



**EL SALVADOR DIARY**  
by David Scondras

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### INTRODUCTION

I visited El Salvador with my Legislative Aide, Jack Mills, from March 15 to March 25, 1990.

We were invited by the Sister Cities Program, which sponsored a Summit Conference of sister cities in El Salvador and the USA while we were there. Essentially, the sister city project is one in which a city in El Salvador which was started by people displaced as a result of the war is paired with a city in the United States which commits itself to help with the needs of the emerging community. We traveled with a Sister Cities delegation, including representatives from Cambridge, Massachusetts; Boise, Idaho; Concord, Massachusetts; Columbus, Ohio; San Francisco, California; New York, New York; Berkeley, California and Washington, D.C.

We attempted to hear the viewpoints of as many people as possible, and tried to arrange interviews with everyone from large landowners to displaced peasants, from officials of the government and the Salvadoran military's High Command to representatives of the FMLN, the rebel insurgency.

The following is a diary I kept, to which I have appended the notes from certain meetings which amplify points made in the diary. You will find that I sometimes do not use the names of some sources - because to do so might endanger the individuals.

MONDAY, MIDNIGHT, MARCH 12TH - BOSTON, A FEW DAYS BEFORE LEAVING FOR EL SALVADOR.

#### Entry 1

Jack (my legislative aide and longtime personal friend) and I spoke with V., (friend of a mutual friend), whose mom sounds like quite a person. I hope we can get to speak with her. V. is the daughter of one of the families in the oligarchy and knows the Sol family rather well. We want to meet with Calderon-Sol, the Mayor of San Salvador.

V. told us many stories about life in El Salvador during the last decade. I asked her how she knew that the military rigged elections. As an example, she told us the story of her mother counting ballots in the stadium after a presidential

election, when all the lights went out. Nervously her mother lit up a cigarette. When she used her lighter, she saw soldiers stuffing ballot boxes, and they saw the flame. "Shut the light." She did.

V. claims that the oligarchy (the largest landowners) and the ARENA party are opposed to the military - that the army is out of control, and everyone wants them stopped. I think that is more or less true, but it is clear that ARENA has a core element that is in fact the very heart of the army right wing, headed up by

ARENA's "Maximal Leader", Roberto D'Aubuisson, who is widely felt to be the architect of the assassination of Archbishop Romero.

V. told us her own story - a slice of the history of El Salvador. A story filled with bombings, death squads, courage and chaos.

## Entry 2

Gary had NPR on the car radio as we were returning home from our visit with V. I was concerned when the broadcast mentioned fighting and killings near San Salvador; I am going there with Jack. I'm not good martyr material, I guess.

V. told us about the White Hand - how when the death squads began their terror, people marked for elimination would find a handprint made with white paint on their doors - a sign that they would be killed.

She believes that Cristiani is an honest person, and she told us that his wife was unhappy that he won the election. V. said that she was convinced that he had run for "duty", and that he wasn't actually supposed to have won the election. "Victory and divorce," said V. (I met no one who questioned Cristiani's honesty or integrity. I also met no one who believed Cristiani really was in control of El Salvador.)

## Entry 3

I received a letter from a constituent saying that we've got enough trouble in Boston, and, therefore, I should not be paying attention to El Salvador.

I had to sigh. When will we face reality? We will never have the resources we need locally as long as most of our tax money goes to Washington to serve an atavistic war machine. We ought to be furious with Washington for pouring \$1.5 million each day into El Salvador to fund a ten-year long war, complete with

death squads, torture, and baby killing - with no end in sight. Taxpayers in Boston are spending 1,488,000 this year in El Salvador, which could be far better spent on the streets of Boston.

#### Entry 4

I'm a little scared. I've never liked planes, and the camping equipment we are supposed to take makes me shudder. I don't have the clothes or the temperament for this.

I'm reading Under the Eagle by Jerry Pearce and Romero by James R. Brockman, plus some material from the Sister City project. It is giving a background on El Salvador, including some general history of the region.

TUESDAY, MARCH 13th

#### Entry 1

I looked over my will today.

V. can't persuade her mother to meet with us. She says that her family will be out of the country while I am there. I think it is more likely that her father just doesn't want to meet with me. I really want to learn about ARENA, and the military as well. Am I naive to suppose that many, if not most, groups, no matter what they are, see themselves as trying to do "good things" for the world? And doesn't that mean that every group has a rationale for what it does, an analysis that shows what it is doing is correct or good or justifiable? Wouldn't they want to talk about it? Maybe we can meet with some ARENA leaders directly.

#### Entry 2

It's evening. Lists. Everything in life seems to be lists. Lists of what to take to El Salvador, what to do, what not to do, lists of dates, what happened when, lists of medicines to take, lists of shots to get. No wonder personal computers are so popular. They manage lists.

I can tell the trip is becoming more real to me. The issues are also beginning to take shape. Should the U.S. continue to give money directly to the

Salvadoran military? Why shouldn't we funnel all of the money - with controls - through the elected government, to increase its powers relative to both the oligarchy and the army? Should all aid go through the United Nations? Or should we spend ANY of our tax dollars on El Salvador at all?

I feel as though I were on my way to the other side of the coffee curtain. A place we helped to shape. Can I be proud of what the U.S. has done? Or at least our intentions?

### Entry 3

It's going to be 14 days without a video! Funny what you end up deciding you might miss. No video. cold turkey.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14th

### Entry 1

V. said serious machismo would be a problem in El Salvador, so I should practice being macho-man before meeting big shots there.

I'm on the plane to Houston. A picture of ARENA's situation is emerging for me. In NACLA's "Report on the Americas" (July and September, 1989, issues) there is a compelling portrait of El Salvador's dynamics.

An economically driven set of crises is portrayed as being CAUSED by the victims of those crises. In El Salvador sabotage of utilities, traffic stoppages, military attacks are portrayed by Cristiani as CAUSED by the "terrorists". The relationship between high unemployment, death-squad terror, government arrest/torture/disappearances, wide-spread malnutrition, lack of sanitation and health care, etc., and the growth of the FMLN is never considered.

The Cristiani solution: a consolidated, corruption-free military (i.e. more police) and a decontrolled economy.

It is interesting that in Boston crime, manifested most recently in gang wars,

killings, and unrest is portrayed as CAUSED by the "criminals". The high correlation between unemployment, despair, lack of hope, drug use, and gang involvement among the youth is downplayed as a causal agent among the right wing who would solve the problem with more police and fewer controls on the city's economy.

THURSDAY, MARCH 15th

Entry 1

Houston airport is a big, cold place. Our plane was delayed by bad weather, and we arrived at 1:00 a.m. The organizers from the Sister City program set us up to go to a convent 40 miles away. A convent? And return in the morning for an 8:30 a.m. rendezvous at the airport. Jack and I decided to stay at the Best Western hotel instead, for less money than the taxi to the convent and back.

I am concerned because we need to decide with all the others on how we are going to deal with immigration at the airport in El Salvador. It took a great deal of trouble to get visas (the staffs of Congressman Kennedy and others worked hard to get us in). We want to be sure that we will all enter the country, and that we are given permission to stay for ten days.

You suspect right away that this is a military government when you note that the visa negotiations were conducted with the military High Command - Colonel Ponce in particular - not with the elected government. As far as I can determine, the elected government has no real role in El Salvador.

It makes sense to be worried about immigration, especially since others have been stopped at the airport in El Salvador and forced to return, or given a one-day pass.

Bob packed my new bullet proof vest. I think it is absurd. They wanna kill me, I'm dead.

In a flash of self discovery I realized that I'm mainly concerned about the children of El Salvador - a place which is mostly young people.

I felt a bit guilty knowing that a part of me that wishes for reconciliation, love, and peace to triumph is not based on my sense of what is just, but rather wincing at seeing pain and wanting peace so trips to places like El Salvador can focus on their beautiful beaches.

Incidentally, the flight to Houston did nothing to endear me to airplanes. Bumpy, late, and not very friendly. I spent a lot of time discussing anything to keep my mind off the flight.

Today we fly from Houston to El Salvador. I hope we get in. I hope we don't. We are at the whim of people with seemingly incoherent policies -- makes me feel the journey is dangerous.

During the flight I found out that the military's "retirement fund" (forced garnishing of soldiers' wages which are paid by U.S. tax dollars) is so big that it is being used to establish a bank; it buys buildings and land and makes business loans! The New York Times says that it has more than \$100 million (our tax dollars!). It is truly infuriating! I wish we had that money here for funding Boston people who want to start businesses.

