

UPDATE on the AMERICAS

A bi-monthly publication of the Rochester Committee on Latin America

A Metro Justice Task Force

NOVEMBER 2005

Wednesday, JANUARY 4. 7 PM. Downtown United Presbyterian Church HAITI: Major Crisis Point and the Live-Giving Work of two Rochesterians

What happens when an irresistible force for good meets an immovable object which is the closest thing to evil in this Hemisphere?

ROCLA speakers Sarah Brownell and Kevin Foos, a young married couple in a major leadership role in the radical Catholic Worker Movement living here at St. Joseph's House of Hospitality, will travel to Haiti late in January for six months of life-giving work with the people of Borgne.

Haiti, we know, is in the midst of an unbelievable cycle of violence. Already the poorest nation in the Americas, with their democratically elected President Aristide removed in February of 2004 by US Marines, with its poor majority calling for his (and democracy's) return, and now with a truly evil repression led by UN "Peacekeepers" pushed on to massacres by a strange triad of the US, France, and Canada.

On September 23 in Washington, DC, Peter Mott participated as a juror in the International Tribunal on Haiti which "tried" and found guilty US and UN officials and the UN's Brazilian commander - guilty especially of the July 6, 2005, midnight massacre of 27 poor women, children and men in their beds in Cite Soleil, Port au Prince.

Sarah has been working with Spiritus Christi's mission in northern Haiti, Project H.O.P.E., since 1998. You will remember her as the RIT-trained engineer who went to Haiti with Rochester's Professor Bill Larsen to set up water systems.

The Struggle With Water Reflections from Borgne, Haiti

by Sarah Brownell

Water is life. I am continually inspired by the story of the citizens of Cochebamba Bolivia who put lives on the line to wrestle their water system back from the clutches of privatization. Perhaps water is a human right. But in Haiti, water is as much a burden as it is a gift.

I stood in the door of the Priests' house where I stay in Borgne looking over the charcoal cookstoves, ashes, and pots crusted with burnt rice on the balcony where Nanoun and Marlene were cleaning up from preparing lunch.

"I'm going to Nan Sab to work on the water treatment system." I said. They looked at the clouds gathering beyond the mountains. Their eyes said, "Not today." "Why?" I asked, "It isn't going to rain here, and I don't care if I get wet. Besides, people have already been waiting too long for clean water." I put my flip flops into my bag for crossing the river.

"Dlo desann." Marlene warned. Literally, it means "the water descends". In fact, a few days later, a flash flood carried away a woman walking home from selling fruit at the market. One moment she was crossing a shallow, gurgling river, the next, her body was in the ocean. It was not a hurricane or a tropical storm, just a thunderstorm on the other side of the mountain...

The reasons for much of Haiti's troubles with water—both too much and too little—are the same: exploitation, lack of infrastructure, abysmal wages, poverty, deforestation...and they

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*ROCLA Programs and Actions Every
First Wednesday 7:00 PM Downtown
Presbyterian Church 121 N. Fitzhugh St.
Free and open to the public.
Wheelchair accessible*

Metro Justice of Rochester, Inc.
THE ROCHESTER COMMITTEE
ON LATIN AMERICA
167 Flanders St.
Rochester, NY 14619

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Randall Shea's Letter from Guatemala

(excerpts) Oct. 2005

[Ed. Note: Randall, a former Rochesterian, is founder of a school in the rural Mayan village of Santa María Tzeja where he lives with his wife Juana, a lawyer, and their three daughters. ROCLA supports his work.]

On August 19th our third daughter, Aida Clara Abigail was born. She has not been sick a single day yet, for which we are very thankful.

