

Winds of Peace



Newsletter for Madison Friends' Projects in Viet Nam

January, 2001

Issue #6

Going Back by Mike Boehm

The time is drawing nearer when folks from around the U.S. and other parts of the world, such as Australia, will be arriving in Viet Nam to attend the dedication ceremony for the My Lai Peace Park on March 16, 2001.

It needs to be emphasized that the My Lai Peace Park will not be finished when we arrive on March 16 this year. The two-storied gazebo will be finished, and, hopefully, a gate and archway will be in place. The next step will be planting trees, which is what we will be doing as part of the dedication of the park. After the trees are planted, construction will continue, and the park will be finished later this year.

In the afternoon on March 16, after the ceremonies are finished and the trees planted, we will be going to the new primary school for another ceremony arranged by the People's Committee of My Lai. They are very happy and proud of this new school and want to celebrate the school with us.

As part of the ceremonies that day, we will be tying friendship bracelets around the wrists of children (and probably each other). A number of elementary classes and Girl Scout troops are busy making these bracelets here in Madison.



Two Vietnamese girls with friendship bracelets made for them by the children of Madison, Wisconsin, March 16, 1998.

Among the people attending will be Hugh Thompson, Larry Colburn and Jim Andreotta, who is the cousin of Glenn Andreotta, the third member of the helicopter crew who rescued the villagers at My Lai during the massacre. Attending the ceremonies with Larry will be his wife, Lisa, and his son Connor, who is in the third grade. Connor will be bringing art work made by his class, to be given to children of the My Lai primary school, who will in turn have art work made for him and his class. At least three other schools here in Madison, and elsewhere in the U.S., will be participating in these art exchanges.

I would like to encourage anyone reading this to come to My Lai to attend this ceremony. As well as being historic, the dedication ceremony of the My Lai Peace Park will be a tremendously healing event for our two countries and an example for other countries in conflict around the world.



Photo by B. Haynes

Joy Rifkin, a student at Wingra School, weaving a friendship bracelet for the children of My Lai.

Dear friends,

This issue of *Winds of Peace* is a departure from our usual format.

In this issue are articles about the School of Americas and brief histories of the wars in El Salvador and Guatemala in an attempt to show the connections between the war in Viet Nam and the wars in Central America. By learning the histories of the wars, we also begin to understand why the Sister Meeting Sisters Project is already having such a tremendous impact on the women in El Salvador and Guatemala.

We will return to our regular format in the next issue, although we will continue to give you updates on the Sisters Meeting Sisters Project.

M.B.

International Nonviolent Peace Force

A Draft Proposal by Mel Duncan and David Hartsough



Endorsed by

Oscar Arias

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and
Former President of Costa Rica

Mairead Maguire

Nobel Peace Prize Laureate from
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Ambassador to the UN from
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International Fellowship of Reconciliation

Hague Appeal for Peace

Recommended by the Peoples
Millennium Forum at the United
Nations, May 2000

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Mission

To mobilize and train an international nonviolent, standing peace force. The Peace Force will be sent to conflict areas to prevent death and destruction and protect human rights, thus creating the space for local groups to struggle nonviolently, enter into dialogue, and seek peaceful resolution.

Goals

- To build the organization needed to create and maintain a standing Global Nonviolent Peace Force of 200 active members, 400 reserves, and 500 supporters (building up to 2,000 active members, 4,000 reserves, and 5,000 supporters over 10 years).
- To develop the theory and practice of "Third Party Nonviolent Intervention," in order to significantly increase that tool's effectiveness. (The understanding starts with the experience of existing peace teams, human rights, humanitarian, and military organizations.)

Background

As we venture into the new millennium, we stand at a significant crossroad. Will the next century bring an incessant stream of devastating armed conflicts and brutal violence, like the horrors we have seen in Kosovo, Rwanda, Iraq and East Timor? Or are there alternatives to the endless repetition of such catastrophes?

There is an alternative, one that builds upon the recent experiences of many organizations that have successfully experimented with the application of "Third Party Nonviolent Intervention" techniques in areas of advanced conflict. Out of these experiences has grown a new wave of deliberate nonviolent intervention carried out by some twenty or so organizations around the world.

The Global Nonviolent Peace Force builds on this legacy.

Current Work

- Researching logistics, application, and best practices of large-scale nonviolent intervention.
- Developing the proposal and organizational infrastructure through consultations with leaders throughout the world.
- Recruiting grassroots, human rights, and nonviolent leaders to help create and participate in the international convening event.
- Raising money.

Help Needed

- Endorse the Global Nonviolent Peace Force.
- Assist in research. Provide financial support.
- Urge the support of NGOs and religious leaders.
- Advocate for a Resolution of Support from the UN General Assembly.

Conclusion

We have the capacity to make the Global Peace Force happen in our lifetimes. The ingredients abound: there are many veterans of nonviolent movements; strategic lessons have been learned; our organizational abilities have increased; highly qualified trainers are available; the World Wide Web, already used to advance the campaigns for banning land mines and establishing an International Criminal Court, is available as an organizing tool; funders are expressing an interest; and, most importantly, people are demanding an alternative to highly militarized interventions. There will be no better way to commemorate the United Nations decade of Peace and Nonviolence than to do so.

Letters

In keeping with this newsletter's purpose to educate and promote discussion, we will print not only letters which support our work, but also letters critical of this work. We request that all letters be signed by the writer.

Dear Friends,

In celebration of the lunar New Year, which we have been doing for over twenty years at the Vietnamese Mission to the United Nations, we are happy to support your Projects in Viet Nam.

The work for My Lai is of special interest to us as we visited these in 1990 on Clergy and Laity Concerned's 25th anniversary trip. What I call "the Vietnamese Guernica" was especially moving but perhaps the most vivid memory is that of the veteran in our group.