V. told us that the military is competing to replace large land and business owners, and this is one reason the oligarchy is worried. Maybe the retirement fund plays a role in the military's acquisition of economic power.

## Entry 2

Thursday evening. We stopped at BELIZE. it was almost comical to see the "Phillip W. Goldson International Airport" sign - too big for the building. The building is small and unpretentious (except for the large sign) for an "international airport".

Life in Belize seems very "personalized". The newspaper, in criticizing the keeper of the National Zoo, says, "..now Sharon..." in a scolding tone. Sharon is the cabinet officer in charge of the zoo.

Kids - perhaps 15 to 18 years old - hang around outside trying to get tips or sell crafts. They are concerned that they won't be allowed to do their work when the new airport, financed partly by public, partly by private funds, is built. The large new building has architectural echoes of mission style, in spite of its size. The kids speak English and Creole to each other.

We're very uptight now -- everyone expects to be hassled at the airport in El

Salvador. The game is so sick - we spend \$1.5 million a day there! More than all other U.S. foreign aid payments save four. I hope the good common sense of U.S. citizens eventually comes through, and we cut off foreign aid to anyplace that doesn't welcome those who are traveling with the blessing of a member of Congress to see how our money is being spent!

I am particularly nervous because our group expects ME to be the spokesperson upon our entry into El Salvador - to be the one who argues (if that is what is needed) with the airport immigration officers. I'm not sure I can succeed. I hate dealing with macho-men.

Next stop: El Salvador. Not clear what will happen.

### Entry 3

El Salvador, night of the first day.

What an anti-climax!

We all passed through immigration without a hitch, going one at a time, me in the lead. I waited for each person to get through, joking all the while with the airport staff. I implied that I had a friend in line for whom I was waiting. Each person in our party went down the escalator to the baggage area as soon as he or she passed through immigration. We didn't want to create the appearance that we were a group; it seemed to be going well, with people assuming we were independent travelers.

We were prepared to wait at the airport for hours, or all day, trying to get through immigration and even to have some members of the delegation barred from entry. To be treated civilly seemed like a miracle. Interesting that we feel we "got something" when all we got is what we deserve in the first place!

I was relieved and annoyed at the necessity for all of this stress. El Salvador should welcome us. Officials ought to meet us at the airport. After all, we are representing many cities in the U.S., and ultimately our experiences will play some role in shaping public opinion in our country - public opinion, which will, I hope ultimately determine whether or not El Salvador gets the \$600 million in aid each year.



I goofed at the airport.

As the last person to descend the escalator at the airport, I assumed that everyone else was way ahead of me; so I went quickly through the baggage search, which was perfunctory. Then, when I came out of the airport to the big sidewalk in front, no one from the group was there! They were picking up their baggage: I never travel with more than I can carry, so it didn't occur to me to check the baggage area.

Finally we were all assembled; we drove by van and cab to the motel. On the way I noticed a helicopter overhead and asked the taxi driver about it. "Security," he said.

When pressed though, he said the "guerrillas" were not around now. So, why the waste of money?

We passed kids in combat uniforms with assault weapons - in trucks with machine guns - stopping civilians on the street.

When asked about Duarte (the President of El Salvador who preceded Cristiani), the taxi driver had only good things to say about the programs the ex-president instituted, one of which pays for the legal education that his daughter is receiving.

He said that there was need for the military because of the guerrillas, that the death squads were a media event, not real, and besides they were gone now, and believes that aid from the U.S. is crucial. (presumably to protect the country from these unspecified "guerrillas".) He also felt that Cristiani is losing support as gasoline prices increase (raising all other prices in turn). (I took this observation with a grain of salt--after all he also pointed out he had to buy gasoline as a cab driver and it was killing him)

We arrived at the hotel, checked in, changed, went out for dinner (all fourteen of us).

I ate some rolled burritos filled with cheese and delicacies. Open air place to eat. Fluorescent lighting. It was pleasant, warm with a light breeze. After a wonderful meal, we returned to the motel, where I tried to call Bob.

Tomorrow I'm supposed to put on a show - convincing the commander of the base at the High Command to give us safe conduct passes (permission to travel, which isn't necessarily respected by local military commanders in any event).

FRIDAY, MARCH 16th

## Entry 1

I'm a little bemused. First the Sister Cities' trip organizers write a list telling me not to drink water, be careful of the food, don't eat this or that, etc. Then they (those who organized the trip) sit with us at meals, eating everything in sight! Why did I bring all those cans of yellow-fin tuna?

On to confront Colonel Segovia today at the High Command! He's the member of High Command who is supposed to issue our safe conduct passes.

## Entry 2

Unbelievable day. It would be very hard to outline everything that was said, every nuance, every gesture; yet these things are important because they frame the tone of the Army. Repeatedly we went to the High Command to try to get the passes. A kind of theatrical performance involving threats, waiting, secrecy. List of characters involved: Ponce, Diaz, Segovia (members of the High Command), Sarah Burns from Kennedy's office, Senora de Hasbum, and Holly.

Between trips to High Command, we met with CRIPDES, an organization which tries to help people who have been displaced because of the war. In some instances this means bringing supplies to the various towns in the "contested areas" of the country where displaced people have returned to try to build a life for themselves. The testimony of a woman who was abused during the armed forces' reaction to the November military initiative of the FMLN was particularly poignant.

Her face showed no evidence of emotion. Matter of fact. As if it didn't matter. She spoke of having her family all arrested, of being beaten, suffocated (a plastic bag over her head, drawn tight at the neck), of having her six year old child taken from her and being told that they had killed him. It was a story of a brutal attack after the FMLN offensive, an attack not on the FMLN, but on organizations like CRIPDES, which take care of the poor.

Behind the CRIPDES office, where we were meeting, the yard had been fixed up. Large bamboo stakes held up a roof of palm leaves that sheltered us from the sun. The wind blew multicolored crepe paper streamers in anticipation of the party that would be held later. A collection had been taken to buy a tape deck for Salsa music and Lambada. Their old equipment had been destroyed when the Treasury Police occupied and trashed their offices in November. They wanted to make sure we had music for dancing.

Her voice stopped.

She began to cry quietly.

She could not go on.

I was stunned. Behind the facade of matter-of-factness lived all the pain of the experience. Another woman apologized, explaining that it was difficult to remember those terrible things. Two tears wet her cheeks as she offered the explanation.

I am told that Salvadoran refugees in the U.S. are often disbelieved when they explain what happened, and now I know why. They are like the volcanoes of their country - quiet and solid until they crack in a quake, or spew lava as they blow up.

I understood.

We had to leave before testimony was finished - to go back to obtain passes from the military High Command. We were sure we would not get the safe conduct passes. They might or might not be respected by the military in any event. We could see that they did not want to give them; or at least they were not happy about issuing them.

We were told to return at 3:30 p.m. to pick up the passes.

We drove to the headquarters of the High Command. I can't get used to the number of kids with machine guns around me. They took my passport at the gate, and we walked into the compound - there was an outdoor waiting area for "guest" - with a soldier or two and the omnipresent assault weapons. Senora de Hasbum was argumentative. She clearly knew English, but preferred to speak in Spanish, especially since I spoke only English. Holly translated. We had spent hours waiting, cajoling, playing this ridiculous game of cat and mouse with this woman and the other bureaucrats who floated around her. It is rather difficult to argue with people who are armed to the teeth.

I lost my temper at Senora de Hasbum. I said I was insulted by the level of disrespect, that making an American elected official wait all day without any explanation or courtesy was a disservice to El Salvador.

It took a long time for the High Command to understand that we meant to visit the sister cities - no matter what.

We got some of the boy soldiers to bring us glasses of water. We hung out in

front of the Sergeant who liked us; or at least he was civilized by comparison to Senora de Hasbum.

At one point I was frightened. I looked back at the section of pavement we came in from, to see a group of boy soldiers yelling and running at us. They had Uzis and M-16's. Real ones! Then they stopped and ran the other way, and then returned. Exercising!

These people have the diplomatic skills of a rhinoceros.

Some of the boy soldiers were very kind, and tried to solicit our approbation by getting us water. One boy brought us a glass of water with a napkin carefully wrapped around it. It was nice.

The desk sergeant apologized for the situation, saying that if he could make the rules, it would be different.

I grew increasingly upset with the calculated duplicities of Senora de Hasbum.