A lot of rain has been falling in Guatemala the last 10 days or so, a result of tropical storm Stan passing through our area. There has been considerable flooding and damage over a fairly extensive part of Guatemala. The area of the country where we live, thankfully, is quite distant from the coast and damage has been fairly minimal. The roads we use, however, are dirt covered with gravel, and the rains have caused them some deterioration. To get into the county seat now, rather than sitting comfortably in an old yellow school bus brought down from the United States, we all have to travel standing in the back of a Toyota pick-up. Up to 30 people will often pack into the back of the pick-up, including women with babies, children and old folks. When we come to a steep incline all the men are supposed to get out and walk so that the truck has a better chance of climbing the hill. That uphill walk, however, can be an unattractive prospect at 6:30 in the morning, and human nature being what it is, some of us men will invariably opt to stay on the truck and hope for the best. More often than not, however, the truck won't be able to climb the hill with our extra weight on board, and then comes the real fun; the driver attaches a 40 foot rope to the front bumper and all the men laboriously pull the truck up the hill, with the tires spinning and smoking and mud and gravel flying.

Another consequence of the rain in Santa María Tzejá is that the little cracks, crevices and hiding areas around the base of our house have become water logged, forcing the spiders who normally live there to migrate to drier territory, like the inside of our home. Yesterday I encountered three super humongous tarantulas in my office, not far from where little Aida was sleeping in her hammock, and I had no choice but to eliminate the intruders. I can only hope that the biblical prohibition of killing does not refer to mutant tarantulas.



Randall Shea holding Aida Clara Abigail.

Work wise, we recently inaugurated a beautiful, new computer center in the village, in my back yard in fact. Jeff Taylor, son of Clark and Kay Taylor, who started up a project between their church in Needham, MA and the village way back in 1987, provided close to \$30,000 in funding. Using his multiple contacts in the business world, he convinced Microsoft to donate 25 computers and the accompanying software to our computer center. In early August of this year Jeff and his companion landed on our village soccer field in a helicopter, accompanied by Microsoft personnel and television cameras, and then presided over a grand

inauguration ceremony attended by many people in the village. It was a festive event.

The center has been getting a lot of usage with close to 100 middle school youth and primary school children receiving computer skills classes for four hours a week. Some visitors from Spain who were in the village also gave computer classes to our middle and primary school teachers for close to a month, and later this fall we are planning to offer our first computer classes for literate adults in the community.

In addition to providing the funds for the construction of the center, Jeff is also providing the funding for the center's operation. Already the center is one of the most vibrant and exciting places to be in the village.



We are also planning on opening up our first school library in the village in the very near future. Earlier this year three young women from the Basque Country region of Spain were in the village for close to a month doing the practice teaching component of their university training. While they were here they saw the need for a school library, and upon returning to Spain, they raised close to \$7,000 which will now be used to purchase books, bookshelves, tables, and pay a small salary for a librarian. While in Spain they also collected one ton of books, which are being shipped to Guatemala on a boat. The three young women recently returned to the village and will be overseeing the library's operation for the next year.

I was surprised recently to receive a letter from the individual who is the Acquisitions and Gifts Coordinator for the Tozzer Library at Harvard University in Cambridge. The letter reads, in part:

Dear Mr. Shea,

I am writing to you on behalf of Tozzer Library at Harvard University. A professor in the anthropology department would like to show your film, *There is Nothing Concealed That Will Not Be Made Known*, this semester in her class called Memory Politics: Truth, Justice, Redress.

The letter went on to ask if I could assist the library in acquiring a copy of the video, which, of course, I was only too happy to do. It's not everyday I get a personal letter from Harvard University asking for my assistance in providing them with something I helped to create, so I went ahead and had the letter framed and I now display it on my office wall next to my university degrees.

Continued on next page

The Struggle With Water *(Continued)*

began well before Haiti became a country itself. During the 1700s French colonists cleared thousands of acres of forest to grow sugar cane, coffee, and lumber for export to Europe. For Haitian peasants, trees are still one of the few resources available to exchange for the currency needed to send their children to school, to visit the doctor, or purchase household items. Wood and charcoal are the main cooking fuels, and each year, charcoal makers journey further and further from urban centers to find trees. Only 1.4% of Haiti's land is still covered in forests. Yet, it is the trees that hold the topsoil necessary for subsistence farming, that clean impurities out of water, and that prevent flash floods. Additionally, little infrastructure for water or sanitation is available, especially in rural areas. According to the World Health Organization, less than 45% of rural Haitians have access to an improved water supply, and less than 16% have adequate sanitation. At the clinic in Borgne, a fourth of all patients are diagnosed with preventable waterborne illness such as typhoid and parasites and about 17% of Haitian children die before reaching the age of 5.

