



Partners in Health of Maine

Compañeros en la Salud

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

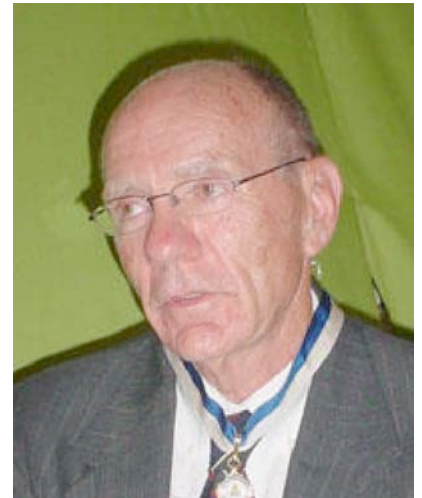
December 2006

Our Mission:

Partners in Health of Maine is a group of medical professionals and technical experts who have given their time and expertise to improving the health care in Central America. Since 1976 we have been providing medical care, equipment, education, and technical assistance to the people of this area. Our belief is that long-term improvement can be fostered by caring individuals becoming "Partners in Health" with their third world counterparts.

Dr. Bach Honored with Nicaragua Humanitarian Award

Dr. Robert Bach, our Partners in Health founder and president, was honored with a prestigious national humanitarian award from the president of Nicaragua. The **Order of Rubén Darío** was instituted in 1951, and is awarded "For service to Nicaragua and to humanity in the fields of art, literature, science and international relations." About 500 people, including church and government leaders, attended the event which took place in August in the traditional Miskito church in Puerto Cabezas. The national anthems of both the United States and Nicaragua were sung.



Dr. Bach was presented with an illuminated, hand-lettered proclamation and a heavy bronze medal on a ribbon. Dr. Bach has been quietly serving the people of the impoverished RAAN region of Nicaragua for 30 years with his skills as a surgeon and his compassion as a true humanitarian. The people of this region consider Bob as "Hijo Dilecto de la Costa y Nicaragua" which translates as "Beloved Son of the Coast and Nicaragua."

The Rubén Darío award is named after the Nicaraguan poet, born in 1867. Darío is considered the father of the Latin American modernist movement in poetry. Fellow poet, Enrique Anderson Imbert said, "With incomparable elegance, he brought to poetry a joy of living and a fear of dying." ("Rubén Darío y la Critica") In a country passionate for poetry, it is totally appropriate that Bob Bach received this honor. If you have read any of the Partners in Health newsletters, you have seen Bob's heartfelt poetry.

As you know, Partners in Health is board-governed and has no paid staff. Dr. Bach himself visits Nicaragua two or three times a year to perform surgery, assess needs, and develop relationships critical to the success of our goal of establishing sustainable health care. Jill Grant, vice president of Partners in Health and a medical technologist at EMMC, said Dr. Bach's low-key, gentle style is what has allowed the organization to serve so many people in so many different ways. "Every human being is important and has value in his eyes," she said. "When we go there, we work right alongside our counterparts. We ask people what they need and we bring them the tools they ask for. We move gently in the community, and we socialize with our counterparts." The result, she said, is a community of Nicaraguan professionals who genuinely welcome the volunteers from Maine.

Felicitaciones and kudos to our esteemed leader! We also wish him much success in his new location in North Haven, Maine and in his pursuit of a Master of Divinity degree at Bangor Theological Seminary.

