



# Partners in Health

Of Maine

*Compañeros en la Salud*

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

December 2007

*Our Mission:*

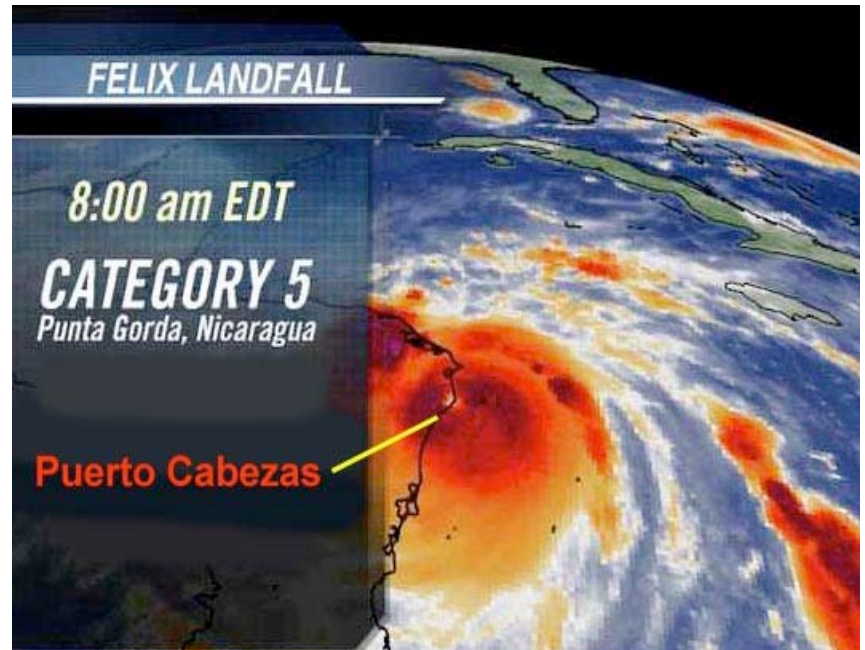
*Partners in Health of Maine is a group of medical professionals and technical experts who have given their time and expertise to improving the health care in Central America. Since 1976 we have been providing medical care. Equipment, education, and technical assistance to the people of this area. Our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

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## Hurricane Felix

By-MaryBenziger;  
thebenzigers@hotmail.com

Hurricane Felix made a direct hit on the area of Nicaragua that Partners in Health has strived over the years to nurture. The Atlantic coast is populated by indigenous people who have historically been neglected by their own country. On September 4<sup>th</sup> the category 5 Hurricane Felix brought death and destruction to the people of this region. All the roofs in Puerto Cabezas are made of zinc-plated corrugated metal panels that Felix played with until they peeled off like paper. Power lines were down everywhere. Ancient trees toppled. Water supplies became tainted. Fishermen lost their lives. Many people lacked the basic necessities of food,



water, and shelter. This kind of disaster anywhere is terrible, but in this very impoverished region it's a crushing setback.

We appealed to you for help, and were astounded by your generous response. We are deeply grateful for your gifts. Please read the following article by **Jill Grant** to see how some of these funds have been put to good use. As you know, we are a grassroots organization of volunteers. We have no paid staff. Our volunteers pay their own way and give their valuable time and energy to promote better health care in the RAAN region of Nicaragua. 100% of your donations go directly to the support of the Nicaraguan people through our projects. Thank you so much for your continued support.

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## Hurricane Felix Relief

By Jill Grant; [jgrant6198@aol.com](mailto:jgrant6198@aol.com)

I have just returned from two weeks in Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua. Partners in Health received many generous donations in response to our Hurricane Felix appeal. I was able to bring aid money to help people recover from the damage done by Hurricane Felix. I felt uncertain about how to identify those in most need. When I arrived, I gathered together our Nicaraguan friends including Erna Patterson, Harold Oporta, and Lucia Green. These "Nicas" were happy to donate their time and energy to help out their neighbors. We decided to help the elderly and handicapped who did not have resources to repair their homes. While seeking out these people, I was sad to see the giant ancient trees in the park all gone except one. The roads had been cleared and life was returning to normal. Everywhere there were houses with newly repaired roofs and houses that still had pieces of plastic. By the end of the day, we had identified ten people who were in great need.