Randall Shea's Letter from Guatemala *(continued)*

Since we usually do a significant part of our fundraising for the school project in the fall [*note: Randall and family will not be coming north this year*], this seems like the appropriate moment to ask each of you to renew your support for the education work we are doing here in the village. So for those of you who have not yet made your 2005 donation, I would like to respectfully ask you to continue supporting us by mailing in your contribution to Gates Presbyterian Church, 1049 Wegman Rd., Rochester, NY 14624. Please be sure to attach a note indicating that the funds are for the Santa Maria Tzejá education project. Also, please send me an email note when you mail your donation in so that I can verify that the funds are properly credited to the school fund. The church, under the leadership of their pastor Reverend Ralph English, has most generously been receiving donations on behalf of the school for several years now and they do so without charging any administrative fees.

Thank you again to all of you for your ongoing support over the years.

Celebrate Human Rights Day – December 9, 2005

This year Human Rights Day will bring together poets, musicians and artists who will give expression to their passions regarding what is happening in our country and the rapid erosion of both human and environmental rights here and around the world. Musicians include ROCLA's Henry Padron.

Friday, Dec. 9,

5:00 PM - Candlelight vigil and readings of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights outside city Hall),
 5:30 PM - Potluck at Downtown Presbyterian Church),
 and
 7 PM Program: **Human Rights and the Arts.**

I work with the Sant Teknoloji: Bwase Lide, the Brainstorming Technology Center, which is a project of Haiti Outreach: Pwoje Espwa (H.O.P.E.). The overall goal of the center is to inspire local confidence and creativity in environmental problem solving. The current focus is prevention of waterborne illnesses. The center has a staff of four quarter-time local employees and 8-15 volunteers who offer traveling seminars on waterborne illness prevention, host weekly radio shows, open the Sant Teknoloji to visitors twice a week so they can try out technologies used around the world, and provide water testing services.

We are learning together how to tackle the local problems of water and sanitation. For example, a few years ago we installed three UV water disinfection systems in nearby villages. We asked users to pay a token fee (the price of a lime) to fill their 5 gallon containers. Later, we checked with the operators to see if they were making enough money to compensate them for their time and for cleaning supplies. They were not. "Why?" I asked. They said, "Because people believe water should be free."

The Sant is planning to bring treated water to more people.

We are brainstorming how to make it both economically sustainable and free, possibly by funding it through a side business. We are also working on reforestation and ecological sanitation projects—sharing local knowledge with technical knowledge—so that water will become the gift of life it was meant to be!

ROCLA's Contributions for 2005

Every year we ask members for suggestions about ROCLA contributions. Please let us know which of the groups below (under "Please advise") you consider worthy of support. If you have questions about any of them please call Bob Kaiser at 293-3194.

Already given:

| | |
|---|--------|
| • Cuba Caravan (Pastors for Peace) | \$2000 |
| • Nicaragua (water containers) | 100 |
| • Flood relief, Guatemala and El Salvador | 500 |
| • Guatemala (Randall Shea's school) | 200 |
| • VIVE refugee center in Buffalo | 200 |
| • INTERCONNECT the movement's newsletter on Latin America | 200 |
| • Latin America Solidarity Coalition (LASC) | 250 |
| • Haiti Tribunal Commission | 300 |
| • LASC palm cards | |
| (for distribution at SOA Watch, etc.) | 40 |
| • Haiti water project | |
| (Sarah Brownell and Kevin Foes) | 200 |

Which of the following do you think we should support financially? Please call the Kaisers at 293-3194.