We stopped for lunch at China Beach following our My Lai visit. He was not able to eat but instead went off down the beach. When I went to walk on the beach after lunch he was coming back with a Vietnamese child on his shoulders and others flocking around him. That remains a symbol to me of the hope that relationships between nations may change before it is too late.

So blessings on those in My Lai and Madison who are building a Peace Park.

Hoa Binh (Peace),
Janice Duren

To the fund for Mike Boehm
and after watching the T.V. show P.O.V. (Regret to Inform):

This activity for forgiveness is so necessary for the Peace in this world. I was raised a Quaker, and my beliefs are always with me. I reflect on the activity of my great-great grandfather, Charles Osborne, who was a very strong abolitionist and underground worker.

Gertrude O. Clearfield

Dear Mike,

As I was making out my check, my seven year old son asked what the Newsletter (beautiful) was about. I explained as best I could My Lai, and Viet Nam's current & historical situation (much of what I've learned has been directly or indirectly through you and your projects) and he ran upstairs for his money to give, too. Thank you for showing the way.

Beth Gehred-O'Connell

Mike,

Enclosed you will find a check for the loan fund in Viet Nam. I currently work for the credit union movement in this country. Our motto is "People helping people." Poor farmers and small businesses that were ignored by large banks formed credit unions in Europe many years ago. I see a parallel with the loan fund.

I see the ever-improving relations between our country and Viet Nam as a positive for both nations. Someday I would like to return to Pleiku where I served with the Army Corps of Engineers in 1967-8.

Thank you, Mike, and everyone else for the good work you are doing.

Sincerely,
Ken Anderson

Dear Mike and Valerie,

I've just now read the Winds of Peace newsletter (July/August, 2000) and want to tell you how much your work "touches my soul." I want to thank you for what you are doing to help create a world of love and understanding!

Phyllis Jansma
Fremont Friends
Meeting for Worship

Enclosed is a contribution for your Peace Projects in Viet Nam.

Dear Mike Boehm,

I'm a Vietnam veteran who has supported Peace Trees Vietnam and also Madison Friends Meeting.

I know you are planning a spring trip to Vietnam to dedicate the My Lai Peace Park. I had thought I would like to participate in the trip as I have never been back to Vietnam. I have since changed my mind again - there is still too much emotion in me about Vietnam. On Oct. 8th, 1968, I lost my left leg above the knee when I stepped on a landmine. This is why I'm drawn to your work and also Peace Tree's work.

Tears well up in my eyes when I read your newsletters and I don't know why.

I love the people of Vietnam, they are a gentle people, I hold nothing against them - I sponsor a child in northern Vietnam through Childreach.

Thirty-two years and the war is still in my head - all those people wanted to do was plant their rice and farm the land.

I hope this check will help you continue the work.
Sincerely,
Tom Mallabar

Winds of Peace

Newsletter for Madison Friends' Projects in Viet Nam
"The people of Viet Nam are looking forward to the winds of peace blowing from America."

Mike Boehm, Project Co-ordinator
Phan Van Do, Project Assistant in Viet Nam
Terri Smith, Newsletter Design

For this newsletter to fulfill its potential we need your feedback. Please send any letters, questions, or written contributions to:

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www.mylaipeacepark.com

School of the Americas Demonstrations

by Mike Boehm

On January 17, 2001, the School of the Americas changed its name to the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. The military at Fort Benning, Georgia, is saying now that they have closed down the School of the Americas. But in a media interview last year, Georgia Senator and SOA supporter, the late Paul Coverdell, characterized the DOD proposal as "cosmetic" changes that would ensure that the SOA could continue its mission and operation. Critics of the SOA agree; the new military training school is the continuation of the SOA under a new name.

Last November, on the same weekend that President Clinton was in Viet Nam, I was with about 10,000 other people at Ft. Benning, Georgia, demonstrating against the U.S. Army School of the Americas. The graduates of this school are responsible for the murder of thousands of people in Central and South America. We the people of the U.S. would have been better served if President Clinton had investigated and put an end to our own human rights abuses rather than chastising other countries around the world, including Viet Nam, for their abuses.

The School of the Americas was first established in Panama in 1946 as the U.S. Army Caribbean Training Center to help professionalize Latin American and Caribbean militaries. In 1963, under President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, the training center was renamed the School of the Americas (dubbed the School of Assassins by those in Panama). In 1984, the school was forced to move from Panama to Fort Benning, near Columbus, Georgia, under the terms of the Panama Canal Treaties.

The SOA, run by the U.S. Army, trains soldiers and military personnel from Latin American countries in subjects like counter-insurgency, infantry tactics, military intelligence, anti-narcotics operations, and commando operations. U.S. taxpayers fund this training, and all of the training is conducted in Spanish. Latin American instructors teach most of the classes. According to the SOA itself, more than 56,000 members of Latin American militaries have attended the SOA since its inception in 1946. Among the training tools used in these classes were manuals that included techniques to terrorize, torture, and murder civilian populations. Defenders of the school denied the existence of these training manuals until June 1996, when the Intelligence Oversight Board, appointed by President Clinton to investigate abuses by the U.S. Intelligence community, discovered them. Bearing the SOA emblem, the manuals provided detailed instruction in the "arts" of blackmail, extortion and forced interrogation, including instruction on how to keep torture victims alive and revive them when the pain becomes too unbearable for them to remain conscious.