(continued on p. 2)

## Hurricane Felix Relief, cont.

By Jill Grant

Two of the homes we targeted housed elderly women with no hope of help. We decided to provide the materials for their roofs and do the repairs. By noontime these two houses were fully repaired and the occupants were so grateful. One house had a retired ninety-year-old schoolteacher who is wheelchair bound. She was able to sleep without fearing the rain and sat on her veranda with shade. The other house had two elderly sisters. They were so pleased that the roof was repaired. They had moved their beds to the drier side of the house. The other eight people we identified had people that could help with the repairs, but no resources to buy materials. We delivered 2 X 4's, sheets of corrugated roofing, and five pounds of nails to each of these houses. This jumpstarted their repair efforts.



Partners in Health also provided roofing for the hospital in Puerto Cabezas. The patient care areas had been repaired, but the warehouse and maintenance shop were still missing their roofs.

Boxes were being stored in a room next to the OR. This room is needed as a recovery room. The repair shop and the warehouse now have roofs and the boxes have been moved. The recovery room is being repainted and repaired. The maintenance shop was broken into during the storm and trashed. Partners in Health provided new iron bars to secure the windows and doors. Money was also provided to repair some broken doors and replace two pieces of roofing on the new pathology laboratory.

Finally, we prepared food packages. We were able to buy bulk food like 100 pound bags of beans and rice. We prepared bags of food to feed a family for a week. These were delivered to people who were the least able to provide for themselves. The elderly women received bags. The ninety-year-old schoolteacher said a prayer of thanks. We prepared 100 bags of food. Some of the food was delivered to the people who live by the dump. There was a package for each family.

We will also repair the roof of Martha Downs' house. She is the paraplegic coordinator of aid to wheelchair bound people in Puerto. A huge tree fell on her roof. It needs new rafters and roofing. The interior of her building needs some repairs also. Her house has an exam room for handicapped patients, storage for wheelchairs, and a meeting place. I feel it is important to help the people who are helping others.

I spent about one third of the donated funds. Miki MacDonald is taking another third of the money to identify more needs and help more people get their lives back together. It's amazing that a small donation of building materials can help people so much. The people are taking the broken pieces of their homes and literally putting them back together bit by bit. I felt such a feeling of sadness and admiration. I traveled outside of Puerto Cabezas to see the small villages that were flattened by Felix. The people are living under large pieces of donated plastic. They are sifting through the rubble, and salvaging what they can. Next to the plastic roofed shelters, they are rebuilding their houses. So with the sadness, I admired the spirit of the people who were doing the most with what they had. I would like to thank all the people who sent donations for the Hurricane Felix relief. **Your donations made a difference.**



**Woman's Health Project**

By: Max Barus, MD; [mbarus@ctel.net](mailto:mbarus@ctel.net)

The **Women's Health Project** continues to make significant progress, despite some setbacks. The havoc caused by Hurricane Felix effectively halted the routine health care needed to make cervical cancer screening and prevention a reality. Now things are returning slowly to normal. Cervical cancer prevention is a multi-step process that must function at each step in order to be effective. The project is concentrating on the following areas:

**Pap smear testing:** There are new challenges in this first link in the chain. There is a change in the delivery of primary care, including Pap testing, as the Ministry of Health has moved to a new community based model, with creation of about 12 new neighborhood clinics which will take most of the load from the Polyclinic. This will create both improvements and difficulties. Access to care will be significantly improved but we will need to increase our attention to training clinicians in performing adequate Paps, and supplies will need to be monitored at 12 sites instead of one. Rural communities have long had local health centers but many were much harder hit by Felix and screening care will take longer to recover. **Miki MacDonald** continues to work with **Erna Patterson** on the implementation of Pap-Day Brigades, which have successfully targeted large numbers of women in the villages where they have been held. We see this as a model for reaching women who otherwise would not come in for testing. Outreach to women in a variety of locations will continue to be a priority for years to come.

**Cytology:** **Justo Saballos**, the Cytotechnologist, is now housed at the new Pathology building at the hospital and is working closely with **Dra Jannine Tenorio**, the new pathologist. They are doing a great job and are improving quality control while greatly increasing the number of Paps processed annually, to over 4,000 this year. When this project started the Polyclinic was doing fewer than 30 Paps per month. We continue to support them with instruments and some supplies, as well as the new building.

**Tracking:** This remains one of the most problematic areas and the new community health centers create a challenge. Instead of a single site there will be a dozen or more places where women get Paps. We will need to focus computerized tracking efforts at the Pathology department instead of at the Polyclinic. This means that we need to help the individual health centers understand the need for obtaining accurate patient contact and tracking information so women can get appropriate follow-up when Paps are abnormal.