What an annoying situation - to be obliged to argue for a "pass" of little use, for the purpose of information gathering. Finally, as the sun set, I told the Sergeant that we were leaving in five minutes. Hasbum had left. She claimed that the papers were ready and that they were just making copies.

We actually began to walk away before we got any action. The Sergeant asked us to wait, saying that they were ready.

We waited. Again.

If you feel like a yo-yo reading this, you have an idea of how we felt.

We got to see the elaborate flag-removing ceremony, listen to the national anthem (I guess that is what the boy soldiers sang), and finally, after the ceremony, we were escorted by three armed boys to the offices of Colonel Diaz.

On the way through long corridors, up stairs, down stairs, around stairwells, and through doors and doors, we remembered the "disappeared". I was convinced for a second that we were not going ever to see anyone again.

I couldn't write much more until the next day because the events did not lend themselves to note taking ...

Entry 2

Yesterday was incredibly tense. I'm not a big fan of M-16's (having written the law to ban them in Boston), and too many of them held by kids too young scares me. I really think when you see dozens of children under the age of 17, some 15, with a lot of live military hardware in their hands, you have reason to be concerned.

And then there was Senora de Hasbum, or whatever her name is - a smooth person who, in Holly's terms, gives you the royal put-off with great equanimity. The Sergeant kept telling us that we made Senora Hasbum upset. I think she gets upset professionally.

When we had decided to leave at about 5:45 p.m., the Sergeant said Colonel Diaz wanted to see us. It sounded almost as though we were being commanded to stay - it was certainly not OUR decision to stay.

After another interminable wait involving the martial exercises with the boy soldiers and the flag folding ceremony - us standing at attention during the national anthem - we were told to come.

Kids with their Uzis and M-16's escorted us through stairs and corridors. We were scared that we might not be heard from again, but, sure enough, Colonel Armoando Ailes was really there waiting for us.

I couldn't figure out the chain of command and where in it this Colonel stood, with reference to Ponce or Diaz or Segovia.

His office was air conditioned, with carpeting. We were stunned at its relative opulence. He spoke fluent English, tested us by "accidentally" speaking in Spanish for a second while sitting at an elegant circular table in the office.

He offered us tea, coffee. He showed us his model cannon collection, hundreds if not thousands of cannons from all kinds of wars and places. Asked me if I could get him one for his collection. Asked me if I knew Paul Tsongas. He was clearly proud to have been the person assigned to Paul when the Senator came to El Salvador for a tour.

He drew back a curtain and revealed a white board upon which he could write with markers, and made a drawing of El Salvador. On the map he listed El Salvador's problems: economic, political, and social. Then he crossed off "economic", and said he was going to talk about the important ones: political and social problems.

He spoke to us of El Salvador's history, saying that in 1970 there was a crisis. The military, he said, could not rule. It needed to be in a constitutional context.

Also, he told us to talk to everyone - left, right, farmers, taxi drivers - everyone.

He said he believed in land reform. His wife (from a family with coffee plantations) was against it because it took away her inheritance.

He suggested that the U.S. should not be on a map of the Americas, as it is so different from the other countries - - it has no real boundaries. it is really everywhere in the world. (It so dominates all other countries in North, Central and South America, and is such a powerful actor on the world stage, that it should not really be considered one of the family of nations in the Western or any other hemisphere, but a force unto itself to which all other countries react and relate)

You get a sense from this Colonel of resentment of gringo arrogance, but respect for gringo power.

I asked him if we could meet again toward the end of the trip, so that we could ask him more questions. He said yes, and gave me his card.

He emphasized his support for Cristiani.

He claimed that the Sandinistas were an evil force, and that Jimmy Carter may have redeemed himself by this latest act of his in Nicaragua. (I assume he meant that Carter helped get Chamorro elected. I personally doubt that Carter had anything to do with it.)

He claimed that the Sandinista overthrow of the dictator Somoza gave people in El Salvador the idea that they could do the same, and, therefore, the Sandinistas in effect lit the fuse in El Salvador.

Finally, his secretary brought in the "safe conduct" passes and I signed them on behalf of everybody; we left carrying them with us. A precious cargo. Maybe.

SATURDAY, MARCH 17th

Entry 1

Breakfast with Holly, who needs an antibiotic for her sore throat. Mario and David are not that well either, it seems.

So far the rules about what to eat and drink seem to be working for me.

Rick tried to get us up because he heard machine gun fire last night. Jack and I had slept right through it.

Because the hotel we stayed at posted the monetary exchange rates, I started to notice that virtually every day the exchange rate increased. This brought back the memory of that taxi driver we had met who told us that Cristiani is losing popularity because of inflation. There certainly is inflation.

During our trip around San Salvador yesterday one thing became quite clear- someone had machine gunned the University fairly recently - presumably during or immediately after the November offensive.

Last night I spent some time watching people dance at the hotel, acting for all the world as if there was no war, no poverty and no pain-people who clearly had considerable disposable income and this intrigued me. Who are these upper middle income people in a country so clearly poor as a whole? At the end of the evening, the band played a strange version of "The Saints Came Marching In". We ate baked bananas, papusas, quesadillas, sweet corn breads, aqua crystal. A wonderful evening, from the lambada to the table settings, although a chill came over me when I noticed the hotel had guards armed with assault rifles at the doorway.

During the trip around San Salvador, I noticed an apparent contradiction.

When you see the corrugated tin roof shantytowns, the poverty of so many people, especially the people displaced by the war, you realize that the armed services must be an attractive alternative to hunger for many young people. Yet, there is forced conscription and shanghaiing of people into the services. Why? I believe from conversations that many, if not most, young people realize that to be in the army may well mean shooting at your brothers and sisters, and for many people, a relative has been killed or wounded by the army. I do not get the impression that the army is respected by most people, and this might explain the unwillingness of those who are hungry to solve the problem by joining up.

As we drove from one meeting to another, many small things struck me. One was the obvious severity of attacks on the civilian population - bullet holes everywhere being repaired. a question: why would the army attack the civilian population? it brings to mind an American Vietnam-era idea: to kill the fish,

drain the ocean.

Another unrelated observation: pharmacies all sell virtually everything over the counter. You can get antibiotics, tranquilizers, etc., without prescription; yet there isn't any apparent drug problem. I wonder if drugs are simply too expensive for most people? Or if the culture does not lend itself to drug use? what would happen in the U.S. if we decontrolled drugs? Or is there a drug problem that I cannot see?

Another item: everyone here must carry an ID card which he or she must get at age 18. The army stops people and asks for their ID cards. In effect, everyone here has a passport and must carry it at all times. I am told that the army will stop kids as they come out of the movies to check ID's, and lock them up those who do not have them.

I have yet to see an example of the civilian government at work. Maybe they collect the garbage?

## Entry 2

On the walls of the place of worship, near the living quarters of the six Jesuits killed by the army, are sketches of the dead bodies with bullet holes, faces twisted in agony. Colonel Ailes referred to killings like these as "mistakes". The Colonel's "mistakes" are reflections of a deep pathology. I think we have to stop dressing up what is happening here with phrases like "human rights violations". It is code for awesome sado-masochistic murders. Whoever killed these priests enjoyed what they did. We saw the bloodstains on the floor where the cook and her daughter were murdered. A priest led us step by step through the tragedy - from the moment when the army appeared to the murders.

Car comes by, and machine guns the front of the dormitory. Priests take refuge in living quarters. Murderers enter through the door. Push priests back into dormitory. One priest tries to hide himself in his room. He is killed in his room - to teach a lesson? Remaining priests taken out back, forced to lie on the ground. They are shot. One who looks up is shot through the eye. Roses now bloom where the priests died.

Bullet holes in the walls. Seems everywhere in El Salvador there are bullet holes in the walls.

The priest with whom we spoke believes that the American Embassy knew what



was about to happen and collaborated in a cover up. He also believes that Cristiani is powerless, that eventually the U.S. will have to invade to get rid of the very army it presently props up.

He told us that our congressmen say that they want the military who killed the Jesuits removed, but that it won't happen.

The priest claimed the new Archbishop is doing what he can, but that "the rubber band is stretched as far as it can go".

## SATURDAY

### Entry 1

We got a little sleep at the hotel, but not much, because we decided to leave for the mountains, for the province of Chalatenango, at 2:30 a.m. Saturday.

Makes sense when you realize that the personnel at the checkpoints will have the least ambition to stop us and search or hassle us at that early hour. Which proved ultimately to be true. However, the very fact we had to be concerned with being stopped, detained, delayed or harassed every step of the way gave a tone to the trip that was anything but relaxing.