Sustainable Public Health: Bilwaskarma Outreach, Probadenic East

By: Robert Holmberg; rholmberg@emh.org

A recent October visit to Bilwaskarma by Dr. Robert Holmberg, Dr. Peter Hauptert, and Dr. Andy Herriott was productive and energizing. We came away after 3 days of intense local meetings with a renewed sense of group enthusiasm, determination, and strategy for continuing and building the Bilwas Outreach program. We had the great addition of Miguel Tello, CEO Strachan Foundation from Costa Rica, as not only funder but tremendous consultant; and Jose Rodriguez representative from CEPAD in Managua. Some of the outcomes of the meetings include:



Figure 1 Bilwaskarma Outreach Planners

- 1) Education in and production of more specific Logic Models of inputs, outputs, and short term outcomes
- 2) Agreement of local leadership infrastructure
- 3) Beginning determination of field measurements of impact
- 4) Inspiration and agreement on the CBIO (Census Based Impact Oriented) method from Curamericas with population based measurement of disease and risks/ community participatory agreement on focused interventions around maternal child health problems/annual action plan and evaluation process to measure impact;
- 5) Miguel's anticipated authorization of Strachan Foundation support for another year
- 6) Plans to develop further grant support

In detailing further support this year to Strachan Foundation for the Bilwas Outreach Project, we are asking for the possibility of a \$3000 grant from Partners in Health of Maine to supplement other private donations anticipated. If you would like to **earmark your contribution to Partners in Health for the **Bilwas Outreach Project****, please feel free to do so.

The Bilwas Outreach Project truly exemplifies the Partners in Health philosophy of helping enable sustainable health practices in the RAAN, a truly impoverished and underserved region in Nicaragua. The identification of critical public health problems (clean water; sanitation; safe food preparation; preventive health care for mothers and babies) by local team leaders on a village-by-village basis, and the building and implementation of plans of action is resulting in improved living conditions and health care for all.



Figure 2 Bilwas Outreach Session

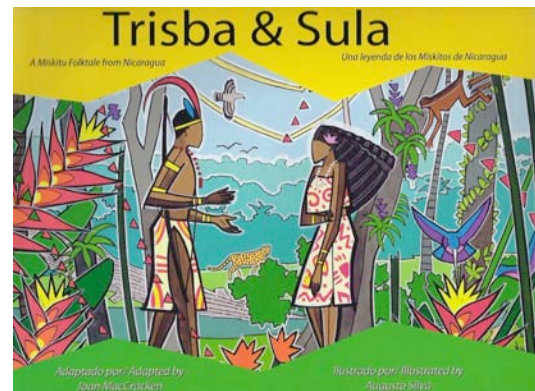
Exciting times!

Trisba & Sula: A Miskitu Folktale from NicaraguaBy: Joan MacCracken, MD; joanmacc@aol.com

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

Dr. Joan MacCracken has been busy selling her beautiful book, **Trisba & Sula: A Miskitu Folktale from Nicaragua//Una Leyenda de los Miskitos de Nicaragua**. At this point all proceeds from the sale of her book go to the Literacy Fund of PIHOM. She has currently raised over \$5,000.

The Literacy Fund will be used to help improve literacy in Nicaragua and specifically in the Autonomous Region around Puerto Cabezas (Bilwi). One idea is to create Library Trunks for the villages which will be filled with Spanish/Miskitu books for lending. These trunks will be cared for by the local women elders in the villages. In other third world countries, this concept has been successful. Also the funds may go for adult education classes in the villages to help the parents of the children learn to read. Others have also used funds for scholarships and uniforms. In November Joan traveled to Nicaragua to discuss these proposals with the Miskitu people of Tinniniska, the center to maintain Miskitu culture, and with others in the region.



Trisba & Sula has been awarded two honors. *Criticas Magazine* chose it **Best of 2005**. *Skipping Stones Magazine*, a multicultural children's magazine, honored it with its gold sticker for **Best Bilingual Children's Book for 2006**. Recently a first grade class in Bangor collected Nickels for Nicaragua and joyfully donated 1800 nickels! Joan has been presenting a slideshow on Nicaragua to schools and libraries in her area.

Copies of the book are still available for \$20 (that includes shipping and handling). Checks made out to

"Tiffin Press" can be sent to Tiffin Press, 110 Jones Point Road, Brooksville, ME 04617. Dr MacCracken guarantees satisfaction. For further info contact: tiffinpress@aol.com.