**Colposcopy and Pathology:** This continues to be done at the hospital in the dedicated Colposcopy room, refurbished and supplied by PIH. **Dr Ballesteros** performs colposcopy each week and the 2 gynecologists in town also utilize the room. The pathology is now done in the new Pathology building and that entire system; building, supplies, equipment and Pathologist, is now up and running. **Dr John Benziger** has really accomplished the incredible by writing the grant, overseeing the building design, obtaining and bringing down equipment, recruiting the Pathologist and providing support to the staff.

**Definitive therapy and referral:** Hysterectomy and LEEP, a surgical procedure that preserves fertility, are both available at the hospital. We are hoping to increase the use of LEEP and plan to continue to bring down experienced clinicians from the US to provide teaching and see patients. Unfortunately, we continue to see many women with advanced disease who need referral to Managua. This year we plan to work with **Dr Ballesteros** and specialists in Managua to try to facilitate referrals and coordinate care.

In the long term, HPV vaccination offers hope of eradicating this disease, but we know of no plans for implementing a vaccination program at the current time. Even if there were money to provide for the very expensive vaccine there would be a need for screening and treating women who are currently infected for the remainder of their lives.

While we are pleased by our successes there are many challenges before us. We take strength from the women who courageously fight this devastating disease and the Nicaraguan men and women who are working so hard to help them.



## Our Blossoming Garden

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

I feel like I am looking out at my garden with all sorts of things sprouting that I don't even recall planting. One is **Max Barus'** Pap smear project, which has been worked and tilled by its founder with the enthusiastic help of **Miki MacDonald, Betsy Weiss, Holly Weidner, and Erna Patterson**. Their patience and thoroughness with attention to the quality of Pap smears and follow-up is behind-the-scenes work, which is so important.

A functioning state-of-the-art pathology department at the hospital is bearing all sorts of wonderful things thanks to **Dr. John Benziger**. Imagine frozen sections, interpretation of fine needle biopsies, and Pap smears being interpreted in Puerto Cabezas. No more sending specimens across the country or carrying them home in our suitcases. The building is beautifully constructed, thanks to Ted.

The hurricane relief effort obtained funds well beyond expectations, the seeds of which were planted at **John and Mary Benziger's** house and nurtured by so many. The initial distribution of funds in Nicaragua by **Jill Grant** reminded me of the flying nun. So many things such as lumber, zinc roofing, and food were delivered by Jill and her crew in person.

The website also sprouted with a special site for Hurricane Felix thanks to **Molly Marston** which helped immensely to bring in the funds that we received.

A wonderful library project has continued to blossom due to **Joan McCracken's** efforts while her husband **Bob Holmberg** has continued to cultivate the Bilwaskarma outreach project nurtured by the sage advice and experience of **Peter Hauptert**.

The surgical team's trip in October was rewarding but very different. We came as a team ready to see and operate on a lot of patients. We left more as facilitators and teachers. The difference was the arrival of two young well-qualified Nicaraguan surgeons, **Manuel Silas, and Ernesto Espinoza**. They have gained the confidence of patients who no longer feel compelled to wait for North American teams. **Kelley Olson** our vivacious ultrasound technician showed the new radiologist at the hospital many valuable tips about performing ultrasounds. **Dr Richard Swett** shared his orthopedic knowledge with new orthopedic surgeon **Dr Ernesto Espinoza**. He also brought a large amount of valuable orthopedic equipment. **Abbey Campbell**, a student from North Haven High school added the enthusiastic spirit of youth. **Elizabeth Hill**, a nurse practitioner, was the antithesis of a "know it all" gringo, which is so appreciated by our Nicaraguan friends. **Lori Allen** returned as an obstetrical nurse, lending a hand whenever needed, blessing us with her flexible and cheerful personality. We were also fortunate to have an experienced pediatrician, **Dr. Martha Ullman**, with us to help with challenging pediatric patients.

### Blossoming Garden

Look at this fertile garden  
I can't remember exactly  
When I planted the seeds  
Or where they were planted

I can't recall doing that much  
Maybe removing a few weeds  
Watering it occasionally  
Observing mostly

I think someone  
Tilled it in the night  
Or brought fertilizer  
When I wasn't there

Amazing how  
A few seeds  
Planted years ago  
Have grown so ell

Thank you everyone  
For working in this garden  
Which gives so much  
To so many

By: Bob Bach



I witnessed the blossoming of young surgeon, **Dr Manuel Silas**, whom I had previously worked with during his residency. His skillful and dedicated approach to surgery and his compassionate manner was wonderful to see.

