



Partners in Health of Maine

Companeros en la Salud

Volunteers sharing the gift of health

December 2004

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.

Volunteer House in Puerto Cabezas

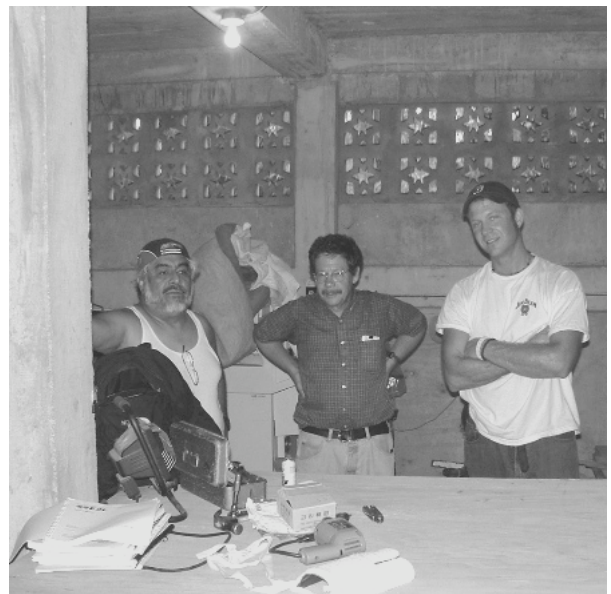
By Jill Grant jgrant6198@aol.com

At last our dream of a volunteer house is coming true. The construction of the volunteer house was started nearly three years ago. Construction at a distance in a third world country is fraught with problems, but finally the house is coming together. This two story house has five bedrooms, kitchen, dining room, living room, and two bathrooms on the second floor. The first floor now has the beginnings of a maintenance workshop and storage rooms. We will also have an office/conference room and bathroom on the first floor.

It was my goal on this October 2004 trip to Nicaragua to live in the house and work on the second floor living space. When I arrived, the septic system had been repaired and was functioning. The pump was hooked up so we had water and a shower in one bathroom. As we found out later in the week the PVC pipes had not been glued together with the correct adhesive and they blew apart under the pressure of the pump. The pipes were reglued and we had water again. The refrigerator and stove were moved to the second floor and cupboards were built to make a basic kitchen. Bars were placed on some of the windows on the second floor and more will be installed. We'd like to have all the upstairs windows secure soon. A basic large kitchen table was built. We now have two rooms with beds. Next we will have to build closets and paint the stucco walls. We will use local ceramic tiles on the floors for a surface that is easy to clean and cool to the touch. We have the beginnings of a verandah on the second floor that is made out of wood. Instead of finishing the verandah in wood we will rebuild it in cement. This will be expensive, but necessary since the wood beams on the verandah are already beginning to rot. Finally we will build a cement fence around the building to add another layer of security. There is still much to do, but at last we can use the building.

The final goal will be to have beds for twelve volunteers. Each room will have closet space and a desk. The large open floor plan of the kitchen, dining, and living room space will allow volunteers to eat and socialize together and plan their next day's work. This space will allow volunteers to invite their Nicaraguan counterparts to socialize and share experiences away from the medical setting. We now have space to store equipment and supplies from our shipments. With this building, we will now be better able to serve the Nicaraguan medical community.

In March, I will return to the house to oversee more work. It is my plan to work on the second bathroom, closets, and painting. In time, the house will be used for visiting medical students and volunteer groups. A small fee will be charged to all who use the house so the expenses of the house will be covered. I am encouraged and happy with the progress of the house, and know we will be better able to serve the people of Puerto Cabezas with a base of operations.



Victor Sologastia (bioengineer), Dr. Bruce Alexander, and Daren Beaupre (bioengineer) behind the workbench at the new volunteer house



Puerto Cabezas orphans 10/03

Changed Point of View

By Adam Bezgembluk zak123456@hotmail.com

Before I went to Nicaragua, I thought I had it bad. I am a high school student in Bangor, Maine. After I was there for two weeks, my views about how my life is were changed.

In April of 2001, my father and I went on a medical expedition to Nicaragua along with other Partners in Health of Maine volunteers. (Dr. Robert Bach has been going to Nicaragua for more than 20 years.) When I was in Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, it was quite busy. Everywhere you went you would see kids on the streets, in bare feet, wanting to wash your windshield for some money. Some kids did not even have shirts, which I thought was quite sad. Another emotional moment occurred when I was sitting on a chair, sipping on some soda. A little child, about 6 years old, came up to me and asked me if I wanted my shoes cleaned. I said no thank you, but the friend next to me gave the child some food. As we were walking away, the child came back and thanked my friend for giving him the food. I didn't expect the kid to come back and thank him. Rather, I thought he would run off and ignore us. I realized that not everyone can get what they need, and at times we have to give.