### Entry 2

We passed all the checkpoints without incident. Still - unnerving to see those sandbagged embankments manned by children holding assault weapons.(I realized that in a country half of whose population is under 16 years old, there is going to be a significant number of young people in every job, but still..)

The moon was full; yet there were more stars than I've ever seen.

I forgot to mention: we slipped out of the hotel two at a time and filled up the van to brimming with bodies and bags. We had two guides and a system for checking on the progress of each group (ours was not the only group going to

San Jose las Flores). We drive further and further into the mountains, until the asphalt wore out, until we were on a dirt road, until there was no electricity.

The views were spectacular - Yosemite with palm trees. We passed homes bombed by the military.

The village of San Jose las Flores was reminiscent of my grandfather's village of Oropedion in the mountains of Macedonia. cobblestones, chickens everywhere, pigs, ponies and dogs, and, of course, my favorite animal - goats.

There is no comparison between the life in a camp for those dislocated by war or the shantytowns of San Salvador and this village. Clear air, breathtaking views, green trees and space. Food and services provided by people for each other. Room to play, instead of the squalor of urban refugee camps.

This place is not poor in the way San Salvador can be poor; it is agrarian with a rhythm of its own. You can tell it is alive.

#### FIRST DAY OF THE SUMMIT CONFERENCE

##### Entry 1

In Las Flores we met the FMLN. A few were under 16 years old. It seems so tragic when children kill each other - with American weapons no less! The villagers are clearly not afraid of this army-these young people called the "guerrillas" by official El Salvador. The tone is so different from the El Salvadoran army. People are not afraid of these young soldiers: a sense of caring and safety comes across clearly.

I spoke with perhaps ten of the FMLN members. They are respected by the villagers. I discovered that sometimes when a young person's parents are killed or family is destroyed, if the child really wants to go the FMLN will take care of them. The child would not be allowed into any combat, however.

I met a person who was involved in trying to get the UN to help with repopulation efforts. Many people ran away from the destruction of their homes by the Salvadoran Army into Honduras; they were forced into long marches, fleeing the army, which pursued them viciously, occasionally slaughtering groups of them. One of these slaughters occurred near a body of water which I was able to see from part of the road to San Jose las Flores.

Eventually the refugees wanted to return, because the refugee camps were

terrible. UN meetings were held to resolve this problem, but decisions were delayed by a representative from the Dominican Republic who quibbled over whether the refugees could take their belongings with them (she wanted them to leave their possessions behind). The refugees, tired of arguing, left Honduras without UN permission. In the end they just returned to El Salvador and repopulated the villages, taking their chances.

In walking around Las Flores we saw the remnants of homes that had been bombed. Since the FMLN doesn't have any helicopters or airplanes, then who did the bombing?

During the first day in Las Flores, all of us from the United States were politely asked to pay attention and to keep in communication with each other. There is concern here that the army will show up. We are not exactly a disciplined group of people. It is interesting that the FMLN does not object to being photographed, but in San Salvador you'd think you were trying to steal state secrets with a photo of someone in the army.

One of the problems with wandering too far afield is the danger of hidden mines.

I was not thrilled with the climbing involved in getting around the village. About noon, we went up to a mountain pass to greet people from a neighboring area. I could see for many miles into a deep valley, and saw a line of people marching the many miles up to the pass. When they got to the pass, the marchers stopped, made speeches, and sung songs. Toward the end of the parade of people I noticed many burros carrying youngsters. I thought it was odd because there were quite a few elderly people marching, and I thought it was rather callous to allow the kids to ride when the elderly couldn't.

Great music. Live, of course. Bass fiddles, guitars, violin. Viva, viva, viva...what a lot of life for a place that has sustained so much death! Viva la solidaridad international!

How odd it was that we were acting as representatives of a people known here only by their guns and bombs. How important this people-to-people mission really is!

Do we want these people to remember for all time that our people are the ones who help kill their children?

Men and women walked four hours uphill to get to Las Flores - carrying food in bowls on their heads. Little girls and boys marched wearing new clothes - "Sunday best".

Las Flores is celebrating its Saint's Day. We are here for the feast of San Jose. Our arrival in town has added spice to a holiday that was already in the works.

There was constant evidence of people's primary concern about the war. I saw a sign on a woman's shirt which said, "Work for peace."

While the people wait for others to catch up from the valley, they sing songs together. Kids range from blond to black - skin and hair. There seems to be no obvious kind of racism among them.

It is apparent from the joy and from the lack of fear that the FMLN, mingling with villagers in substantial numbers, has a truly indigenous base in these mountains.

When the kids passed by, I discovered why they were on burros. Some were without feet, some without a leg. They had to ride. Their bodies had been damaged by mines or bullets. Many of them. One child won't take off a white napkin from the lower part of his face. I don't want to see what is missing.

I am hearing from others of the attack on Guancorita, a small village newly settled, not too far from San Jose las Flores. A few weeks ago helicopters fired twelve to fifteen rockets into the village, killing five.

One person with whom I spoke is convinced that the U.S. is involved in some of these air missions; he heard English on the radio during the attack. The members of our group from Boise, Idaho, are particularly hurt by this attack, because Guancorita is their Sister City.

I was curious how the FMLN obtained their guns. They claim they get many from the Contras, who sell them. I know there are leaflets around offering money for army guns (essentially telling soldiers to sell their guns and equipment to the FMLN). The FMLN say they will lay down their arms when the U.S. funding of the army stops.

On the wall near the day care center (which has become a place for us to eat and sleep) are written the words, "You are in your home", and the behavior seems to reflect this sentiment.

I went into the church at the center of the village - a church which has clearly weathered many bullets - and saw a large butterfly on the altar. Romero's picture is on the wall.

One of the soldiers was limping. He is clearly loved by people who greet him, hug him, shake his hands.

## Entry 2

Night is coming. I saw an extraordinary thing. The concrete square in the center of the village can hold perhaps 300 people crowded together. (This square reminds me of every village square in Greece, where people walk every evening - almost a ceremonial after-dinner promenade).

This night the generator is hooked up to a few light bulbs above the square and to the loudspeaker which squawks a bit. From the speaker come the sounds of the Beatles...

“...she wouldn't dance with another...when I saw her standing there...”

Fifty or more young people in green camouflage are dancing - members of the FMLN dancing with the villagers. Their guns are laid in piles around the square, in easy reach, and there is laughter and fun. I can see Colonel Ailes' interpretation now: FMLN forces villagers to dance and laugh with them at gunpoint.

I was invited by a woman in military gear to dance. I did. People watched, as I am, after all, one of the outsiders.

Kathy told me that one of the members of the FMLN, a woman, said that homosexuality results from deformations of capitalist society. I thought, “Oh God, Marxist rubbish. Can't expect 19th century dogma to hit it right every time.”

It made me feel a bit deflated to realize that, as usual, even a society at war with itself agrees that people like me are a sickness. I wondered to what extent she is parroting doctrines, rather than thinking or analyzing.

SUNDAY MORNING, or is it Monday?

I've forgotten what day it is.

## Entry 1

We've been asleep on the concrete floor of one of the spaces used for the children. The early sun is kissing the tops of the mountains. The dog who lacks courage (won't let me pat him) is skulking around. There are chickens and children

everywhere - lots of morning laughter.

I missed the men's turn to wash at the spigot, but that's okay. I'll use the outhouse behind the school. (I've noticed that I am picking up a bit of Spanish - not intentionally, mind you: serros-mountains, escuela-school).

Last night just after the dance the few lights were doused. A boy came over to me. One of his eyes didn't focus. Congenital, I assumed.

Later he was telling me words for things..."astros" for stars and "focos" for the lights and "serros" for mountains. I would point, and he would tell me the word.

He was proud to be able to say the English word "goodbye". It was funny. First thing out of a stranger's mouth being "goodbye". It caught me by surprise. He was smiling when he said it, and did not seem ready to leave.

It took me a minute to realize that this was the only English word he knew or remembered at that moment, and that it would have to serve as "hello", or at least a signal that we were on some level "connected". English is so concerned with the difference between hello and goodbye - many languages use the same word for both.

Anyway, I naturally asked him where he had learned the word, and he said in "DENBER, Colorado". I asked him why he was in Denver.

He wouldn't say.

We spoke of snow (an idea that intrigued him), and when I asked him again about Denver, he showed me his hand, most of which was gone. He had been to Colorado to get medical help.

Later he taught me the word for sleepy. I asked him his age. Sixteen, he said.