Finally there is **Patricia Ballesteros** to thank for preparing the landing field for us when we arrive. Potential chaos is prevented and we are greeted with an organized plan.

If there are others who have tilled the soil of this beautiful garden who have not been mentioned, I apologize and thank you for your efforts.

## PIH Literacy Project Update 2007

By Joan MacCracken, MD; [joanmacc@aol.com](mailto:joanmacc@aol.com)

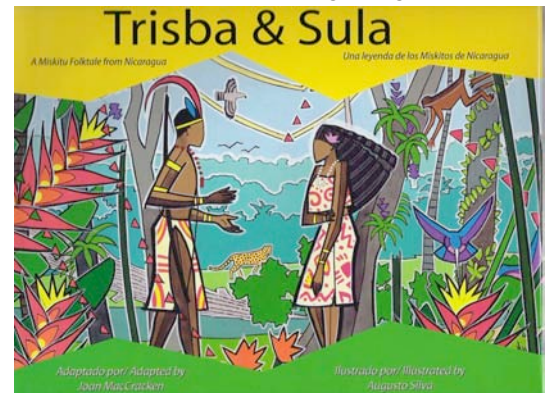
There has been progress with the literacy project, but sometimes it feels slow like molasses. Our recent visit to Bilwi (Puerto Cabezas) advanced the library chest book project a bit. We now have three attractive wooden footlockers ready to receive the various children's Spanish books, and these chests have had signs painted indicating their purpose and donation source. We have determined where the initial three chests will go after speaking with the Minister of Education representative. The local public school in Bilwi will joyfully receive one when school begins again in the new year. This school services over one thousand children from the poorest families and is in great need of supplies. The other two locations will be Haulover, a remote village on the sea, and Krukira, a village very badly damaged by the hurricane. We also will donate \$1000 from the Literacy Fund to the school in Krukira for further assistance.

Though the actual delivery of the children's Spanish books was delayed due to postponement of the PIH cargo shipment due to Hurricane Felix relief needs, the presentation of these books is more appropriate at the start of the next school year which begins in late Feb '08.

Funds from the sale of the book, *Trisba and Sula*, will also be used to support the publication of the Tininiska magazine, which raises awareness of the Miskitu culture.

*Trisba and Sula*, the Miskitu folktale, remains on sale as a fundraiser and can be obtained by contacting [joanmacc@aol.com](mailto:joanmacc@aol.com)

Volunteers sharing the gift of health



## Pathology Lab Up and Running



By John Benziger, MD;  
[thebenzigers@hotmail.com](mailto:thebenzigers@hotmail.com)

*Javier Cárcamo, Justo Saballos, Jannine Tenorio, and Patricia Ballesteros in the new pathology lab.*

2007 was a year that saw the idea of a Pathology Service at Hospital Nuevo Amanecer become a reality. Some finishing touches were completed on the new laboratory building early in the

year, and Doctor Jannine Tenorio moved to Puerto Cabezas in April after completing her training in Leon. I went down at that time and helped Jannine, Javier (the histotechnologist) and Justo (the cytotech pap screener) move in and get the service up and running. For the first time, surgical biopsies are being processed and diagnosed in a timely fashion right in Puerto Cabezas. This new service is helping to improve patient care and is gaining recognition. I went down in September to help work on improvements and for a planned inauguration, but hurricane Felix arrived at almost the same time. While the damage to the whole area was terrible, the Pathology Lab building held up well. The service has resumed, and we have plans to continue to make improvements and extend their reach.

**Bilwaskarma Villages Community Health Outreach Project**

Dr. Bob Holmberg; rholmberg@emh.org

Hurricane Felix was just one more blow to the staggering public health problems afflicting northeast Nicaragua – the semi / autonomous Miskito Indian region which suffers the highest poverty and health care disparities in all Central America. This November, for the 5<sup>th</sup> time in as many years, our Partners in Health of Maine team flew east from Managua over north central Nicaragua's verdant green and nearly trackless mountains to Waspam and the remote Bilwaskarma villages along the Rio Coco River bordering Honduras. After buzzing away cattle and pigs from the dirt runway we made a bumpy landing in Waspam and then headed via trusty Landrover over rough dirt roads and streams to Bilwas and back into a primal setting. We crossed over small rivers where women and naked children were doing daily laundry and past small villages made of small stick houses where subsistent living is the only way of life. The children are remarkably cheerful given the grim statistics of essentially no local economy, desperate poverty, over 40% illiteracy with 46% moderate to severe childhood malnutrition and childhood mortality among the highest in the Americas.