*****Donations to the Literacy Fund of PIHOM** should be sent directly to: Partners in Health, c/o Steve Johnson, 959 Kennebec Road, Hampden, ME 04444. Please designate Literacy Fund.

Thank you so much for your support of this project!

Hot Update from Nicaragua November trip:

Great progress on the Literacy Fund. Dr. MacCracken has met David Cleban, a local Miskitu working with Wisconsin/Nicaragua Partners of the Americas on getting books into the new public library in Puerto Cabezas. He is willing to help with literacy trunks to the villages. Joan traveled to three villages by boat and now has plans to start with three trunks to three villages. The trunks are being made of mahogany by local carpenters and will be ready to hold the Spanish and Miskitu books that will be purchased with the fund.

*****If anyone has Spanish books in good shape that are no longer wanted, the library in Puerto would love to have them. Carry some down with you when you go next time, or contact me, or Jill Grant.



Accomplishments in 2006

A Message from our President, Dr. Robert Bach (bob@pihom.com)

It has been an encouraging year as more people have become interested in Partners in Health. **Jill Grant** has continued to make a host of new friends in Nicaragua creating a healthy atmosphere for working in partnership with our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters. Jill has been the primary mover behind our guesthouse. **Max Barus**, the founder of the women's health project, is streamlining the screening process of Pap smears and colposcopy with computer documentation of results and follow up. There are now several people involved, including **Miki MacDonald** who has been a key enthusiastic person in this program, enlisting the services of several Nicaraguan personnel such as **Erna Patterson**. A new volunteer, **Holly Weidner** has recently spent several months in Puerto Cabezas with her daughter **Kate** helping to facilitate the Pap smear program.

Dr. James McKendry and his wife **Helen** have just returned from Nicaragua where he continues to provide limbs for amputees. He has surmounted many problems with his usual patience, and has been supported by Helen's eternal optimism. **Dr. Karen Burke** will be returning again as an internist providing her usual large supply of medicines and medical expertise.

Donna Nielsen continues to bring groups of nursing student to Puerto Cabezas who benefit from her teaching and her experience with people in the community. **Robert Holmberg**, **Andy Herriot**, and **Peter Haupt** are expanding the outreach program in Bilwas that is training health care leaders in thirteen surrounding communities. **Ed Bezgembluk**, **Gayle Rogers**, and **Kelly Olsen** have all made visits to Nicaragua this year to provide ultrasound support during our trips, which has proved to be invaluable. **Joan McCracken** is raising money through the sale of her book in hopes of establishing libraries in the communities. **Karen Dow**, **Kathy McCarthy**, **Catherine Orent**, and **Christine Slate** have all given of their talents in anesthesia this year. **Ted** (our Nicaraguan contractor) and **Gary Kingsbury** have provided their expertise in construction of the new operating room in Bilwaskarma. **Dr. Patricia Ballesteros'** organizing abilities have proved to be invaluable for our arriving teams. **Steve Johnson** continues to handle all the accounting, quietly working behind the scenes.

John Benziger has shown us how to obtain a grant, build a pathology lab, and (the most difficult of all) how to staff it. His wife, **Mary** has proved her skills at putting together the annual report and newsletter. We are thankful for **Bob Allen's** evaluations and good care for seriously ill cardiac patients. **Dr. Uiman**, a pediatrician, returned again with her lovely daughter **Sarah** with our team in August, attending to several pediatric patients. **Dr. Alan Browne** and his wife **Nancy Tracz** joined us in Bilwas and performed several surgeries in Waspam, establishing a nice rapport with their clinic.

Everyone has commented about our nice web site (pihom.com) that my daughter **Molly Marston** has been overseeing. There have been many new young volunteers including **Patricia Zavaleta**, and **Steve Kelleher**, a medical student at Dartmouth, who have proved to be very helpful.

Thank you, Gracias, and Tengki Poli everybody for all your help.