He continued counting in Spanish. Then I tried to excuse myself for bed. I asked him where he was going to sleep. He explained to me that he never slept. Only during the day. That he was waiting for airplanes. I thought he was assigned to watching for planes.

He said no, he just couldn't sleep, because the planes had bombed him at night, and now he can only sleep during the daytime.

I felt very sad.

Later we heard that the army had surrounded another town, where they were led to believe that the Summit would be held. Apparently, disinformation was successfully used to block the Army from interfering with the Summit.

After breakfast in the Day Care center, I helped wash some dishes, helped save meat curing on a clothesline when the weight became more than the little tree supporting it could sustain. Such pleasure working together with people on simple tasks. I was annoyed to find out that a little girl had no trouble catching a chick. I wasn't able to pat or catch a single farm animal while I was in las Flores.

Lots of cowboy hats around.

### Entry 2

One of the most interesting times for me was a lengthy conversation with the "seventh Jesuit", who had escaped death by not being home when the massacre happened. Jack Mills has summarized the conversation nicely in his paper which I am attaching to this diary - called "Meeting with Father John". We spoke in the day care center, an open air place with adobe walls. He spoke without mincing words, without the patina of hypocrisy that is the mark of modern "diplomacy". One thing he mentioned was the Charismatic Church's entry into El Salvador, as a right wing support church for the army teaching people to accept their lot without struggle. "I don't think we walk around getting God as spirit. The miracle is to live. The Charismatics are spiritually ill...their message is that it is okay to have the existing hierarchy even when it leads to starvation and oppression..." He spoke as well of specific attacks by the military on villages. After a while one story would blend into the next; all the stories sounded the same: bombs from airplanes, rockets from airplanes, machine gun fire in the hills.

### Entry 3

That evening the Summit meeting continued. Each of the sister cities always emphasized the establishment of the village as the key victory. The creation of an elected town government was the major accomplishment each village pointed to.

Eventually, it was time for us to speak.

When I was called on, I decided to tell the groups what was most on my mind. I told them that if what I have been told and what I can see are true, then they are not free, and our government is not obeying the will of our people. That if this is true, then we are not free either-that is the real message from El Salvador

to the people of the U.S. We in the United States would never support what I have seen happening here.

#### Entry 4

During the time in San Jose las Flores we drank water which had been boiled for us over a wood fire. Food was cooked over wood fires. We used flashlights at night for lights.

#### Entry 5

At the Church we heard many, many tales of how people came to be in one or another of the villages. I will retell one of the stories because it is characteristic and compelling.

"...we had become internal refugees - captured by the military and sent to camps. For three months I lived in San Salvador, when 26 families decided to leave. We found life here in las Flores.

"For six years we had to go on forced marches. We experienced massacres.

"All four of my children were killed in one such massacre. You can still find pieces of heads and bodies in the places of these massacres. There was hunger and heat, and we walked in the torrential rains. In October, 1979, my wife was killed by the military, and they threw my son on the ground and killed him. My 95 year old mother was burned alive. I am now all alone. They still capture and torture people from here. Because of the pressure from the international community there has opened a little political space.

"During the forced marches we lived in small communities. When we heard the military was coming, we went on a march to another town. Our children grew up hungry, eating roots and fruit. We would have to stay hidden for three days sometimes. We gave our children leaves and plants wrapped like tortillas to keep their stomachs filled..."

Hence, the importance of the new communities to these people.

A good deal of time at the Summit was spent describing how the towns worked. Each presentation was broken into three parts: Accomplishments, Problems, and How the Government of the Town was Structured. Basically they are similar to many small agricultural communities, with cooperative farming taking the place of taxes - working for the town a few days a week to produce



a surplus which the town could sell or trade with, to afford the clinic, the water system and so forth.

Some time was spent explaining what material goods are needed, but everyone agreed that the overriding need was for peace, and that peace would come to pass only when the U.S. would stop funding the army.

## TUESDAY MORNING

### Entry 1

After a hard night.

Stomach upset, restless. We almost couldn't find a place on the cement floor to lie down, it was so crowded.

Somewhere between 2:00 and 4:00 a.m. Scott woke me up and asked for help with a serious attack of diarrhea and nausea. I gave him some Immodium, and then remembered that there was a doctor in another group visiting the village.

I contacted the doctor, who arrived quickly, followed by the local health care provider (each village has a person trained in health care who is responsible for the village's people) who brought enough medical supplies to take care of Scott. It impressed me that the village took responsibility for a health care emergency, and how efficient the whole provision of care was. An irony that you can get faster care here than in Boston.

On the other hand, if you need a doctor, there is only one for virtually all of the repopulated area. If you need a specialist, forget it.

First item of the daily agenda: breakfast. We went to the day care center, a series of interconnected rooms opening onto a courtyard with a cement floor, one corner of which is the kitchen - a wood fire and wok arrangement, with a few large cement sinks, a toilet behind a wooden swinging half door, and then a doorway through a wall into the backyard where there was a large sink in the corner of the yard for cleaning dishes, and a few trees.

We ate well: tortillas, scrambled eggs and beans. I also ate a can of tuna. This was my first day of feeling well in awhile.

### Entry 2

The meeting began as usual with a song devised for the occasion in the church. I found out that the village carpenter and two helpers had made all the wooden

benches for the church. Quite a feat.

The church had little beams of sunlight coming through the roof. I suspect that when it rains (this is the dry season), there must be some leaking here. I also strongly suspect that those little round holes through the roof come from bullets. Looks like scattered stars in the ceiling.

The director of the village (the equivalent of the mayor), who is elected by the people of the village, and I talked a bit about gay people last night. He seemed rather confused. After listening politely, he said he's just a peasant and did not know what I meant by women homosexuals. (I guess he knew what I meant by male homosexuals.) I wanted him to know that there are gay people concerned about the village. A beginning has to be made, and I think a good beginning is the knowledge that at least one person who cares about Las Flores is gay, and says so.

Yesterday we were supposed to have finished the presentations from the different villages. Only four reports had been made, however, and there are ten remaining, which will take the rest of the day.

Last night I realized that people from an oral tradition might be used to long speeches; it makes sense to me. The mayor of the small town of my great uncle in Macedonia said that all of the information for his village is spoken to people through a loudspeaker and bullhorn.

Each sister city reported on what it has accomplished, what is planned, and how materials and help from their sister city have been utilized. They provided us with a level of accountability that I envy.

Everything in San Jose las Flores seems hard. Rock, cement, wood. I need more cushioning on my body for this arrangement. The church has 18 pillars holding up a frame roof. The altar is elaborate - 28 feet of carved wood with a wonderful crown.

During the session today several things were mentioned over and over. One was the difficulty of getting materials - materials which are stopped by the army and never arrive at the villages. (When we got our safe conduct passes, the army made it clear that we would not get them if we were bringing anything to the villages. It is quite clear that the army wants the villages to disappear.) Villages are testimony to the frequency of machine gun fire from airplanes. Villages epitomize survival of people who will not knuckle under.

Gifts were exchanged. One particularly wonderful gift was flowers made from cornhusks - very well done. One of the villages said they wanted to know what

Watertown means; to a country in which water is so important and difficult to get, Watertown must be interesting indeed.

Each village has health promoters. All have or are trying to get day care and schools, and they do some farming together for common needs.

This is only the second Summit, the second time that all the villages have come together to share and work together. It is quite wonderful.

It is clear why it is hard to get supplies. One village testified that the Fourth Brigade of the army wouldn't let them get the tin they need for roofing because, the army claimed, the tin would be used for making mines. They also wouldn't let medicines through to the villagers.

Watertown's gift was a banner depicting life with knitted pictures - cornplant, houses, machines to prepare the fields, the sun - the light of a new dawn we all hope for.

Another song break.

I decided to buy some soda pop. I noticed that there was no alcohol for sale, and discovered that this was a village decision because alcohol caused too many problems. There are several small stores in the village where one can buy Coke, Fanta, corn Cheetos, canned fruits, juice.

On the way to the outhouse I noticed how children in the day school play with two giant abacuses.

The toilet was flushed using a can filled with water. Rather sophisticated compared with your standard outhouse.

I thought about last night. The stars were a sight. There was a slight mist and a very slight blue glow around the horizon. The white mission-style church was outlined in black against that blue glow - with a large palm tree next to it. It reminded me of a stage setting for "Camino Real".

The stories in the church continued as the villages listed their problems. A typical report of problems with the army came from Quadhilla:

Yesterday they killed 3 cows.