SOA graduates have included some of the most notorious human rights abusers from Latin America. From Leopoldo Galtieri of Argentina (for whom an international arrest warrant was issued in April 1997) to Omar Torrijos of Panama, and Hugo Banzer Suarez of Bolivia, SOA graduates have led military coups and are responsible for the massacres of hundreds of people. SOA graduates were responsible for the Uraba massacre in Colombia, the El Mozote massacre, the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the Jesuit massacre in El Salvador, the La Cantuta massacre in Peru and hundreds of other human rights abuses. Panamanian dictator and CIA operative Manuel Noriega is also a graduate of the SOA.

The actions of the SOA went largely unacknowledged and uncontested until 1990 when Maryknoll priest Fr. Roy Bourgeois, a decorated Viet Nam veteran, founded the School of Americas Watch (SOAW). In ten years the demonstration to shut down the SOA has grown from a handful of friends to 10,000 or more people. The demonstrators include old people, young people, students, veterans, peace activists, and representatives from just about every religious order. These demonstrations are held on the weekend nearest to November 16, the anniversary of the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her teenage daughter in San Salvador.

The national media finally began focusing attention on the SOA a few years ago. Coverage by National Public Radio, The Washington Post and The New York Times, among others, has begun to question why the SOA exists. Perhaps the most significant coverage came from the official Ft. Benning newspaper, The Benning Leader, which ran a feature article by the editor, who ended his coverage with this quote from a demonstrator, "Where were the Christians when the Jews were going into the ovens in Germany? This is definitely an evil thing."

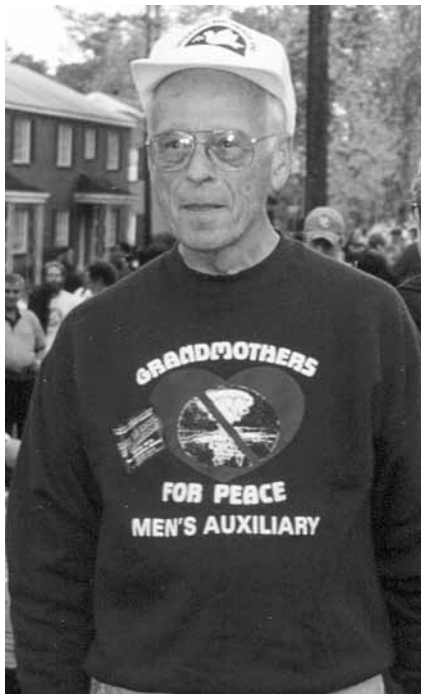


Photo by M. Boehm

One of the thousands of protesters at Fort Benning, Georgia.

We who have a voice must speak for the voiceless --Archbishop Oscar Romero



January 2001 Winds of Peace

This was the third year in a row that I had participated in the annual protest, and I will continue to go each year until the SOA is shut down. Saturday was a day of speeches, songs, and testimonies of friends and family of those who have been murdered by SOA graduates. On Sunday, each person who decided to perform civil disobedience was given a small white cross with the name of someone killed in Central America. We lined up twelve across and prepared to enter the Ft. Benning base. In the lead were people carrying coffins on their shoulders. A woman and a man then alternated chanting (reminiscent of liturgical chanting) the name of someone, man, woman or child. As each name was chanted, we answered by raising our crosses and responding, **“Presente!”** The dead were present with us, and we carried them in our hearts as we then began to cross onto the base. I carried with me the spirit of Claudia Sapar of Guatemala.



At this year’s demonstration, the military followed through on its threat to process everybody who was arrested for entering the base. In the previous two years, most people were put on buses and taken back off the base with no further consequences, but last November almost two thousand people were arrested. Almost all were checked out on a computer and given “Ban and Bar” letters. These letters forbade them from crossing onto the base for five years under penalty of fines and prison. Last year, like most years, a number of people ignored previous “Ban and Bar” letters and crossed anyway. They are now awaiting trial, but they may end up with lighter sentences now that U.S. District Judge Robert Elliott has retired.

In the past, Judge Elliott has given out sentences of up to fourteen months in jail and fines of up to \$3,000. Elliott’s efforts to crush the movement to close the SOA are consistent with previous judgments he has made. President Kennedy appointed Elliott U.S. District Judge in 1962. Later that year he prohibited (overturned on appeal) Dr. Martin Luther King from marching in Albany, Georgia. What Judge Elliott is most well known for, at least to those who followed the trials resulting from the massacre at My Lai, is his defense of Lt. William Calley. He thought of Calley as a son (during this period they became golfing partners) and granted a habeas corpus petition to Calley in 1974, setting aside the lieutenant’s conviction for his role in the massacre. Elliott explained his decision by saying, “War is war, and it’s not unusual for innocent civilians such as the My Lai victims to be killed.” He backed this statement up by saying that when Joshua took the city of Jericho in biblical times, no charges had been brought against him for the slaughter of civilians. Calley’s petition by Elliott was also overturned.

Anyone who has done research on the causes of the various wars in Latin America will see the involvement of the U.S. government and will realize that the war in Viet Nam was not an aberration. Our policies, which have led to death and destruction around the world, were stated very clearly in 1948 by George Kennan, who was then the head of the State Department’s policy planning staff. In his now famous memorandum he wrote:

“We have about 50 percent of the world’s wealth but only 6.3 percent of its population...In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity...To do so, we will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming...We should cease to talk about vague and...unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living-standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.”

With this as the philosophical underpinning of our foreign policy, it is no surprise that a democratically-elected government in Guatemala was overthrown with the help of our CIA for the benefit of the United Fruit Company. Similarly, in Southeast Asia, U.S. foreign policy, dictated in part by commercial interests, sought to contain independent movements for self government. So, it was never in the cards that Ho Chi Minh would be allowed to create a free and independent Viet Nam. It is no surprise that the SOA

Those sentenced for protesting have served more time than any of the SOA graduates linked to atrocities.