There is just one other experience that really changed the way I am. That was when I went to an orphanage in Puerto Cabezas. I went to visit the orphaned children. As I was playing with them, I did not think about what they have, or what they eat, or anything like that. All I wanted to do with the children was play and enjoy the happy atmosphere they were creating. They taught me to respect what I have, and use all the things I receive wisely. Every other day after I had visited there, I wanted to go back, to help the children, to play with them, and enjoy them.

As you can tell, I like to help people. I would like to do something in the medical field to help people. The trip to Nicaragua influenced me by making me care more about how others feel, and made me want to help them get better if they were feeling sad. I never really had a long thought of doing something medical until I went to Nicaragua. Just knowing that the knowledge I learn can be used down there to help those who have less knowledge gives me a goal. And, it makes me realize how good I have it in Bangor, Maine.

The Orphanage

There were nearly sixty of you
Sitting quietly on your benches
Waiting to say grace
Thankful for food, shelter
And the promise of
Running water

In the late afternoon
You ran out to meet us
Looking for hugs
Nelcito and Ronald
You cried for so long
Yesinia, how sad your eyes

Your bunks were so tidy
Stacked three high
Lots of teddy bears
Your nocturnal friends
Warm and fuzzy
But not good story tellers

R. Bach

New Recruits to Partners in Health

By Mary Benziger, thebenzigers@hotmail.com

In the spring of 2003, John Benziger, a pathologist at MaineGeneral Medical Center fortuitously met Jill Grant, learned about Partners in Health of Maine and came home energized. After Jill and her son Nate joined us to share more information we were both hooked. John and I had planned to combine volunteer work with travel when we retire. Why wait? Jill's enthusiasm for the people of Nicaragua and the work that PIHOM is doing was contagious.

John was immediately interested in the cervical cancer screening program that Dr. Max Barus was implementing, and also in the status of the laboratory in Puerto Cabezas and what might be done to help. I have no medical background and wondered what I might be able to do to contribute, and the idea of a mural came up.

We decided to join Jill on her trip to Nicaragua in October 2003. John and I researched the history of Nicaragua and were appalled to learn of the misfortunes, both natural and political, that these people have endured. We studied Spanish. I made plans for two murals: one for an exterior wall of the hospital in Puerto Cabezas; one for a piece of plywood for the tiny hospital in Rosita. Even before we boarded the plane we felt we had already been enriched.

In Puerto Cabezas, John worked at the clinic helping Justo, the cytotech who spoke no English. That was challenging, but more amazing was the discovery that the lab at the new hospital had a sink but no running water. Most patients at the hospital bring their support crew with them. There's no such thing as food or laundry service in a third world hospital. I recruited local people to participate in the mural and take pride and ownership of their work. Children, teenagers, hospital staff, and PIHers all helped.

We arrived in Rosita just as a birthday party was beginning. We were invited to the party and were enchanted with the squeaky clean children dressed in their party clothes, the music, food, and pinata. The loss of power in the midst of this did not interrupt the festivities. Little did we know that electricity was a very sporadic occurrence in Rosita. The next day we all piled into the old hospital truck and went for a drive. Every 2 miles we had to stop and put water in the truck's radiator. We traveled the potholed roads past thatched houses on stilts, a Sunday soccer game in a field, over rickety bridges and muddy brown rivers where women were washing clothes and half naked children were playing. It felt like a National Geographic expedition.

Another cooperative effort in Rosita produced an inland rain forest mural that can be displayed anywhere, and won't be destroyed with the old hospital.

In conclusion, our experience with PIHOM was educational, enriching, and life changing. Not only do we have a greater appreciation for our own good fortune, but we will try to keep involved and do what we can to help the Nicaraguan people improve their health conditions.



Two helpful artists in Rosita

Accomplishments in 2004

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

This year has seen an incredible amount of accomplishments by a lot of different volunteers. One of the most impressive is the Pap smear project started by Max Barus and Miki MacDonald. They have now incorporated training in colposcopy and have made a huge difference in women's health in the area. Betsy Weiss, Joan McCracken, and Kate Barus also served in this arena.

Jill Grant has persevered in the construction of our new warehouse-living quarters having overcome many roadblocks along the way. Her enthusiasm has not faltered and it is an inspiration to all of us.

Gary Kingsbury and Karen Brooks raised over \$2,000 for repairing the generators in Bilwas with one of their well-organized talent shows.

Bob Holmberg, Andy Herriott, and Peter Hauptert have seen very positive results from their medical outreach program along the Rio Cocco river.