124 chickens were killed.

4 of our horses were killed.

Last year 15 acres of corn caught fire from the strafing.

Bombings. Children dead. Holding back necessary supplies.

Town after town repeated the same facts. All of it centered on the difficulties of dealing with the army - all of it obscene. Some of the problems are bureaucratic in nature. For example, the mayor of San Jose las Flores lives far away, in Chalatenango City; he was elected by people who live there, but who claim that they are residents of Las Flores. The real residents of Las Flores find it hard to get identity cards from the mayor, who is drunk often, who charges more than he is supposed to for them, and who displays a gun on his desk, which he waves around to intimidate the residents of las Flores. Since the residents of Las Flores can't get ID cards, they can't vote him out.

One of the villages has a sister city in Canada. The Canadians couldn't get to the Summit because of difficulties with a safe conduct pass. Not enough political clout, I guess. The Salvador Military isn't dependent on Canadian aid. We were approved only because of the direct intervention of Congressman Kennedy's office and calls from Senator Kerry and Congressman Moakley's staff.

Finally it is time for the sister cities of the U.S. to make their reports. it took a long time, and was quite wonderful. I thought the present from Watertown was particularly nice. (Gifts which are supplies had to be left in San Salvador, to be smuggled in, because they would be confiscated at checkpoints. The gifts I refer to are the symbolic gifts.)

The children of Watertown sent drawings and messages of love and hope to the children of the towns in the mountains. I watched the acceptance of the children's drawings. There was a cheer in Spanish:

"La lucha pro la paz es la tarea de todo."  
The struggle for peace is everyone's job.

### Entry 3

We held a short meeting outside the Church, discussing how to pass through the checkpoints on the way back without having notes such as this diary, and our photographs confiscated. We decided to send the pictures and videos out to San Salvador in another manner, and to embed our notes in our dirty laundry.

Once again I was disturbed at the need for this kind of chicanery. It is an irony, given our government's enormous support of the El Salvadoran military, that an elected official from the U.S., and others who are from the office of a U.S. Senator, feel safer and more respected in the hands of the FMLN than with government troops.

#### Entry 4

During the afternoon helicopters and a C-47 plane (courtesy of our tax dollars) are firing fairly close to the town. A plane came around the nearest mountain. You can see the smoke from the gunfire and hear the machine gun rattling. We are getting a bit nervous, but not the people of the village. The soccer game goes right on. Children don't look up. Babies are not grabbed. These people are familiar with war. Will they ever know peace?

While I was watching the American presence in the skies above the village, the villagers were voting on a joint declaration which would be signed in a ceremony that evening.

#### Entry 5

There was a big crowd in the square for the signing. Rickety wooden tables had been set up under the stars. The generator was turned on; the loudspeaker set up; the few lights were turned on. Parents pushed their children forward so they could see, holding back to watch over their heads. I did the same because I was so much taller than most of the Salvadorans. The directors of the towns sat on one side of the long set of tables, and the sister city representatives from the U.S. sat on the other side. The speeches began.

They read the agreement over the loudspeaker - an agreement to work to end U.S. aid for the Salvadoran military, an agreement of cooperation between sister cities. The document means a great deal to the people of the villages. It is like a signing of a peace treaty with people from the U.S. - an agreement to fight together against oppression.

Representatives of the villages and of their North American sister cities came up one at a time to sign.

Cheers...

#### Entry 6

On our last night in San Jose las Flores it was moving to watch the FMLN and the people of the villages dancing together to rock and roll, with the awesome reality of war in the background.

WEDNESDAY

#### Entry 1

Jack decided to sleep outside last night; a wind storm blew into Las Flores after we fell asleep, blowing off part of the roof. We could have been hurt, but it missed us.

Children were sleeping everywhere in the school room last night, snug and cute. I saw one child asleep on a wooden shelf.

I tried to catch a goat this morning, to the delight of dozens of children. Steve found me a barber! I've decided to get a haircut. This could be a disaster, but why not? My cramps have returned.

## Entry 2

Last night Tenly (from the West Coast who is an extraordinary person-among other skills she often translated for us) , Steve (a nurse who was especially interested in the medical issues in Las Flores), Kathy (an appointed official from Cambridge, who runs their sister city project) and I met with three members of the FMLN for two hours of talk about gay and lesbian issues.

It went very well. They said they had never met any people who they knew were gay, and that they wanted to continue the dialogue. We promised to send them some material on gays and lesbians, in particular school books which are non-sexist and teach sex education to children. They said they appreciated gay and lesbian support, and one of them seemed very knowledgeable about some of the politics. He referred to Walt Whitman and also to an Hispanic poet who is gay as examples of his knowledge that gays have contributed to the cultural wealth of the world.

They argued that staying alive is of greatest importance. Kathy pointed out that living and loving are not really separable - that waiting till "after the revolution" was not acceptable.

It was a good meeting in the kitchen area of the child care center. Our chairs were in a circle, stars above. We were really relaxed.

At the end the only male member of the FMLN at the meeting, a bright, handsome, suntanned balding man, somewhat thin, dressed in a green uniform, hesitated while reaching to shake hands. He decided to go for a hug. It was a nice moment, AK-47 and all.

The dancing was fun - and discordant, given the war - but symbolically wonderful to see guns set aside as people in army fatigues, boys and girls, men and women mixed with the rest of the villagers. It is so obvious that these

soldiers from the hills are loved by these people. You'd have to be an idiot to miss it.

### Entry 3

Racing to beat Tenly and Kathy to the shower. Only to find that I didn't want to take a shower in that shower.

Steve showed me the barber who turns out to be the village carpenter. I had visions of being shaved with a chisel.

### Entry 4

They're at it again. fighting in the hills. Planes above, all C-47's, I think. Gatling guns? The sound of bombs.

I'm glad the FMLN doesn't require safe conduct passes. One bureaucracy seems to be enough.

It is unnerving to be in a place where the land is controlled by competing armies.

### Entry 5

Jack and others went off to Guancorita, while I stayed behind to see more of San Jose las Flores.

We visited the clinic - a three room affair, terrazzo floor, very clean. People told us of their needs; they focused upon the need to help two individuals, one with leukemia and the other with an ear infection that won't stop. They want us to find a way to get their sick to help - in the U.S., if possible. It was interesting that they focused on these difficult cases. They were willing to sacrifice much to obtain care for these two. It seems a matter of principle for them, and I admire it a great deal.

They need help in analyzing their water system (a source of parasites), and they need antibiotics, antiseptics, help with resolving gastrointestinal problems. I can certainly vouch for the need for help with gastrointestinal problems!

### Entry 6

I foolishly agreed to look at the water supply system. I didn't know this meant a fairly long walk, mostly uphill. I especially didn't know this meant avoiding land mines. You can see where the army had scorched the earth. The water supply needs filters for amoebae and parasites. We went to the storage tank;

Kathy climbed down into this 20 foot tank. I dropped objects from the top and tried to figure out how high it really was from how long it took to drop. Perfectly sensible physics. Unfortunately, the timepiece wasn't refined enough; the problem of missing the edge of the tank, etc., made it impractical.

#### Entry 7

I got my hair cut. The carpenter-barber had one pair of scissors and a very small mirror, perhaps two inches by one inch. he carefully cut my hair, and told his story.

"I saw the beginning of the war. Army troops surrounded the villages and began killing people. (Early 1980's) We worked in the fields; they killed poor people. They accused us of collaborating with the guerrillas. I was a member of the village's civil defense team. Nevertheless they didn't respect us, and so we left our village. In 1981 I kept on moving. In 1982 I joined another community. The organizing movement against the government got bigger because the government kept sending troops to kill us. In 1982 there was nothing to eat. It was hard to find a pan of salt and very expensive. In 1986 I was captured and taken by helicopter to a camp. I was moved from place to place in the helicopter with my family. Finally I was brought to San Salvador and put in a refugee camp. At the office they said you could leave to go live with a relative if you wanted. We said we only had friends in Chalatenango. I got there (to Chalatenango City) and was noticed by the repopulation people while doing construction work. Some knew me; they knew I worked hard. So I came to San Jose with Sister Theresa and Father Miguel in october of 1986. Life is good here. In Chalatenango the salary was not enough. Here I work for the whole community in a cooperative fashion.

"I am not a member of the FMLN. The FMLN does not help us with anything material. But they don't offend us in any way. Both armies' soldiers are peasants. The difference is that I have never seen the FMLN kill a civilian.

