human rights it purports to instill. At best, the low intensity conflict it teaches maintains the status quo in nations with large, impoverished populations plagued by unfair labor practices, poor living conditions, and lack of education. At worst, it is a tool for achieving and legitimizing fascism. As the U.N. Truth Commission Report clearly demonstrates, SOA training does not alter the patterns of traditionally abusive militaries—it only makes the alumni more mindful of hiding their atrocities.

Attempts have been made to close the School, but have not succeeded. Rep. Joseph Kennedy has repeatedly introduced bills in Congress that would close the School. His attempts have failed by increasingly narrower margins, indicating that policy makers are awakening to the fact that taxpayer money could be better spent. You can join in the fight against institutionalized rape, murder, and torture. Write to your Congressperson and Senator and let them know that you do not support continued funding of SOA. For further information, contact SOA Watch at P.O. Box 3330, Columbus, GA 31903.

NOTE: *Information for this article was provided by Maryann Bell, Director, Peace Studies Center, University at Stony Brook, New York, as well as the book School of Assassins by Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, which can be obtained through SOA Watch.*

A Day's Life . . .

The first week of November [1994] I was working in the clinic in El Tablón with Irma and the Health Promoters in the mornings—seeing patients, precepting for Promoters and consulting with Irma. In the afternoons we worked together, quickly trying to analyze the data from the projects and preparing for the upcoming community presentations. One evening, after a long day of work, a boy came running up to our house and told us there were problems with a childbirth. We grabbed a pack of equipment, and Irma, Lissi and I headed through the woods to a small, one-room house. The expectant mother was in the squatting position and looked completely exhausted. They told us she had been in labor for 16 hours. The local midwife looked tired as well, and she thanked us and left. While Irma prepared our equipment, I asked our patient to sit on the bed and rest, listened to the baby's heart and then performed a vaginal exam. The heart beat sounded good, she was fully dilated, the head was in the cervix and her water had not yet broken. Her problem was that after so many hours of pushing she was incredibly swollen, both inside and out. Irma

agreed we should break the water. I did so and while Irma went to get the water we were boiling, I pushed all the swollen tissue out of the way and asked the patient to push so I could see how well she was moving the baby. Much to my surprise, on that, her first push for us, the baby came out full speed, a beautiful and healthy-looking baby boy. This was

Economic opportunities in this area are scarce. Many are left with only one alternative: Making hammocks and other typical weave-work in their homes and selling them in a very informal and exploitative market. The average salary one person can receive in this type of work is less than one dollar a day.

incredibly exciting for me and I was all smiles as we cleaned the baby, cut and cleaned the cord, gave eye-drops, and delivered the afterbirth.

But not all was as perfect as one would hope. For some reason, the mother didn't seem so happy. She smiled at times, but just as often looked sad. I thought maybe she was just tired, but while we walked home I asked Irma and Lissi if they had noticed the same. Then Lissi, who had been talking with another woman in the house, told us what she had learned. This woman was too poor to support this child, so she had received food throughout the pregnancy from another woman in exchange for the

unborn baby. The following day, her newborn son was taken away from her. I was shocked, sad and disturbed by this. It didn't comfort me much when Lissi added that this was not so unusual. In fact, this child was the seventh for this woman and she has only kept two.

— Stephen Miller, MD, January 1995



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DGH is administered by an elected Board of Directors drawn mostly from past and present volunteers with MDS. The board is assisted by an advisory council composed of 100 physicians, students, retirees, artists, nurses, business people and

others. A diverse group of volunteers provides the vital core of DGH's resources, including this newsletter. There are no paid employees. DGH is incorporated in the state of Georgia as a 501(c)3 organization. Donations are tax deductible.