During our last trip we were blessed with two bioengineers, Victor Sologastia and Daren Beaupre who repaired, organized and inventoried all the equipment in the basement of the new warehouse. They also worked with personnel at the hospital with future plans for providing further instruction in maintenance and repair.

Our group also spent a lot of time at the orphanage and was able to make a nice volleyball court while Kate Gonda, Maureen Wrobel, Sarah Syndacker, and Nina Alexander provided daily entertainment for the kids in the late afternoon. Sarah our newest and incredibly enthusiastic volunteer will be living with the kids at the orphanage for six weeks.

We were glad to have Dr. Bruce Alexander with us once again helping in the Emergency room. The ER personnel always welcome his kind and modest personality.

Dr. James McKendry, orthopedic surgeon and veteran volunteer accompanied by his effervescently optimistic wife Helen, spent a week in both Puerto Cabezas and Rosita setting up a prosthesis program for amputees. This will be a significant contribution to many who have been disabled from the war.

On arriving in Bilwas it was nice to see a roof on the new operating room which we hope will be completed by next spring. Thanks to the efforts and leadership of our Nicaraguan medical director, Dr Patricia Ballesteros, wonderful improvements continue to appear at the clinic.

We also spent some time with doctors at the Lenin Fonseca hospital in Managua making plans to send them equipment for their new operating rooms.

On the way home I wondered how we could afford to finish the operating room, complete construction of the warehouse and send a container of equipment to both Hospital Amanacer and the Lenin Fonseca. We can only hope and pray that funds will become available to complete these important projects.



Daren Beaupre (bioengineer), Maureen Wrobel (OR nurse), and Sarah Syndacker mixing cement to anchor a pole for a volleyball net at the orphanage

Awakening

Noisy rusted buses roaring
Spewing clouds of black soot
People hanging off the sides
Worn people walking
Staring straight ahead
As if their faces frozen

Just eight hours before
Flying well above the clouds
Surrounded by the well groomed
Nails elegantly polished
Reading "Glamour" magazine
Laptops all around

I continue to run
And see several
Tired women pedaling
Slowly, eyes half closed
Having worked all night
Their worn nails unpolished

R. Bach

"No tengo Dinero"

"No tengo dinero"
"I have no money"
Echoes in my mind
Visions haunt and reappear
A mom crying over her child
She never bought the pills

I see a man in agony
Holding his hernia
Acutely strangulated
He had been told to
Buy the surgical supplies
But "No tengo dinero"

His head was too large
His mother knew
A neurosurgeon just
Two plane tickets away
"No tengo dinero"
I hope it's not too late

R. Bach

Connecting with the Women's Movement

It's our last day in Puerto Cabezas. We (Betsy Weiss, MD, and Miki Macdonald, RNP) are scheduled to provide PAP smears at The Women's Movement. Dr. Joan McCracken is going to repaint two dark offices at the Ministry of Health a warm yellow with the nurses who coordinate tuberculosis care and AIDS education. It will be a full day with dedicated people.

The three of us sleep in the front room of El Cortijo 2, a simple Caribbean style inn surrounded by coconut trees and the cooling ocean breezes. When we look past the lights on the porch, we see the stars saying goodnight and the sun reaching up to the edge of the ocean. After coffee, we walk to the cliff overlooking the metallic ocean and sit for a moment as the sun comes up. Together, we take three deep breaths, and welcome another full day in Port.

The Partners in Health PAP Project grew out of a request by Erna Patterson to coordinate family planning and cervical cancer screening for women in Miskito villages. Erna is an activist, a nurse and doer. Initially it seemed simple to train people to provide the service and assist with the PAPs. However, with each step another layer of barriers emerged: travel to clinics, supplies, cytology, treatment, tracking, and follow-up.

This past February, Erna encouraged us to offer a PAP Clinic for members of the local Women's Movement where she has been a leader for years. The Women's Movement believes healthcare is a human right, and women who are looking to care well for themselves should be supported and empowered. Unfortunately the group has had no resources to provide medical services to its members.

The plan was to offer PAPs to women from two very poor neighborhoods of Puerto Cabezas. With two days notice, The Women's Movement had assembled over one hundred women, many of whom had never had a PAP smear. The oldest woman was 68 years old and the youngest was twelve years old.

We set up in a back office with a desk covered with a bright yellow and green cloth. Our supplies were in a file cabinet, and the window behind us faced an empty lot giving us enough light to do the PAPs. The ceiling was low and the walls dark. The small room was crowded with the two of us, our Miskito translator, and the patient. One of us was assigned to hold the light and manage the slide, and one to do the procedure. Often the patient would bow her head and swish her skirt as she shuffled in shyly with her underwear in her hand. We would talk a bit, and she would climb onto the table and allow us to do our work.