"The army keeps harassing us. I don't know the FMLN's goals. Both armies come into the community. I think people should change the way they are living because the government and the rich people live first class, and the campesinos get nothing. (Bomb in the background as the carpenter is speaking.) I could not live in Chalatenango. Here there is no rent, free water; you can get firewood."

More bombs. There are now C-47's flying over San Jose las Flores. I feel so impotent. If they decide to strafe the village, there is nothing at all I can do about



it.

The haircut is finished. it is good. The barber wouldn't take any money, but would take a donation to the village. After failing once again to catch any goats, I left with the rest to continue our journey.

### Entry 8

On the way home we stopped at Coral de Piedra. We saw the man who lost two of his children on February 11th. His boy is very sick. He's no more a guerrilla than I'm Santa Claus. We gave him a ride to visit his wife who is also in the hospital.

While Jack was in a meeting, I spoke with villagers near the place where the children were killed. Five deaths, four children. Little crosses. In the air we hear gun fire exchanged. The remains of the house that was strafed by rockets have been turned into a shrine. The army tries to pretend that this was an accident. So does our embassy. Hard to believe. After all, there were some 15 rockets fired. All by accident? I saw a baby who had been wounded by shrapnel. He'll be able to walk. he is lucky.

This attack was no mistake. It's easy to find a lot of scorched earth in Guancorita.

Shall we call this place Little Vietnam?

NEXT STOP: GUARJILA

### Entry 1

Back into that cramped miserable van - we journeyed on dirt roads to a village that seemed paradise by comparison to any I had seen up till then. Beautiful, pastoral setting. A tree with pink blossoms on one side of the road marks the entry to the large village. Flocks of birds circle the valley like petals blown from a peach tree. Animals quietly graze. The flat of the farmland contrasts sharply with the steep walls of the volcanic hills surrounding the village.

On the grass near the meeting house a large group is sitting, listening to a speaker.

On the big tree there are bells which are rung for prayer or meetings.

The beauty is startling. The beauty of the people who live here is startling. In

the meeting house they are holding a teach-in on the use of vitamins in raising livestock.

A golden cat strolled by and disappeared into banana plants. Flowers everywhere. I took a walk through the village. Homes are laid out, each with a garden and trees. Each home has a wood stove and a large storage bin for quantities of dry food. The homes are clean and intricate. Dirt floors, hammocks, raised platforms, private areas.

There is a community center, a school. I watched people getting water from the fountain. The whole village is entrancing - but listen to the guns in the background, the bombs. There are planes in the air at all times. Gunfire in the background constantly.

These people have fought hard for their homes, and built ones they can be proud of. They have one complaint: the army.

I forgot to mention that I met the mother of the four children who had been killed in Guancorita. The blood of her children is still across the remaining wall of the house they ducked into for cover, thinking that the only brick building would be safer than the plastic temporary houses they had put together.

I noticed many cans on the ground under a tree near the killings. They were empty rations eaten perhaps by the very soldiers that killed the children. They are stamped "JP Morgan, Boston Mass." However, they have a New Jersey zip code.

I have appended to this diary the detailed testimony about the massacre. It is enough for here to say that this was clearly another in a long list of deliberate acts of terrorism brought to the people of Chalatenango by the army of El Salvador.

The mother told me, "Please tell your President to stop shooting at us. We want to go out to the fields to work, and it is dangerous." She showed us a metal pan, very dear to her, which has bullet holes in it now.

Now, as soon as the children hear a helicopter in Guancorita, they begin to cry, and they don't know where to hide. She said to me that the only thing the government knows is how to destroy.

The nun who lives here in Guarjila is also a medical doctor who takes care of much of Chalatenango. She spoke with us at great length. Jack has notes on the conversation.

What she said was compelling.

First, that she was held for six hours herself - for no reason. That one of her health promoters was arrested, tortured, and accused of being a collaborator with the FMLN. Signed a confession.

That there is little help from the government with the health care she is providing, and that the war has destroyed any infrastructure there was. On December 10th she saw the army burn fields in a scorched earth policy. She also knows that since November at least 11 civilians were killed by the army in one village.

She painted a picture of an El Salvador whose army, paid for by the U.S., is out of control - destroying the villages and trying to undermine the efforts of the people to feed and take care of themselves.

The diary must stop here for a while because we must hide our notes in our dirty laundry to protect them from the soldiers at the checkpoints. I remember few things except that there was a celebration at our arrival that evening, with lots of dancing and noise, that I met many, many Salvadorans, danced, and eventually fell asleep on a concrete floor near Jack. At least there were pads on the floor - a luxury. We left abruptly at 3:00 a.m. Given the darkness and the sound of gunfire, I didn't stop to search for my glasses, which became a casualty of the war.

## SAN SALVADOR

### Entry 1

We made it back.

I'll never forget the trip. For hours during the drive the sound of gunfire. It made me sad to think that people were dying as we drove back. I got motion sickness jammed into the van with 16 people, driving along winding roads through the

hills. We had cover stories in case we were stopped for being out beyond the time our passes allowed, but fortunately (and unlike most of the trips the sister city project has sponsored) we were not stopped. We brought a man into San Salvador whose wife had been shot in the abdomen by the army. He had his little boy with him - no ID cards - and he wanted to visit her in the hospital.

The people of El Salvador are quiet and patient.

We will have a press conference to announce the joint resolution tomorrow. Hopefully some press will have the courage to cover the story.

I realized that the press rarely covers the kind of stories I experienced. Perhaps if they leave San Salvador, or stray from the official embassy (yes, the U.S. Embassy) line, they will be kicked out. Perhaps they are remarkably lazy. Or afraid?

I'm really worn out, mentally and physically.

## Entry 2

We met with the Colonel (retired, but well connected with the Junta's leaders) who is now the Minister of the Interior (analogous to the cabinet officer in charge of HUD and HEW combined). He spent more than an hour with us, and seemed prepared to spend the whole day. Kathy and I were with him while others went to the U.S. Embassy for a meeting, which is covered in the appendix.

Kathy Hoffman took the best notes for the meeting with the minister, but a few things really struck me:

First, that he really was a member of the army-part of the ruling hunta. Once again, where is the civilian government?

Second, when asked about El Salvador, he expressed the wish that things could go back to 1970, when everything was peaceful, when everyone was happy, when there was full employment (when the oligarchy and army ruled together).

Third, he kept blaming the victims for the shortcomings of the army and government. For example, he said that Guancorita was an error - that they were fired upon when they arrived in an army helicopter to investigate the alleged massacre. This is really amazing. We asked him if he thought it made sense to conduct an investigation of the army massacre from an army helicopter which was armed and which was identical to the helicopter that rocketed the village the preceding week.

killing so many people. He didn't think this was inappropriate, and was clearly angry that anyone had the nerve to shoot at the helicopter.

Fourth, he, like virtually every official we met, thought nothing of lying. For example, he claimed that the army did not shoot at civilians during the November offensive. Yet we had seen the bombed and strafed and rocketed buildings. Some of them were not yet repaired. The army clearly bombed civilians, and, in fact, these events were recorded by news crews on videotape and in the press. Yet he says it just didn't happen.

I paid attention to his body language and tone - defensive, indignant at press reports that point fingers at the government. He kept sidestepping our observations, constantly giving as excuses that

1. the event did not happen or
2. the FMLN did something worse or
3. the FMLN is the reason we must do this or that.

When we suggested that the killers in Guancorita be brought to justice, he said that the FMLN had shot down the helicopter that had brought the investigatory commission.

## THE ILLEGAL MARCH

### Entry 1

It is the tenth anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Romero by the Army of El Salvador. A very broad coalition of groups, from trade unions to many political parties, human service organizations and small business organizations, have formed a group called the "National Debate" which is trying to orchestrate negotiations toward a cease fire and end to the war.

They decided to hold a national march to end at the Cathedral with a solemn service in commemoration of Archbishop Romero. It will be the first political demonstration in many years, and is illegal under El Salvador's laws which can treat any five people meeting together as itself an act of terrorism.

The government caved in on today's march. Even though all assembly of people is illegal, it is clear that it will happen anyway. The army is stopping all trucks

or buses or vans or cars stuffed with people on all main roads into the city to minimize the crowd.

In spite of this, the National Debate (which is described in the appendices) was a great success on this tenth anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Romero.

It is a clear day in San Salvador. The early temperature is fairly cool, with the tropical sun slicing through the air drenching the flowers, trees, and us in light.