I tried

You were very thin
Your ribs protruding
Like a human washboard
Your deep brown eyes
So tired and weary
Yet hopeful and trusting

A chronic infection
Had sapped all your strength
Too weak to walk alone
One lung nearly destroyed
The other with an abscess
"Could it be drained?"

The instinct to operate
Was challenged by fear
That you wouldn't survive
So alone in this decision
Would I be at peace
If I didn't try?

Your eyelids fell like
curtains

After we said a prayer
Pain and fear took flight
The abscess was drained
The other lung so scarred
Nothing else to be done

At first you didn't wake up
So we helped you breath
Then you began to struggle
Pulling at your "windpipe" tube
A sight we could not bear
So we helped you take it out

Then your breaths became
shallow
Should we put the tube back in?
"She won't get better,
Don't make her suffer.
She looks so comfortable,
How can I intervene?"

I left for a short while
But when I had returned
Your heart had failed
Your mother began to wail

Like an arrow piercing her chest
And another entering mine

"I should have put the tube back in
We could have breathed for you
You might have lived
Another day or month or two"
"At least you tried" someone said
My pain remained the same

All these years of training
All these years of experience
Did compassion blind
The eyes of reason
They tell me "to look forward
And not look back"

I still see your big brown eyes
I still hear your mother wail
I see your family
Wrapping you in a sheet
Carrying you to a truck
You were too young to die

R. Bach

Women's Movement is Moving in a Big Way

Holly Weidner and her eleven-year-old daughter Kate took up residence this fall in the PIH volunteer house in Puerto Cabezas. Holly, a physician assistant for MaineGeneral Medical Center in Augusta, chose to take a 3-month leave of absence from her job to help with the PIH Women's Initiative. PIH first looked at the incidence of precancerous and cancerous lesions of the cervix in 2003 and were alarmed at the high rate, especially in younger women. This led to our program to identify and treat these women.

This autumn Holly met with Directors and staff from Hospital Amanecer, the Polyclinic, SILAIS and four women's groups from local churches in Puerto Cabezas, to help identify problems and needs in the delivery system. Her communication skills in Spanish were put to the test and passed with flying colors. She was invited to speak on a local radio station, and also on a local television program. She was able to spread the word about the importance of having pap smears and getting follow-up.

Holly worked with three head nurses from the polyclinic to develop a strategy for addressing needs. Holly, John Benziger and our Nicaraguan PIH director Dr. Patricia Ballesteros met with SILAIS director, Subdirector, and Interim Director, to facilitate the efficient use of cytological services. Holly worked with Dr. Ballesteros and a new gynecologist, Dr. Moncada, to help create access to free colposcopy for RAAN women. Holly acted as supervisor for several sessions of colposcopies, and trained two nurses in triage and education of women. Holly helped further the progress of the Pathology program by facilitating meetings with Dr. Benziger and key personnel.

Muchísimas gracias for your valuable contributions to Partners in Health, Holly! We hope that the experience was also rewarding and enriching for you and your wonderful daughter.

Grass Lice & Other Delights: Miki MacDonald; miki.macdonald@maine.edu

The PAP Project welcomes two new members this year: Holly Weidner and her daughter Kate. Holly arranged a three-day trip down the Laguna de Karata and turned what would have been a "vacation" into a PAP brigade. We visited 3 Miskito villages south of Puerto Cabezas, which had not received cervical cancer screening previously. Of the 170 women we saw in Wawa Bar, Karata and Haulover, most had never had a PAP smear.

Our Nicaraguan leader and birth mother of the PAP Project, Erna Erna Patterson had visited these villages in the past, thus was able to facilitate our connections with the local women. As Betsy Weiss, Holly Weidner and Miki Macdonald did the exams, Erna gave the gathering of women a talk on PAP smears, HPV and cervical cancer. Johanna, a trilingual nurse from the Polyclinic in Puerto Cabezas, inscribed the women's names and asked pertinent questions. Kate Weidner and Joan MacCracken spent hours playing with children to distract them from peeking in the clinic windows.