The atmosphere in the old dilapidated building was cozy with camaraderie. Women waiting sat around a wooden table talking, while children played on the floor. Their comfort reflected the fact that this is their place and we were welcome visitors.

Of the PAP smears performed, fourteen were abnormal, a rate many times higher than in the US. The PIH Women's Health project has grown out of the efforts of PIH volunteers who were struck by the remarkably high rate of abnormalities on the few Pap smears which were being done and the numbers of women with cervical cancer. Cervical cancer affects women in the prime of their lives, between 20 and 50 years of age, and is devastating for the women and their families. Unfortunately, Central America has some of the highest rates of cervical cancer in the world.

Nicaragua has \$14 a year to spend on each of its citizens for health care. This includes immunizations, prenatal care, plus the universe of preventative health and all disease management. Cervical cancer screening has been long neglected due to lack of funds; however, cervical cancer remains the leading cause of cancer deaths in Nicaraguan women. The cost of PAP supplies in Nicaragua is about \$5 per woman, more than one third of the budget allotted per person.

Pap smear testing and the treatment of the identified precancerous abnormalities remains the most effective cancer prevention intervention ever developed. However, this sort of program only works if the entire chain of interventions is in place and functioning. This includes Pap testing, cytologic interpretation, patient notification, colposcopy, biopsy, specimen preparation and reading, patient follow-up and definitive treatment. Making this possible in low-resource settings such as the R.A.A.N. region presents a challenge.

The Partners in Health Women's Health Project has provided support to all the links in the chain of interventions. We supply materials and supplies for Pap smears, teaching for nurses who do Paps, equipment, chemicals, educational materials and microscopes for the cytotechnologist, colposcopy and biopsy equipment and training for physicians, support for pathology services and, through existing (PIH supported) surgical facilities, the means to provide definitive treatment. We continue to focus on supporting the work of Nicaraguan clinicians. In the next year we hope to provide ongoing support and introduce computerized patient tracking at the Polyclinic, continue colposcopy training and improve support for the new pathologist in Puerto Cabezas.

By: Miki Macdonald, miki.macdonald@maine.edu
Betsy Weiss,
Max Barus, MD, mbarus@ctel.net

New Legs Provide New Niche

For the last 10 years Helen and I have headed to Puerto Cabezas once or twice a year with PIHOM. I had been doing orthopedic surgery and Helen had given talks on AIDs and public health topics in the local schools. I retired several years ago from active practice in the U.S. and felt I had perhaps come to the point of retiring from Nicaragua as well.

But a new project materialized a year ago when Jill Grant asked me to evaluate an amputee in the small mining town of Rosita. As a miner he had worked his 10 year old prosthesis to death in the dirt, the wet and the muck.

Nicaragua has only one prosthetic clinic run by the government in Managua, but that is too far away and many can't afford to get there anyway. The people of the Northern Autonomous zones are at the end of the medical pipeline.

The miner and two other amputees who showed up in Rosita were casted. I brought the casts back to prosthetist, Mark Balmar at the Hanger shop in Waterville, Maine, and he fabricated three beautiful legs.

Our Spring crop of casts grew into four prostheses in the hands of Bob Washburn who works with Mark Taggart at Central Maine Orthotics and Prosthetics also in Waterville.

Jamie Vandersea of Maine Orthotics and Prosthetics will join Bob and Mark this time in providing the limbs our Nicaraguan friends need.

We have returned to Rosita and Port twice since last year, have delivered five artificial legs and one artificial arm, and lately came home with five new casts.

I guess their are still a few more Nicaraguan junkets ahead.

By: Jim and Helen McKendry; Jboatmc@aol.com



Wish List!

Partners in Health is looking for the following donated items. If you have any of the following items please put them in a box and mail them to Partners in Health, Jill B. Grant, 150 State Street, Brewer, Maine 04412.

Your donations of medical items or money make a difference.

BP Cuffs, stethoscopes, otoscopes, nebulizers, white lab coats, surgical instruments, dental instruments, and we especially need a **microtome**

Muchas Gracias!

Partners in Health is a grassroots organization of volunteers dedicated to improve the health conditions of people in under served areas of Central America, especially the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) of Nicaragua.

It is our philosophy that it is better to teach than to do. Please join us in our efforts to help these people help themselves.

Please send your tax exempt donation to:

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



Anyone interested in learning more about Partners in Health can write or email us:

Jill Grant: 150 State Street, Brewer, ME 04412; jgrant6198@aol.com

Dr. Robert Bach: 50 Wilson St., Dartmouth, MA 02748; bob@pihom.com

Visit our web site (<http://www.pihom.com/>) for more information on our projects past and present, plus a wonderful photo gallery!