--U.S. Rep. Joseph Kennedy II,
from a letter read at the demonstration



Photo by M. Boehm

Fifty years ago, the U.S. Army School of the Americas opened its doors in Panama to a class of Latin America and Caribbean military officers to receive training in the art of war. Half a century later, it is time to shut the School down.

--U.S. Rep. Joseph Kennedy II,
from a letter read at the demonstration

The Invasion of Grenada

by W. D. Ehrhart

I didn't want a monument,
not even one as sober as that
vast black wall of broken lives.
I didn't want a postage stamp.
I didn't want a road beside the Delaware
River with a sign proclaiming
"Vietnam Veterans Memorial Highway."

What I wanted was a simple recognition
of the limits of our power as a nation
to inflict our will on others.
What I wanted was an understanding
that the world is neither black-and-white
nor ours.
What I wanted
was an end to monuments.

Reprinted from Beautiful Wreckage:
New & Selected Poems, by W.D. Ehrhart
(Easthampton, MA: Adastra Press, 1999)
by permission of the author.

exists to implement this policy.

Because the American military knows it is losing the PR battle on the SOA issue, it has fallen back on arguments used in most of its wars. One argument is the "few bad apples" argument. In this instance, the military claims that it has only been a few bad apples trained at the SOA who have been involved in human rights abuses in Latin America. The United Nations Truth Commission in 1992 investigated human rights in El Salvador, such as the many massacres committed there, and found that many of these massacres had been ordered by or perpetrated by graduates of the SOA: for example, two of three officers cited in the assassination of Archbishop Romero; three of five officers cited in the rape and murder of four U.S. churchwomen; ten of twelve cited for the El Mozote massacre of 900 civilians; over 100 of 246 cited for atrocities in Colombia. And these are only the human rights violations that are known.

I have been asked in the past, "What has the U.S. learned from the war in Viet Nam?" Well, two things our government learned were: don't let the media close to the action and don't let the American people see their boys and girls come home in body bags. So now we only let our soldiers fight in wars where there is little chance of their getting hurt, such as the Iraqi and Bosnian wars. Or we hire the killing done, which is where the SOA comes in. The military people trained at the SOA are little more than hired killers, who, in Central America at least, provide protection of our economic interests there.

In the last eight years I have sat with Vietnamese women in their kitchens, pig pens, cow pens, in their fields, and under their fruit trees, listening to stories of the horrors they have survived. Now I am hearing the same stories in El Salvador and Guatemala. I can't bear hearing any more of these stories. I can't bear having murder committed in my name. And so I am committed to shutting down that obscenity, the School of the Americas.

Like everyone else who took part in these demonstrations, I felt a strong sense of being part of a special community. I would like to send a message to all the other committed people I have met during the last three years at the SOA demonstrations. Every year when I look around at folks who have come to Georgia to demonstrate, I see faces, some confident, some frightened, but all determined to shut down the SOA. I want to say to you, "I am so proud of you, and I'm proud to be with you."

For more information about the U.S. Army School of the Americas and the demonstrations planned for the future, I would encourage people to visit the School of

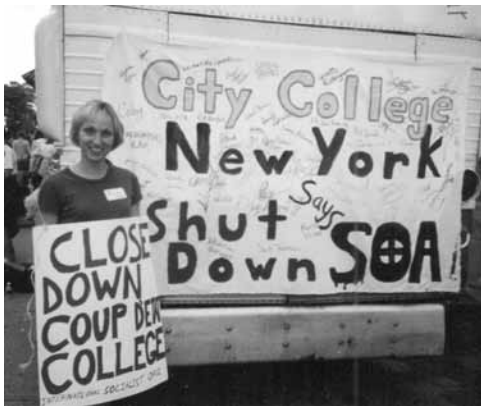


Photo by M. Boehm

On February 12, 2000, Hugh Thompson and Larry Colburn spoke to Latin American officers who were being trained at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia. This event was promoted by the military as an example of how they are responding to criticism about the human rights abuses of their graduates. Yet nothing changed after their talk.

Military officials invited Hugh and Larry to return to Fort Benning to talk again at the School of the Americas this February. Hugh had prior engagements and could not attend. Larry refused to talk again at the School of the Americas. He said he had done some research since last year and from what he learned he felt he could not participate at the School of the Americas.



the Americas Watch web site at www.soaw.org. I will be attending the demonstration scheduled for next November, and I hope to see you all there.

Information for this article was obtained from the following sources:
Hell, Healing and Resistance by Daniel Hallock
www.soaw.org www.colombiasupport.net
http://web.cln.com/archives/atlanta/newsstand/041198/m_cover.htm

Sisters Meeting Sisters-El Salvador

by Mike Boehm

In January of 2000, I traveled to El Salvador to meet for the first time with women there in order to present the Sisters Meeting Sisters Project and to receive their feedback. The response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic (Winds of Peace, issue #3). I returned to El Salvador in late November, 2000, to meet again with women's organizations to finalize an agenda for the meeting between the women of El Salvador and Viet Nam, scheduled to take place in September, 2001.

Twentieth Anniversary Memorial

Although our first meetings weren't scheduled until the first week of December, I arrived in El Salvador early in order to attend ceremonies for the four churchwomen who were killed 20 years before. Ita Ford, Maura Clarke, Dorothy Kazel, and Jean Donovan were stopped at a roadblock set up by the Salvadoran National Guard, abducted, raped, and shot to death on the night of December 2, 1980. The next day, campesinos discovered their bodies alongside an isolated road and buried the remains in a common grave. Ita Ford and Maura Clarke were Maryknoll sisters, Dorothy Kazel was an Ursuline sister and Jean Donovan was a churchworker. These women, like scores of other priests and nuns in El Salvador, were murdered for the "crime" of embracing Liberation Theology. Liberation Theology arose from the recognition of the suffering of oppressed people and the need to work for justice for the oppressed through study, reflection, and vocation. Embracing Liberation Theology necessarily mandated examination by Christian nuns and priests of Christianity's own role in this oppression. This was unacceptable to the oppressors in El Salvador, the government, the military and the mainstream Christian church, who acted quickly to suppress the movement.

