



# Partners in Health Of Maine

*Compañeros en la Salud*

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

December 2009

*Our Mission:*

*Partners in Health of Maine is a group of medical professionals and technical experts who have given their time and expertise to improve 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 caring individuals becoming "Partners in Health" with their third world counterparts can foster long-term improvement.*

---

*This year we are featuring articles contributed by two of our esteemed Nicaraguan compañeros. We are grateful for their dedication to improving health conditions in the most impoverished region of Nicaragua, and pleased to share their perspectives with you.*

## Two generations, one heart

Dr. Manuel Salvador Salas Flores, [manuelssalas@catholic.org](mailto:manuelssalas@catholic.org)

I first met Dr Bach in 1998 in the emergency room of the Nuevo Amanecer Nancy Bach Hospital Puerto Cabezas in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region of Nicaragua during my social service rotation. I was waiting for the next patient and taking a time to decide about my future on my career and what we could do improve the attention for the people.

Suddenly I wake up to my reality while hearing in a mild Spanish: "hola soy doctor Bach, mucho gusto, ¿que usted pensare estudiar?" My answer was surgery. My dream is to become a surgeon for work here joint to my people. "Es muy bueno usted estudiar por cirujano. Doctor Kenneth and I ser muy viejos, necesitare usted seguir." These phrases began a great friendly and a long work journey together with a same heart moving for God love and a strong spirit for service and help overcome the adversities of work.



In 2003 I started attending Leon University, more than 600 kms from Bilwi, for four years preparing for a General Surgeon and keeping contact with my partner in health, Doctor Bach. During this time he gave recommendations about life, love for the patients, some recommendations about surgical techniques. Despite the distance I felt his presence and support not only for me, but also for my other partners from the surgery residency. In one occasion we receive from his hand some graspers for to make possible a laparoscopic training course for surgery residents and to keep performing these surgeries for the poor people from the ghetto neighborhoods of Leon.

When I returned to Bilwi I started to think about how to give better attention for people. So, in 2007 we presented to Partners in Health and the director of the hospital the idea to start working with some professors from Leon University (National Autonomous University from Nicaragua, UNAN Leon).

Dr. Manuel S. Salas – Surgeon from Nuevo Amanecer Nancy Bach Hospital, and son of a Miskitu woman and Afro descendant father, he studied medicine and General Surgery in León University, with a basic Geriatric training in Pontifical University from Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, and Primary Care Health and Health Policies in Pontifical Javeriana University from Bogotá, Colombia. He is currently studying for a Masters in Intercultural Health at the Autonomous Region University of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN). He is also coordinator of the Intercultural Medicine School project at URACCAN, which has just recently started to provide the first two years of medical school in the North Caribbean Coast with subsequent years to be completed in Managua.

**Bilwaskarma Outreach Program 2009, Peter Haupert, petehaupert@wi.rr.com****Bob Holmberg,**

coordinators based in Bilwaskarma at the clinic, monthly village visits and meetings, selection of priorities by the villages themselves, and careful supervision.

Key to all this was the recently completed census, in which each individual Miskito citizen in the area was documented, 9700 in all, in the nine villages. This allows, among other things, for the accurate allotment of vaccines--a historic novelty.

And the results of all this: Gratifyingly, for the first time in history for this area a dramatic change can be documented, thanks to the statistics, and the organized, concerted effort at education and changing habits.

For instance, with that horrible childhood mortality for perspective, the program can boast a zero mortality in the 9,700 population, with the exception of one death that was not preventable. Likewise, maternal mortality, in past days a tragic figure, was "0" for the past year.

So, something exciting is happening in this area of about 10,000 people. And the Nicaraguan Ministry of Health is so impressed that they are considering replicating this approach in other areas of the country.

That's the good news. The challenge is funding the program in a sustainable fashion. That's where **you** come in. Many of you have already helped over the years. That's what has brought us to where we are today. Wonderfully, the program is able to operate at the current level on a budget of less than \$20,000 per year. That includes salaries for the three Nicaraguan health-care professionals, transportation (which is extensive), materials, and medicines. And in that figure there is 0% administrative costs which are born by volunteers and the sponsoring Moravian Church.

If you would like to join us with your support, specify "Bilwaskarma Outreach" on your check for Partners in Health. And thank you for caring.

Just back home after our annual planning meeting in Nicaragua for the Outreach Program based in Bilwaskarma, and enthused by the fact that after years of nudging the big stone, it's really rolling. That's a simile (or is it a metaphor?) for the fact that for 65 years (1935-about 2000) medical efforts had been directed primarily toward curative medicine with sporadic attempts at preventive care. As a result, the deplorable statistic of child deaths before the age of 5 (1:3) (!) remained unchanged despite all the good intentions and conscientious medical care throughout all those years.