The food in these villages was delicious, especially the gallo pinto made with coconut milk (see recipe).

Haulover is the most remote and memorable village we stayed in for several reasons. The local leader welcomed us into his house and arranged for us to meet the health leader and the midwife. Haulover is a narrow sliver of land sandwiched between the Caribbean Sea and the Laguna de Karata. The houses are on stilts and cows, chickens, pigs and dogs wander around freely with no fences. An eager, yet almost invisible tenant of Haulover is Grass Lice. These little beasts were enamored by our vulnerable skin and left their imprint on us with very itchy red blotches. Although irritating, the itch is a reminder of a wonderful trip with special people.

Our plan is to return to Haulover and help this small fishing village set up a community medicinal garden and continue working on reproductive health.



Figure 1 Erna Patterson

Erna's Gallo Pinto w/ Coconut Milk

Boil coconut milk (if using milk from can, water it down to thinner consistency)
 Add onions, black pepper and cooked dark red beans (Nica style) to boiling coconut milk
 Wash rice, then add to boiling coconut milk.
 Let boil, and then turn down the heat toward the end of the cooking. Mix and serve.
"patamba ahuni" ~ delicious food in miskito



Pathology Services Update

John Benziger;
thebenzigers@hotmail.com

The focus of my activities in 2006 has been to work towards bringing pathology services to Puerto Cabezas (PC). This project has been largely funded by a humanitarian grant from the College of American Pathology Foundation. The project started with a plan to construct a new lab building adjacent to the existing Hospital Nuevo Amanecer in PC. Construction began in October 2005. By early November the block walls were waist high. Overcoming pirated building materials and just dodging the worst of hurricane Beta, the walls were up, and work moved to the roof in December. By April 2006 the new lab was almost complete inside and out. The results are a functional, attractive and well-built structure. Donated, used histology equipment and materials were brought to the lab, and Javier, the head technologist, has now also trained in histotechnology. I have worked with him to test out the equipment and process, and I believe that everything is in place to begin producing microscopic slides. I have twice visited the pathology training program in León where we now have a working relationship that should help support and sustain our pathology program in PC. Doctora Jannine Tenorio is finishing up her residency in León soon and is planning to come to PC in March 2007. At that time, pathology services will begin in the new lab. I will go down in April to help with the start up process, and I will continue to support them.

Grants and Funding:

PIH was awarded a grant of \$5,000 from the **AMB Foundation** to finish the operating room in Bilwaskarma. We are extremely grateful.

Any of you who are involved with service organizations (for example, Rotary) that would be interested in sponsoring or contributing to one of our projects, or, if you happen to work for a company that does business in Nicaragua, please let us know. Lots of businesses have grant opportunities for employees who have volunteer projects. If you are reading this newsletter, you are part of our team!

We have been awarded grants from various sources and are so very appreciative of these extra monetary boosts that help us achieve our goals. The underserved, poverty stricken people of the RAAN appreciate our efforts.

Prosthetics Update:

Jim and Helen McKendry and their 9 year old grandson Liam had a productive trip to Nicaragua this November. After their regular stops in Puerto Cabezas and Rosita fitting amputees, they visited León. There they found the Walking Unidos prosthetic shop. There's also one in Managua. These are shops run by local people and existing to provide prosthetics and orthotics at low or no cost to Nicaraguan citizens. This is the way things should be. Nicaraguans taking care of each other. The Walking Unidos are supported by a group in Massachusetts called Polus Center. Jim has been in earnest correspondence with this group. He envisions, ideally, a prosthetics shop in Puerto Cabezas. This would mean getting a prosthetist to the RAAN. In the meantime, perhaps a fund to help people from the RAAN to get to Managua. There is such a need

Website:

Please visit our website at www.pihom.com. Molly Marston has done a great job of providing easily accessible information to all. In addition to learning about our history, mission, and accomplishments, you can visit beautiful Nicaragua vicariously through the photo gallery.