The killings came at an awkward time for the Reagan administration. Congressional approval of aid to El Salvador might have been derailed by this case, so the Reagan administration sought to discount the idea that the killings were the result of a policy of state-sponsored terrorism. In testimony to Congress in 1981, Secretary of State Alexander Haig argued that the churchwomen might have been shot while trying to run a military roadblock.

Subsequent investigations by the United Nations Truth Commission brought the truth to light. In 1993 the UNTC published a report of the results of its investigations of human rights abuses in El Salvador. In this report, they detailed the involvement of the following men in the murder of these women and the subsequent cover-up: Gen. Oscar Edgardo Casanova Vejar, graduate of the School of the Americas (SOA) class of '63; Luis Antonio Colindres Aleman, graduate SOA class of '80; Gen. Jose Guillermo Garcia, graduate SOA class of '62; Col. Carlos Eugenio Vides Casanova, guest speaker at SOA '85; and Maj. Lizandro Zepeda Velasco, graduate SOA class of '66.

The death of these four women changed forever the lives of many religious women in the U.S. and other parts of the world (see sidebar for one testimony.) For information about last December's ceremonies and to read other testimonies by religious women, visit the Maryknoll web site at www.maryknoll.org.

Pablo's Story

During these days before the actual meetings with the women's organizations in El Salvador, I attended other meetings, one which stands out like a beacon, a riveting three-hour testimony by Pablo Alvarengo. Pablo's testimony covered, from a peasant's point of view: the beginning of the guerrilla movement; the importance of the radical priests' role in the raising of the awareness of the peasants which led to the guerrilla movement; and the twelve year civil war with the government. It was also an incredible testimony of personal growth, from his life as a peasant, ignorant of the outside world, to his growing sense of community and his development as a leader. Pablo also shared his experience of grief as, one by one, his children were killed.

Pablo told us that being born into such poverty and misery made it impossible to imagine a better life; misery was normality. The village priest worked with the landowners and the government in keeping the peasants suppressed, common throughout Latin American countries at the time. The villagers were told by this priest that they



Photo by Sr. Eleanor Gilmore, C.S.J.P.

Little girl, placing a candle at the memorial for the four churchwomen.

Testimony

The death of the four churchwomen in 1980 was truly a "wake-up call" for me and for many other religious women who had not yet had much experience or knowledge of what was happening in Latin America during that time. I think it exploded the parameters of my world. These women were similar to me in age and background but were doing something much more radical with their lives. They gave me a new challenge and worldview.

The fact that two of them were Maryknoll Sisters has been very important to me and my Sinsinawa Dominican congregation. We consider each other "first cousins" because Maryknoll's founder asked our leaders (we had been established in 1847) to help with the formation of the new community (in the 1940's, I would guess). So when I visited the graves of Ita and Maura in Chalatenango City, it felt to me like I was visiting my own dear sisters' graves. And when I rode down the dark road from the airport outside San Salvador not long ago (March, 2000) and had a co-traveler point out the area where the four were abducted in 1980, it was chilling for me.

When Sr. Marie Louise and I talked about this earlier today, she said she was more acutely aware when this happened in 1980 of the mortal danger that missionary priests and sisters were in and of how well they must have been doing their job and witnessing for justice and love—if they were targets of such violent action. Had they been innocuous "do-gooders," nobody would have paid any attention to them.

This was probably the real beginning of my cynicism and lack of trust of the U.S. government. Never before had I realized that it could be complicit in atrocities like this.

I think the 20th anniversary last month was a real focal point around which people all over gathered to celebrate the memories of the four women and rededicate ourselves to the work of peace and justice. It helped point up the injustices that are still happening in Central America and re-energize people to work to root them out.

--Testimony from Sr. Maureen McDonnell, O.P.



Photo by M. Boehm

Pablo Alvarengo

Local organizing is important for the success of national organizing... This exchange will show the different experiences of women in different parts of the world [facing the] same problems... Some [women's organizations] will be more advanced in some areas, it is important to learn [each others] strategies... There is a lot of interest in this from the women of the FMLN... We should include in the program an exchange of elected officials and political leadership.

--Irma Amaya,

Women's Secretariat of the
Farabundi Marti Front for National Liberation
(FMLN)



Photo by M. Boehm

Leslie Schuld at memorial site for four churchwomen killed in El Salvador.

must obey the authorities because all authority comes from God. If a child died from an easily preventable illness, the priest said, "Be happy. Your child is with God." If the villagers told the priest there was not enough to eat, he would say: "Keep suffering. Your reward is in heaven;" or "If you don't accept suffering, you will go to hell." These were the comforts of the priest.

The beginnings of awareness started with the arrival to Pablo's native village in 1972 of a young priest, who began teaching the villagers the teachings of Medellin. He also began teaching the villagers, from the Bible, the concept of Christian-based communities, communities that banded together for mutual aid.