What changed all this was the Outreach Program, a concerted effort begun in 2002 to organize the surrounding villages in the Clinic region, and apply a "state of the art" public health model that involves a comprehensive census, community organization with individual health committees, a team of Nicaraguan

**Anne Young, Hannah Ekstrom---fluoride for kids!**



## Renewed Relationships

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

Renewed relationships were the highlight of my trip to Nicaragua in June. Our small group consisted of my sister Barbara (a retired educator), Sarah Cabot (a pre-med student and teacher), and Diana Swett (a medical student from UVM). The bioengineer/maintenance person, initially scheduled, deferred to a later date.

The first morning was spent at the Lenin Fonseca Hospital in Managua delivering some laparoscopic equipment. This resulted in an offer by two Managuan surgeons to go to Port to teach laparoscopic techniques to the surgeons there.

Our trip to Bilwas was diverted because part of the bridge at SeSin had collapsed. We ended up traveling to Port first and being ferried across the river by small narrow dugout canoes, which transported everything from 400lb barrels of fuel to a motorcycle. The scene of huge trucks stuck on both sides of the river, people cooking meals, and the steady stream of people and supplies going across the river in canoes was more than memorable. In Bilwas we were greeted by Garth Cummings who had been there for 6 weeks working on the chicken project. Garth was a great help in both translating and fixing things.

Dr Karen Burke took a medical/agricultural team to Bilwaskarma in January. Hisashi Kominami, Katlyn Stillings Morris, and Meryl B. Olson (UVM Plant and Soil Science graduate students) wrote a 12-page paper regarding their findings on gardening practices and nutrition. They tested soils, conducted interviews, distributed vegetable seeds, and demonstrated sustainable practices by building compost bins. (please go to [www.pihom.com](http://www.pihom.com) for more info on these projects)

In Bilwas our efforts were focused on the nine communities comprising the Bilwas outreach project. We were able to meet their nurses and some of their health leaders, and document their needs, thanks to my sister Barbara's efforts. It was disconcerting to find that only two clinics had BP cuffs and that none had capability for light at night other than a flashlight. We thought that BP cuffs should be the first priority along with some sort of headlamp in case of emergencies at night.



Barbara and Bilwas Friends

### *Hermana Barbara*

*It was nice of you to  
come along  
Your enthusiasm was more  
than strong*

*You related to so many that  
you met  
That they will remember you is  
a safe bet*

*Each book you brought was  
great  
And will likely change a  
child's fate*

*The very narrow dugout didn't  
Faze you a bit  
While climbing out of the creek  
proved you to be fit*

*Documenting the health clinic's  
needs  
Was another one of your good  
deeds*

*So thanks for the contributions  
that you made  
And your sunshine that brightened  
the shade*

*Your admiring brother,  
Bob*

*A message from our president, continued.*

We brought two patients back to Port with us. One was a 14-year-old boy from a distant village with a large polyp in his nose. Sarah bonded with him, which is reflected in the poem entitled, *Chavelo and Sarah*.

***Chavelo and Sarah***

*It was an instant connection that  
I observed  
And soon I learned what a blessing  
had occurred*

*A shy sick boy had come from a village  
far away  
But your attention quickly put his fears  
at bay*

*You earned the trust of his mother  
as well  
From their looks and smiles it was easy  
to tell*

*You were there when his surgery was  
done  
Holding his hand as if he were your  
son*

*When he awoke and saw the smile on  
your face  
I believe you were being an instrument  
of God's grace*

*Your caring vigil continued without being  
restrained  
As you made sure that their financial needs  
were maintained*

*You gave of yourself in such a  
nice way  
For true caring gives beyond what you  
say*

*Even though you will be many  
miles apart  
You have exchanged a piece of  
each other's heart.*

*Tengki poli  
Dr Bach*



**Chavelo and Sarah**

Back in Port we assisted with surgeries and were joined by Diana Swett. We were presented with many significant needs that can be identified in the third poem entitled, *Honored to be Asked*. Please see online at [www.pihom.com](http://www.pihom.com)

Dr. Manuel Salas asked me to give a lecture to the first medical student class at Yuracon (the regional university in Port). Dr. Salas is involved in planning their curriculum. It was an inspiring experience since the presence of the medical school will encourage students from the Atlantic coast to pursue medical careers.

Casa de Amistad or "Jill's house" was incredibly nice. Three bathrooms, overhead fans in every room, plus murals on the walls have turned this into a four star place to stay. Thank you Jill. And thank you all who continue to support Partners in Health.