Yet after 4 years of our small villages community preventive health outreach grant funded by Partners in Health in Maine and the generous Strachan Foundation: we are starting to see hope in Bilwaskarma. Our project is a basic community public health "train the trainers" project in the essentials of public health. We are using the internationally validated method of CBIO (Census Based Impact Oriented) measurement of health status of all villagers via hut-to-hut community mapping. This stimulates and requires community mobilization to participate in yearly health evaluations and yearly re-determination of the preventive health campaigns. Key issues have remained maternal child health, basic sanitation through latrine building, and clean water through building of wells and use of chlorine bleach.

We are starting to see positive results: Only one childhood death under age 4 this past year in the 9 villages versus 6 in 2006. There were no maternal deaths this past year among the 8000+ Miskito Indian population in 10 villages. Women are being encouraged to go to the health outpost for prenatal care and to deliver with a Trained Birth Attendant if not in the Bilwaskarma clinic. Children are being brought into the clinic in earlier stages of diarrheal dehydration and malnutrition. There is also more evidence of village health committee involvement. We have been able to train village health aides this past year in the CBIO technique by a visitor from a Guatemala program. There is even evidence of new collaboration from the under-funded and often dysfunctional national Ministry of Health (MINSAs).

There is so much more to do and so little money to do it. This is the last year of our Strachan Grant. There is more training needed for the health aides, more house-to-house health risk surveys to be performed in order to know we have reached the whole population not just those accessing health care. We have run out of chlorine to clear the polluted wells, which were flooded during Hurricane Felix. New latrines need to be built. There are still too many deliveries occurring at home in the remote villages without Trained Birth Attendants. Food remains scarce, especially after Hurricane Felix's damage. There is insufficient central medicine such as ampicillin to treat infant pneumonia. Teen Care Groups need to be formed to combat growing drug abuse problems (glue, gasoline and alcohol) and to delay the age of first pregnancy (average 14 yrs.). We do have a good local team of Miskito public health physicians and supervisory nurses, besides our village health aides and promotores. We now have a good management and supervision plan and Partners in Health of Maine is monitoring reports quarterly. What we need is YOU, supporters of Partners in Health of Maine to support our cause generously with you financial support. We look forward to being able to write a larger international public health grant after this next year.

Thank you from the Bilwaskarma Partners in Health of Maine team!

Bob Holmberg, MD, MPH  
Pediatrician  
EMMC, Bangor, ME



**Scholarships:** At the present time there are two scholarship projects that are privately funded through PIH. The **nursing project** provides money for nursing student needs in Puerto Cabezas. This funding has gone to educational supplies and living support and is managed by Miki MacDonald.

The **medical student** project supplies money for living expenses for a medical student from the RAAN who expects to return to the RAAN to practice. At the present time Tania Duarte, the daughter of Patricia Ballesteros, has been receiving funding for living expenses during her first year of medical school

**Grants and Funding:** 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 in the past, targeting special projects, from the AMB Foundation, and the Strachan Foundation, 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.

**Website:** Please visit our website at [www.pihom.com](http://www.pihom.com). **Molly Marston** has done a great job of providing easily accessible information to all. Recently she has added the capability of exploring the website instructions in the language of your choice. She is hoping to expand this to include the contents as well. This will make our website easy to use for our Spanish speaking compañeros in Nicaragua. Learn more about our history, mission and accomplishments, and see back issues of our newsletter when you visit our website.

### Partners in Health Board of Directors 2007

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William Abdalah



PIH Volunteer House

## Partners in Health Annual Appeal!

Hurricane Felix set back the progress of our projects and goals. We thank all of you who so generously responded to our appeal for Hurricane relief. That money has gone directly to meet the immediate needs of the people who were in dire straits. A donation to our annual appeal helps ship equipment and supplies that are so necessary for improving the quality of life for so many people. If you would like to earmark your donation for one of the projects that you read about in this newsletter, please do so on your check.



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

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

Your check is a gift of health. Thank you so much for caring!