It didn't take long for the military to react to this. Within months of the priest's arrival, a famous military colonel, known to all the villagers, came to the village and called all the men together for a talk. He addressed the men as "My children" and began talking about the dangers of communism and especially Fidel Castro, who he claimed was behind bringing communism to El Salvador. He described Castro like this: "He is ten feet tall and looks like an ape. His body is covered with hair; he has horns on his head and a long tail for climbing trees. He eats only human flesh, alive, and he especially likes eating babies." He continued describing Castro eating babies, with blood running down his chest. He then told the villagers that under communism their wives would no longer be theirs, that their children would be taken from them at the age of seven and shipped to Cuba and Russia. The colonel asked the villagers, "Do you want this in your village?" The villagers said no and then the colonel said, "That church over there teaches communism!" Pablo told us, "We believed him. Who was there to tell us differently?" (Before we laugh at these ignorant villagers believing all this, we should remember how we in this country were taught to fear and hate communism.)

After the colonel left, the villagers confronted the young priest and argued with him about what the colonel had said. The result was that some of the villagers sided with the priest and some sided with the colonel, and the village was divided. Villagers like Pablo, who couldn't go back to the old way of being subdued by others once they saw the possibility of a better life, continued learn and to organize other villagers. The government quickly responded to this awakening peasant movement with increasing persecution, death threats, and then murder itself. Twelve years of civil war ensued, with the Peace Accords finally signed in 1992.

Planning for Sisters Meeting Sisters Project

With this for background, we began our meetings to set up the Sisters Meeting Sisters Project. On the Monday following the ceremonies for the four churchwomen, Norm Stockwell, an independent journalist from Madison and a member of the Sisters Meeting Sisters committee, arrived in San Salvador, and we began a week-long series of meetings with women leaders in El Salvador. What came through clearly in these usually emotionally-charged meetings was the admiration the women of El Salvador have for the people of Viet Nam. Hearing of the long history of the Viet Nam Women's Union, its large (more than 11,000,000 women have joined) and diverse membership, and its successful organizing efforts on behalf of the women in Viet Nam has only strengthened the desire of the women's organizations in El Salvador to meet with Vietnamese women. (See sidebars for quotes by some of the El Salvadoran women.)

Leslie Schuld of the Committee for International Solidarity (CIS) arranged our meetings. Leslie had already worked with the women's organizations in El Salvador to finalize the itinerary for the Sisters Meeting Sisters exchange next September. The proposed itinerary, as it stands now, will have the women from El Salvador and Viet Nam fly to Madison, Wisconsin, to meet before traveling to El Salvador. The four days these women will be in Madison will be an opportunity for them to get to know each other and for all of these women to be introduced to Madison. Over the next three or four days, the women from Viet Nam and El Salvador will meet with women's organizations in Madison to discuss issues of mutual concern. This stay in Madison is also an opportunity for the women to give testimony, of their histories and the impact war has had on their lives, to the people of Madison and to express what they would like the people of Madison to learn from their stories.

After their stay in Madison, the women from Viet Nam and El Salvador, as well as a small delegation from Madison, will fly to El Salvador. The eight-day stay in El Salvador

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will include meetings with women's representatives from the El Salvadoran government, MAM, the Women's Secretariat of the FMLN, and other women's organizations where they will share experiences (their own, their country's, their community's) of the devastation of war and the rebuilding needed afterwards. They will also share their experiences as women in patriarchal societies, including the struggle for equality, for equal participation in government, and for creating jobs for women.

At the end of this visit the women from all the participating countries will meet to reflect on and evaluate this exchange. The women from Viet Nam will then fly back to Madison and after a one-day rest, they will return to Viet Nam.



Photo by M. Boehm

A women's sewing collective in Arcatao, El Salvador, Madison's sister city.

Much of our work has been raising consciousness... Many women's organizations have been struggling over issues, but not necessarily women's issues... During the war we began to understand our importance as women...to see the role of women not just as the result of capitalism, but also of patriarchy...After the war we felt the need to struggle for our rights as women. The Peace Accords did not mention improving life for women, rather we were supposed to re-insert ourselves into a society that oppressed women. The problem of equality was not changed by the struggle against capitalism...it must be incorporated into the revolutionary struggle, a strategy...to achieve true democracy and a just system should be taken on by the revolutionary left. --Lety Mendez, FMLN

(We would like to talk about) projects in San Marcos, Cabanas, etc...micro-credit, the maquilas, women's development - rights, health, etc...Our similar histories, women in war. (We talked with Mike about healing from war...(MAM is interested in) training around gender issues...We as women have a right to be here...A new vision of how to develop yourself as a woman (referring to economic self-empowerment)...This meeting (Sept. 2001) will hopefully begin an ongoing exchange. --Yolanda Barahoua,

Melida Anaya Montes

Women's Movement Association (MAM)

Earthquake in El Salvador

Over One Million Are Homeless...

After the recent devastating earthquake, thousands of El Salvadorans have been killed and whole towns and villages wiped out in Usulután, La Libertad, La Paz, Sonsonate, Ahuachapán. There is extensive damage in many other areas.

Aid is urgently needed. It is extremely important that material or financial donations go to reliable NGOs. The Committee for International Solidarity (CIS) is very reliable. To send financial aid:

1. People can mail smaller donations or Fed-Ex larger donations, made out to CIS, to: CIS, Boulevard Universitario #4, Colonia El Roble, San Salvador, El Salvador. Phone: 011-503-226-2623. Please **e-mail them (CIS@netcomsa.com)**, verifying the amount, mail carrier, and date the check was sent.

2. Wiring money is the fastest way to send money. The ABA number for Banco Agrícola Comercial: 021000089. The CIS account number is 104-024937-0. The address of the bank is: Banco Agrícola Comercial, Agencia Clínicas medicas, 25 Ave. Norte y 21 Calle Poniente, Frente de la Fuente Luminosa, San Salvador, El Salvador. It is imperative that you keep the receipt of the wire transfer and **e-mail CIS** with the exact amount and date of the wire so they can verify that they have received it.