Peace,  
Bob Bach

-----  
**Nica Nick Names!**

**Puerto Cabezas:** Our Atlantic coast hub city is actually "**Bilwi**" in the Miskitu language, however is often fondly referred to as "**Port**."

**Bilwaskarma:** Village on the Rio Coco is often referred to as "**Bilwas**" for short. (Not to be confused with "**Bilwi**.")



## A Step Toward Medical Equipment Repair

By Jill Grant (jgrant6198@aol.com)

Having just come back from Nicaragua, I have been reflecting on some of the basic needs of the hospital in Puerto Cabezas. In the 16 years I have been traveling to Nicaragua, there has been a glaring need that is not being met. There has not been a consistent effort to build a biomedical engineering department dedicated to the upkeep and repair of hospital equipment (ranging from ultrasounds, centrifuges, electrocardiograms, electrocauteries, infant warmers, suction machines, orthopedic tools, and the list goes on and on). When a piece of equipment stops working, it is pushed aside and left to rust. There has been a need for a dedicated room for such repairs and training of technicians to do the repair. There is also a need for the hospital to set aside a budget to buy replacement parts.

On my November trip I had the pleasure of traveling with a clinical engineer with years of experience in hospital equipment repair. Robyn Frick also has extensive experience traveling to India, China, Africa and other places that are dealing with the same issue that Nicaragua is dealing with. Robyn has the perfect skill set to deal with the urgent problem. Robyn worked for ten days repairing equipment, identifying talented people who could be trained, giving in-services, having a hands-on workshop, and writing a comprehensive report to the director of the hospital on equipment repair. The Director of the hospital, Dr. Salva, responded by cleaning out a good sized room at the hospital and making it a workshop for equipment repair.

An example of the problem that Robyn addressed was the issue of the electrocardiogram equipment. There were no electrocardiogram machines working. We were given a space to do equipment repairs. Ten broken electrocardiogram machines were delivered to our work space. Robyn, with his trainees, checked over the equipment and repaired four of the machines. The other machines were taken apart and pieces were saved in labeled plastic boxes to be used as spare parts. The trainees were encouraged to take the equipment apart. As they worked, Robyn answered questions and guided the trainees.

At the end of Robyn's visit, he outlined some basic needs for the biomedical engineering department. After Robyn left, I had a crew build two work benches, four work stools and a shelving unit for the room. Basic supplies for renovation were purchased including lighting, new wiring supplies for more receptacles, waste basket, a fan for air circulation, light switches, and a new lock. A rolling work cart and some storage for small parts were supplied from our June shipment. As I was preparing to leave, the new workshop was taking shape.

It has been the dream of Dr. Bach and myself to have a place where simple repairs could be made. In the coming year, Dr. Bach and I will support and encourage the local repair people to learn new skills that will help the hospital keep equipment operational. It is discouraging to ship equipment that sometimes becomes rusting junk for lack of a simple replacement part or maintenance. I am optimistic that the director of the hospital realizes that support for this project will benefit the hospital for years to come. *In the picture above: Robyn, Oscar, Rufino, Samuel*



**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. Learn more about our history, mission and accomplishments, see back issues of our newsletter, and learn more about our projects when you visit our website.

**Grants and Funding:** If you are involved with service organizations that would be interested in sponsoring or contributing to one of our projects, please let us know ([thebenzigers@hotmail.com](mailto:thebenzigers@hotmail.com)). 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 are so very appreciative of these extra monetary boosts that help us achieve our goals. The underserved, poverty stricken people of the RAAN appreciate your support.

Your check is a gift of health. Thank you so much for caring!  
(Please see page 7)

## Greetings from Dr. Ernesto Espinosa Hooker, [bilwihome@hotmail.com](mailto:bilwihome@hotmail.com)

*Ernesto Espinoza Hooker is a young orthopedic surgeon who is originally from the Atlantic Coast who returned to Puerto Cabezas after completing a residency in orthopedic surgery. He has proven to be exceptionally talented in this specialty and has introduced new procedures for which patients had to travel to Managua. He is an extremely dedicated, compassionate man of faith who is eager to improve the level of care for his patients.*

Dear friends, I greet you with great appreciation. My name is Ernesto Espinosa Hooker. I have just little more than two years practicing the specialty of orthopedics and trauma medicine in Hospital Nuevo Amanecer in Puerto Cabezas.

This place belongs to the most impoverished of my country and with significant limitations in the health field. The people are from different cultural, ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds. Approximately four main dialects are spoken among the indigenous groups, besides the two languages most spoken in the world (Spanish and English). I think there is no other place on the face of the earth where people live together as brothers being so different from one another not only genetically but each group practice different customs, eats different foods, has different style of houses, and every group approaches health differently. Because of these things, very few graduate doctors from our universities are willing to come to our impoverished and rare region to offer their good services of health, much less come to settle and live here. They prefer to live on the Pacific side of the country where living conditions are much more favorable. This has led us to redouble efforts and fight for the health of our Atlantic coast brethren with greater esteem, vigilance and love.