Rita

Oh, beloved friend
 Heroine, spirit of life

Admired Nicaraguan
Muy simpatica

Ceaseless effervescent energy
 From the sun, earth, and moon

Married without relationship
 Made you look within

Your true identity
 Found and shared

Honored at first by
 Imprisonment

Both fertilizing
 The seed of social concern

A clinic for HIV, born
 A mission of prevention

Your wings spread for
 A Masters in Public Health

Valedictorian with a message
 Wake up US, prevention,
 prevention

Honored at the UN
 Called to Geneva

Immune to pride, approval
 Sought from above

Embraced by the Jesuits
 Aware of misused scripture

Gracia Dios
 Flower of love

R Bach
 ETH 1767 J 6/9/05

Note on Rita: Rita is Rita Arauz who obtained her Masters in Public Health a few years ago at Columbia University. She has probably done more for HIV than anyone else in the country. She lives in Managua and we usually see her at the Mercedes..

Our House Becomes a Home

By Jill Grant (jgrant6198@aol.com)

This year there have been many improvements to our building in Puerto Cabezas. The upstairs bedrooms are now ready for our volunteers. In the coming year we will work on closets for the rooms. Importantly, there are screens and bars on all the windows. As with all areas with a poor economy, robbery is a constant problem. With the new bars on the windows and a Nicaragua couple living in the house, the house is now secure. The couple are doctors working in Puerto Cabezas so the house is occupied all the time. We have worked on the bathrooms and the kitchen. A new refrigerator has been purchased. I believe now we have emptied the crawl space under the roof of pigeons.

The office area was finished and painted. This was no small job with the concrete walls being primed and then painted. The office space will also be used as a conference room. The well was cleaned and some ornamental plants were planted in the front yard.

There is still much work to be done, but the two new volunteers that traveled with me had a very comfortable stay in the house. Kristen Wagner and Courtney Cutchen are interested in careers in medicine and found the experience very rewarding. Dr. Bach also stayed in the house this year. We all enjoyed sitting on the porch and watching the Nicaraguan life go by. On my next visit, I would like to open two doors in the back of the house. This would allow better ventilation in the downstairs when people are working in the workshop. We need to replace the wooden posts on the veranda with cement. (The termites have started to eat the wooden posts.) As with any building, there is constant upkeep, but the building increases our ability to help the Nicaraguan people. We are thinking of setting up a room next to the office to be a colposcopy suite. This would allow visiting medical professionals to have a teaching area to train their Nicaraguan counterparts. When not being used for colposcopy, this room could be used as another bedroom for volunteers.

Mary Benziger has agreed to paint a mural in our office. Her murals have been very popular in Nicaragua. This form of art is much appreciated in Nicaragua and will give our office some personality. Any volunteer wishing to stay at the house needs to contact me, Jill Grant (jgrant6198@aol.com) to make reservations. It costs \$10 a day to use the house. This will pay for the electricity and upkeep of the house. In the shipment we hope to send in 2007 there will be some computers and office furniture. The office will be available for volunteers' use

I will continue to make the house improvements my top priority. I will also be working on projects in Bilwaskarma and Rosita. I look forward, as always, to visiting the Nicaraguan people. It is an honor to work with all the Partners in Health volunteers and I look forward to another productive year in Nicaragua.

Partners in Health needs your help!

Our organization is made up of big-hearted volunteers donating time and energy to improve the health of underserved people in the (RAAN) region of Nicaragua. Money is also needed!

Your donation helps ship equipment and supplies that are so necessary. It also helps with the training and education of Nicaraguan professionals. Sustainability is a big part of our strategy.



**Please help by sending
your tax-exempt donation
to:**

Partners in Health
c/o Steve Johnson
959 Kennebec Road,
Hampden, ME 04444

Figure 1 Joan, Miki and Niños patiently awaiting your help!