3. Tax-deductible channel in the U.S.: for donations of \$100 or more, you can make out checks to LOS OLIVOS, LTD. and mail to CIS Emergency Fund, c/o Ernest Remer Jenkins, 294 Cottage Ave. West, St. Paul, MN 55117-4302. Include a note that this is for the CIS emergency fund and **e-mail CIS** with a note verifying who is sending the donation, date sent, and the amount.

Desperately needed:

1. Blankets
2. Sheets
3. Canvas/tarps-for makeshift tents
4. Heavy plastic-good quality for makeshift tents
5. Thick nylon rope
6. Wheel chairs
7. Nails
8. Hammers
9. Sheets of roofing tin
10. Thin mattresses

The Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Eucharist located at 2100 N. Noland Road, Independence, MO 64050 (phone 816-252-1673) have graciously offered to receive and help fill two cargo containers for the homeless of El Salvador. PLEASE CALL 816-252-1673 BEFORE DROPPING OFF SO SOMEONE WILL BE AT THE WAREHOUSE TO ACCEPT DELIVERY.

Contact Ellen Trakas, 1209 Indian Lane, Blue Springs, MO 64015. E-mail: etrak@aol.com for further information.

The receiving agency in El Salvador is CIS, Boulevard Universitario #4, San Salvador, El Salvador, C.A. Tel/ Fax: 011-503-226-2623.

Sisters Meeting Sisters - Guatemala

by Mike Boehm

After a week of meetings with women's organizations in El Salvador, Norm Stockwell flew back to Madison, and I took a bus to Guatemala. Our contact person in Guatemala is Lynn Haanen, formerly of Madison, Wisconsin. She spent many years as an activist in Madison and then moved to Guatemala eight years ago, where she has continued her activism. She started the School of the Mountains a few years ago and now is the director there.

On a visit to Madison last summer, Lynn heard of the Sisters Meeting Sisters Project and asked that Guatemala be added to my itinerary after meeting with the women's organizations in El Salvador. She then translated into Spanish the script for the film *The Sound of the Violin in My Lai*, a huge task. The Spanish version of the film became an introduction of the Sisters Meeting Sisters Project and me to the people of Guatemala.

Guatemala's History

Guatemala's history is similar to El Salvador's, in that the actions of the U.S. government profoundly changed the course of the country's history. On March 15, 1945, Juan Jose Arevalo took office as the first popularly-elected President of Guatemala.

Since obtaining independence from Spain in 1821, Guatemala had been ruled by one brutal dictator after another. Arevalo, inspired by Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal principles, instituted many radical reforms during his six years in office, including term limits for elected officials including himself, equal pay for men and women, making racial discrimination a crime, and banning monopolies. At the end of his six-year term, Jacobo Arbenz was elected President, and he expanded the reforms taking place.

The one reform that he instituted that was unacceptable to the U.S. government and business interests was appropriating fallow land to give to landless peasants. The Guatemalan government reimbursed the owners of these hundreds of thousands of acres of unused land, but this was still unacceptable by the largest landowner of all, the United Fruit Company. The United Fruit Company, based in the U.S., sought and obtained help from the U.S. government. A sophisticated PR campaign, by advertising genius Edward Bernays, persuaded the American people that communists from the Soviet Union controlled Arbenz and that he must be stopped before communism took over all of Latin America. In July 1954, the democratically-elected government of Jacobo Arbenz was toppled by a CIA led coup. (For more details about this coup, read the book *Bitter Fruit* by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer.)

Ten years of the most profoundly progressive changes in Guatemala were lost and what followed was over 40 years of bloody

civil war, marked by the emergence of multiple guerrilla armies and a ruthless targeting of indigenous people by government forces. This descent into madness reached its peak by 1982 with the routine policy of massacres of whole Mayan villages. A peace was finally brokered by the United Nations in 1995, but Guatemala has never recovered.

Today, various unions and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are working to improve the lives of everyday Guatemalans, many of whom still live in remote, rural villages. Over twenty-three languages are spoken in Guatemala, and many groups are working to help preserve the indigenous cultures, while at the same time bringing benefits of modern healthcare and communication to these outlying areas.

The people of Guatemala are organizing to move beyond the

animosities of war, but are struggling on a day-to-day basis with poverty and the effects of globalization under a less than sympathetic national government. Sisters Meeting Sisters is one project that they hope will help in this process, dealing with both issues of peace and reconciliation, and models of organized responses of groups of women rebuilding their societies.

Meeting with the People of Guatemala

The groups I met in Guatemala were more varied than those I met in El Salvador. All the groups were former guerrillas, although there is an effort with some of the groups to include former government soldiers. These former soldiers have come to realize that the only efforts to help the people are coming from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). One meeting I attended was led by Victoria (see bio on next page). She made a point of welcoming all the veterans there that day, guerrilla, government, and me.

Other groups I met with included catechists (lay ministers), returned guerrillas, and Mayan people. In a meeting with Yali Santos (see bio on next page), head of the Guillermo Toriello Foundation, I was told that Mayan women were most in need of help in recovering from the trauma of the war. Yali said that Mayan women have not even begun to talk about their experiences from the war, and until they do, they will not be able to recover. She said that she believes one of the most important aspects of the visit by the women of Viet Nam is that it will help the Mayan women to finally begin talking about their experiences.

When I first met with Yali, I presented the Sisters Meeting Sisters project to her as an event that would take place initially in El Salvador. In the years to come it could be expanded to include



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women from other countries devastated by war, such as Guatemala. Yali would not hear of the possibility that the women from Viet Nam would not visit Guatemala when they came to El Salvador next September. She said that if the Vietnamese women were coming 10,000 miles to visit the women of El Salvador, why couldn't they travel another five hours to visit the women of Guatemala? So, depending on the decision of the Vietnamese women, Guatemala will be included in next September's exchange.