- Rural and Migrant Ministry (Brockport)
- Mexico Solidarity Network
- No More Deaths (Arizona border)
- School of the Americas Watch (SOAW)
- Jubilee USA (Cancel the Debt)
- Dominican Republic
 (Rural development with Joanne Peterson)

Looking Through Their Eyes

by Kevin Foos

Kevin is a founding member of Poor People United (a task force of Metro Justice) and active in the local and national Poor Peoples' Economic Human Rights Campaign. He has been working and living in voluntary poverty for three years, affording him an in-depth education on social and spiritual issues. This will be his first trip to Borgne. He hopes to make a connection with the community there and learn how to communicate and build relationships for the future. He also will help Sarah with her water supply, sanitation, and community environmental health education projects.

I plan to bring 10 inexpensive, 3 megapixel, digital cameras to use with teenagers who haven't previously had the opportunity to attend school. I will organize a two-month course in photography and participatory methods, using a laptop computer to review and discuss photographs taken by the teenagers. We will focus on specific topics related to social and community issues, investigating both positive and negative emotions about their lives. I also plan to organize a community dinner and event centered around the participants' photographs and their reactions to what they have learned with the goal of trying to bolster their future engagement with the community.

Objectives:

- To teach English and learn Kreyol with children lacking formal education and resources.
- To empower them and present alternative possibilities for alleviating poverty.
- To encourage them to take collective action for grassroots structural change.
- To gather material for fundraising, education, and building solidarity between the people of Rochester and Borgne.
- To bring awareness about Haiti to people in our Rochester community through talks, articles, round table discussions, and local grass roots actions.
- To learn first hand about American involvement in Haiti's political and economic status.

Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser for Sarah's and Kevin's Haiti Trip



9am-1pm Sunday, Dec 11
St. Joseph's House of Hospitality
402 South Ave, Rochester
Suggested \$5 donation
(no one turned away for lack of funds!)

No ROCLA meeting in December
Because We're expecting you at the

Metro Justice Alternative Fair

Friday, December 2, 5-10 PM

Saturday, Dec. 3, 9 AM – 3 PM.

First Unitarian Church of Rochester
220 S. Winton Rd.

Where **Fun, fair-trade, food and festivity** –
Plus local musicians and craftspeople
co-mingle to provide a weekend of camaraderie
and relaxed, meaningful shopping.



Visit the ROCLA booth for beautiful weavings from Guatemala, the always anticipated Syracuse Peace Calendar, and other fair-traded crafts from Latin America.

Time to re-join ROCLA!

In case you've misplaced your renewal letter, turn to page 6 of this newsletter.

ROCHESTER COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICA (ROCLA)

ROCLA for many years has sought to be a bridge between the Rochester community and the people of Latin America. Monthly meetings on the 1st Wednesday of each month at the Downtown United Presbyterian Church, provide an opportunity to learn more about what is going on in that part of the world. In addition to providing information, ROCLA is committed to working for systemic justice and supports numerous organizations that are on the front line of this endeavor. School of the Americas Watch, the Mexico Solidarity Network, Rights Action and the Rochester Labor Film Festival are among the many groups that receive assistance and encouragement.

ROCLA Steering Committee

Marilyn Anderson, David Eisenberg, Hernan Escalante, Marilyn and Bob Kaiser (convener), John Locke, Gail and Peter Mott, Vic Vinkey, Mike Wahl, Tom Ward.

Otro mundo mejor es posible.

(Another better world is possible.)

In the past twenty months, a great many events have taken place, which directly affect our friends in Latin America.



Photo y John Locke

- Most recently, parts of Central America were ravaged by Hurricane Stan.
- Earlier this summer, in the US Congress, those who advocate an easing of tension between the United States and Cuba were voted down by a majority influenced by small group of aggressive supporters of US intervention.
- And while the mainstream American media turned a blind eye, the US military took part in a coup against a democratically elected government in Haiti.
- Today, with the aid of UN "peacekeeping" forces, the US backed junta is free to oppress the people of Haiti and imprison and murder those who speak out against them.
- There are similar stories to tell in throughout the region.
- The US Army's School of the Americas continues to train Latin American military in the art of terrorism against their own people in the name of the free market economy, and for the benefit of a very small and privileged minority.