I thank God for special lives as Dr. Robert Bach, who is a man of great value. When he comes we want him to stay with us and not return to the United States. Through this precious brother and colleague, we have met very special people with whom he has worked (like our dear Jill) helping us with donations of important medical equipment for the public health service in our region. Two friends have been a real treasure for me: Dr. Swett and Dr. Bergfeld. These two friends have encouraged me to make the best of me because I could see in them a life of dedication for others that is worth imitating.

Recently I got back from Miami, Florida where I took a course on knee arthroscopy. This was possible only because of the invaluable help from Partners in Health and a substantial contribution from Dr. John Bergfeld. As arthroscopy equipment had been donated and our training in this modern technique is poor, I was given this opportunity to learn. The door was opened for me and I went in head way. I am happy and Puerto



Cabezas too, because since my return I started to do cases of arthroscopy, still with some shortcomings, with little skill, but I know that being persistent I will develop the necessary skills.

I am anxiously awaiting the arrival of Dr. Bach who has been our friend, confidant, colleague, father and beloved brother in Christ, for him to see that his long and hard efforts have not been in vain, because here we continue in the hospital in response to the demand of health from this town that he loves so much. I have also heard about the possible coming of Dr. Bergfeld in December, which would be for us nothing less than a pleasant miracle. Dr. Bergfeld, thanks for everything you've done.

All other volunteers who would like to come to our Puerto Cabezas will know the warmth of our hug and eternal gratitude, as a great work being done by friends of Partners in

### Dr. Espinosa ad Dr. Bergfeld

Health in this piece of land of America. I greet all from the depth of my heart, God bless you.





Bill Chenoweth and Javier Carcamo

**Our experience in Nicaragua, Bill Chenoweth, [chenoweth@gwi.net](mailto:chenoweth@gwi.net)**

At the invitation of John and Mary Benziger, Barbara and I spent 10 days in early March in Nicaragua, mostly in Puerto Cabezas, doing what we could in a non-medical way to contribute to PIH's activities. That turned out to be my teaching five English classes (and giving four tutoring sessions) to hospital employees with Barbara's assistance and Barbara's helping Mary with her Bodega mural. This could not have been a more rewarding experience for both of us. There were many highlights including Barbara's finding out that she could be very comfortable in an environment like Puerto's and for me, the returning childhood memories of my years in Haiti. But paramount was the fun we had teaching together – getting to know the students, and even in so short a time, seeing them make meaningful progress.

**Partners in Health Annual Appeal!**

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 or see on our website, please do so on your check. Please send your tax-exempt donation to:

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

Thank you so much for your generosity.

**Partners in Health Board of Directors 2009**

- Robert Bach, President
- Jill Grant, Vice President
- Steve Johnson, Treasurer
- Max Barus
- John Benziger
- Mary Benziger
- Peter Hauptert
- Robert Holmberg
- Joan MacCracken
- Miki MacDonald
- Jim and Helen McKendry

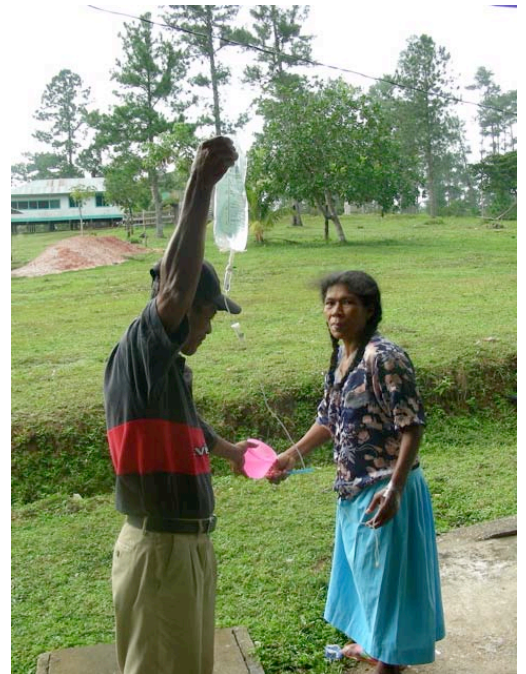
**Nicaraguan Advisors**

- Kenneth Serapio Hunter
- Rita Arauz
- Dino Aguilar
- William Abdalah
- Ernesto Espinosa
- Manuel Salas

Thank you so much for caring!



Sandra administering anesthesia



We could use more IV poles! Won't you please help?