In all these meetings there were two things that broke through cultural barriers. One was showing the video of the film *The Sound of the Violin in My Lai* and the other was playing my violin. Before I played, I would explain that the music I play, old time music, comes from the time when we in the U.S. were mostly campesinos, farmers. There was always a lot of laughter when I said that, because the campesinos in El Salvador and Guatemala cannot imagine us as farmers. I said that I like this music because it is honest, it comes from the earth.

All the women I met with saw not only the potential in the Sisters Meeting Sisters exchange, but also the tremendous need for the strengthening of women. As Manuela Alvarado told me, "If we are ever to save our society it will be the women who do it."



Photo by M. Boehm

Nativity scene, set up for the evening celebration of the Lady of Guadalupe, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala.

Victoria's Story

Victoria (the only name she gives to people) is 36 years old and graduated as a primary school teacher in 1982. She is from Solola and incorporated as an urban supporter while in high school. She was sent to the mountains to the Luis Ixmata Front in 1984, where she was a sharpshooter. She remained there until the peace accords were signed in 1996. She lost two partners in the war, one who was shot in combat at her side. She is now together with another companero, and they have a son of two years. Victoria is a member of the departmental council of the URNG political party in Quetzaltenango.



Victoria and her son

Photo by M. Boehm

Yali's Story

Yali Santos was born and raised in Guatemala City where her parents had moved from the countryside. She graduated as a primary school teacher in 1971 and worked for five years in a private school. She also studied for two years toward a law degree. In 1972 she joined the struggle and worked ten years doing urban support work until her photo, biography, address, etc., appeared in the *Prensa Libre*, the main newspaper in the country, with an article calling her a subversive. (This happened under the regime of Ephraim Rios Montt.) Yali had to go underground and leave the country. She continued working for the guerrilla movement, for the ORPA faction in Nicaragua, for the next seven years. In late 1988, she was sent to the mountains to join the Luis Ixmata Front of ORPA where she was put in charge of political affairs for five years. In 1993, she went to Tapachula, Mexico, to give birth to her daughter, where she remained doing support work until late 1996. She returned to the Luis Ixmata Front a few months before the signing of the peace accords in December 1996 and demobilized to the camp Las Abejas with the other companeros. She was without contact with her family from 1982 until the signing of the peace accords. She now is the director of the Quetzaltenango office of the Guillermo Torriello Foundation of the URNG and is continuing her law studies. Yali went to Viet Nam in 1980, with the first delegation from ORPA, and was very impressed by the attitude of respect that the Vietnamese showed to them.

I/we would like to support Madison Friends' (Quakers) Projects in Viet Nam! \$ _____

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_____ Please earmark my donation for My Lai Peace Park, My Lai Hospital and
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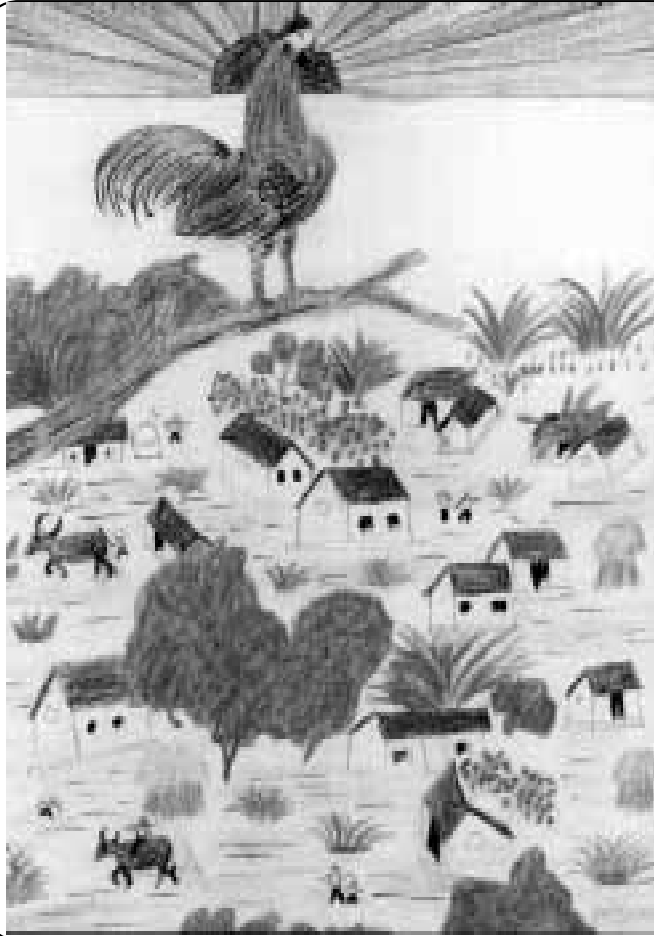
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Please specify Projects in Viet Nam, or one of the options on your check. Donations are tax deductible.

Thank you for your generosity.



Greeting Cards featuring the artwork of the children of My Lai

These drawings were made by the children in My Lai as part of an art exchange with children in Madison, WI.

Sets of six different drawings, in full-color on 5 x 7 inch recycled stock, with envelopes: \$8.00
Shipping and handling: \$1.50

Payment for these cards should be made by check to:

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Please write "My Lai Greeting Cards" in the memo part of your check.

To view all the cards, in color, visit www.mylaipeacepark.com/greetingcards.htm

If you know of a retail outlet for these cards in your area, please contact Mike Boehm 608-244-9505 (vapp@igc.org).

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