But there are glimmers of hope.

- In Venezuela, President Hugo Chavez has withstood a continuing onslaught of pressure from the right wing who receive active support from the Bush Administration.
- Members of the Nicaraguan General Assembly have delayed passage of CAFTA until worker's rights are addressed.
- And the people of Bolivia have refused to let the US-backed global economic system privatize their water and their natural gas.

Through it all, the Rochester Committee on Latin America has worked to support those who envision a more just and equitable Latin America.

- More than 45 boxes of medical supplies and equipment were collected and transported to Buffalo as part of the annual Pastors for Peace Cuba Caravan.
- Financial contributions were made to support the work of many activist and relief organizations including Rights Action, Doctors for Global Health, the Latin America Solidarity Coalition, VIVE la Casa, Interconnect, the Mexican Solidarity Network and many others.
- And locally, ROCLA continues its campaign of awareness by hosting monthly presentations, publishing a bi-monthly newsletter, organizing the annual Dove Awards at the Rice and Beans dinner, and, most recently, hosting an interactive Web site that features an electronic news bulletin for urgent action notices.

In 2006, ROCLA will continue to support these and other important organizations that are working to realize a better world. And, we will continue to fulfill our mission to educate by expanding our awareness campaign with the goal of compensating for the mainstream media's lack of attention to these important developing stories.

With your help, we can make a difference.



Please give generously to ROCLA. Your contribution goes directly to the organizations that can best use it to advance true freedom and justice in Latin America. And your support will help us counter the propaganda of the State Department and the mainstream media.

A Task Force of Metro Justice • 167 Flanders St. • Rochester, NY • 14619 • www.rocla.org

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email address: _____

I/we want to support the work of ROCLA in the amount of:

\$100 \$50 \$30 (Family membership) Other _____

Please make checks to Metro Justice/ROCLA and mail to Marilyn Kaiser, 150 Attridge Rd, Churchville, NY 14428.

I/we would like to subscribe to the E-newsletter and receive urgent information by email

I/we would be interested in being a member of the Steering Committee

I/we would be interested in volunteering for the Alternative Fair and/or Rice and Beans Dinner

My/our specific interests with respect to Latin America are: _____

I/we would like to see ROCLA get involved in: _____

HELP GUATEMALA!



Preliminary results indicate that most families in the departments of San Marcos, Sololá, Huehuetenango and Quetzaltenango have not only lost most of their main crops (maize and potato) but also 30-60 percent of their land, due to mudslides.

ROCLA recommends The HURRICANE STAN RELIEF FUND which from Rights Action's Guatemala City office - is directly involved in purchasing and transporting food, water and shelter materials to hurricane impacted communities. They channel your donations to community-based and non-governmental organizations.

- Credit card donations: www.rightsaction.org (Make donation on behalf of "Hurricane Stan Relief")
- Make check to "Rights Action" (write "Hurricane Stan Relief" on memo-line) and mail to:
 UNITED STATES: Rights Action, Box 50887
 Washington DC, 20091-0887



Spanish members of United Firefighters use a dog to look for mudslide survivors in Panabaj, Guatemala on Sunday. The firefighters were unable to find signs of life at the site, where up to 1,400 Maya Indians died when rains triggered by Hurricane Stan caused tons of mud and rocks to rip through the village.

Photo by Daniel Aguilar / Reuters



Guatemala has a chronic malnutrition rate among children of 49 percent - one of the highest in the world.

This latrine has fallen into a crack that opened up in the ground. In total, some 3,755 houses have been destroyed and another 7,200 damaged, while over one hundred bridges were either damaged or destroyed. Reconstruction will take months, if not years.