I am wearing my bullet proof vest in case the army goes wild, which might happen. After all, this is the first event of this kind in ten years. I think the vest is more trouble than it is worth, but Jack thinks it's a good idea.

Boy, was it a political mistake to assassinate Romero! The march is long and beautiful. Can photographs do it justice? The delicacy of the palm-like branches, the serenity of the marchers, the unique structure of the march, making it possible to disperse quickly, the variety of songs sung by thousands of people - all contributed to making it a unique event. They converged on the national Cathedral, which had not been used for a long time, and this Sunday it was mobbed for a service which virtually every cleric attended.

Floats and posters, white flags of peace, blue and white flags of Salvador. Babies held in mothers' arms.

Peace now.  
Cesen la repression.

Children with flowers.

Clearly the thousands who march don't think this is a democracy.

There is so much more to write about... The individuals on the trip. Holly and her amazing mind. Mario and his humor. David and Tenly and Kathy. So many great people. Rick and Steve. The loss of my hammock. The details of the conversations with other groups.

However, this is enough for now.  
I hope this gives you a little flavor of what it is like in El Salvador.

It was a wonderful and terrible trip.

###

**APPENDICES**

## Meeting with Father John, the Seventh Jesuit

1

Father John is the priest who serves the community of San Jose de las Flores. A Jesuit, he worked very closely with the Jesuits who were assassinated by Salvadoran soldiers in November, 1989.

My role as a priest is to accompany the people of San Jose de las Flores spiritually. Part of what I try to do is to get people organized in a religious and communitarian way.

I get little support from the Vatican. They live a luxurious life there. Unless they come live with the poor and the oppressed they will never have the experience of this community and therefore, they will never understand it. When you live with these people you know what a sense of impotence is. The impotence I felt when they killed the Jesuits made me think of the thousands of campesinos whose children were killed, and how they must have felt to be able to do nothing.

Over the years, the church hierarchy has not been very supportive of people like myself. Of all the bishops, only Bishop Rivera came to Archbishop Romero's funeral. Perhaps that's because they thought, "That's what he [Romero] gets for getting involved in politics." Maybe the church hierarchy will understand more clearly what's going on and become more supportive and involved since the Jesuits were killed.

The army was unable to stop the rebels during the November offensive. There was fighting on four fronts and the army was in a completely defensive position. They therefore decided to bomb San Salvador that night and to eliminate the leaders of the people's organizations. They tried to kill all the labor leaders, the human rights leaders, the political leaders, etc. Many of these people were in hiding, but the Jesuits were at home the Uca. Like other leaders of popular organizations, the Jesuits disrupted and threatened the system of death we have in our country. Therefore they were killed. If I was there at the time I also would have been killed.

I am sure that there is a group behind Benavides that agreed with the decision to kill the Jesuits. None of them have been identified. I don't know, but I don't believe it includes Christiani. I do believe that the group includes many high officers in the army.

The government lacks the capacity to restrain human rights violations. After so many efforts have been made to punish violators of human rights, none have been punished. In fact, now they're trying to pass a law to benefit about 2,000 of those who were in the death squads, and this may include those who killed



the Jesuits.

2

The capacity of love, commitment, and sharing in las Flores is very unusual. I've never seen it elsewhere. Perhaps it comes from the horrors of the people who live here now. They were forced out of their homes and communities by the Salvadoran army. They went on forced marches called "gindas" [a term for the act of escaping] on which they ate almost nothing, lived in holes and caves, and kept moving all the time so that the army would not catch them and massacre them.

The military continues to commit horrible human rights violations against the civilian population in El Salvador. The people of San Jose de las Flores were the targets of an attack during August 27-29, 1989 which was carried out by twenty-three planes. The military dropped between twenty-two and twenty-four 500 lb. bombs and fired seventy-two rockets. The bombs fell in the hills, but the planes rockets and strafed the village and the plaza as well as the hills. Pieces of shrapnel weighing seven or eight pounds, as well as many smaller pieces, were found in the village.

You can tell that the government is lying when they say that the FMLN terrorizes these communities. Look at the little ones who are FMLN members. They are from the communities. From this you can tell that the communities are with the FMLN. I have a feeling that I will be going to the U.S in the end of April. My impression is that we are at a very special point. The government might force a confrontation or it might enter negotiations. But I don't think we'll have peace soon. It's very difficult for peace to come as long as U.S. aid continues. And the people of las Flores need so much: most needed is money, then medical supplies which are very hard to get, and then educational supplies, which are hard to get.

U.S. advisers are not allowed to leave their barracks during combat. They should never be in combat. But I don't think they follow these rules.

My dream for this community is peace with justice and liberation.

The U.S. could force peace by demanding that the Salvadoran government get into negotiations or lose U.S. aid.

## GUANCORITA

A truck from San Jose de las Flores brings us to Guancorita. It's early morning. As we pass people, the truck stops to pick up anybody who wants a ride. It leaves us at Guancorita, and continues on.

The old name of Guancorita (before repopulation) was Coral de Piedras. As the old name indicates, there are rocks everywhere, large and small. Because of the rocky ground there are few trees and little ground cover. Most houses are hundreds of feet apart, and no house is less than thirty feet from another. The road follows a U shaped route, and houses are located on either side of the road.

144 families live here: 93 men, 136 women, 243 girls, and 242 boys; a total of 714 people. Previously refugees, they decided to repopulate this village. They've been here for four months.

A member of Guancorita's Town Council (or Directiva) guides us on our tour. He tells us that when the residents left Honduras they wanted to rebuild their lives and community and live in respect and peace. Living in the refugee camp was like living in jail. They were unable to work, and instead were dependent on a financial "relief" program. He says that residents of Guancorita don't view the repopulation as a land takeover, but instead, as a result of the war. Some of the land was previously owned by families who were forced to leave and who returned with the repopulation, while some land was owned by people who were killed. Other families who want to come to Guancorita are welcome to.

The military, which originally drove the residents from the village, has been paying a lot of attention to it since repopulation.

On January 17, 1990, soldiers occupied the village, establishing a garrison and digging trenches. Soldiers went from house to house asking for tortillas. This was particularly hard for the people of Guancorita because they had not yet established their own food production, and were still receiving food assistance from a church. We were told that people gave the

soldiers tortillas out of fear.

We saw a place where the soldiers had been encamped. Hundreds of cans were on the ground. Many were labeled "Homestyle Beans with Cheese" and "Chicken Stew". They also said "U.S. Inspected and passed for quality" and "Distributed by J.P. Morgan Inc. Boston, Ma. 07933".

Those of us from Boston realized our direct connection with the experience of the people in Guancorita. We wondered how much money J.P. Morgan Inc. made on the sale of these cans of food, and wondered whether these rations were categorized as military or economic aid by President Bush.

The soldiers fired mortar rounds from mortars on nearby hills. The rounds land near the village. When asked once, the soldiers said it was an 81 mm mortar round.

One night two women had given birth and the soldiers started to fire mortar rounds. The women fainted in fear. Representatives of the village went to ask the soldiers to stop, but the soldiers said they had to fulfill the orders they were given. Helicopters fired rockets into the village center; we see pieces of them that say "Made in USA". The military embargoed tin needed to rebuilt houses in Guancorita, and even made it difficult for the residents to bring in bread. They need permission from the military to receive shipment of any kind of goods.

During the time since Guancorita was repopulated, planes attacked the village twice with rockets, and strafed with machine gun fire on four occasions before the February 11 massacre. Four rockets were fired in the course of these attacks, landing approximately 5 meters (15 feet) from houses.

The first house we pass is hundreds of feet from any other structure. A rocket landed nearby, on barren, rocky ground. The nearest wall of the house (about fifteen feet from where the rocket landed) was so badly damaged that it had to be replaced. The wall was made of wood planking nearly an inch thick. Another wall, which is further away and located an angle which reduced the rocket's damage, contains many shrapnel holes, some of which go clear through the 1"x8" planking and are up to 3" long. There are dozens of shrapnel holes in the tin roof.

Residents of the village tell us that nobody was in the home during the attack and that anyone who had been would have either been seriously injured or killed. During attacks, people in the village flee the plank and tin roof houses or the plastic provisional houses and try to make it to the stronger brick or adobe houses.

We go to the house where people were killed on February 11, 1990. It's a brick building with a tin roof. The roof is half

blown off, and the tin is a sieve of shrapnel holes, many less than an inch apart. Those who were killed here left a provisional house, a plastic covered shed, at 7:30 a.m., seeking safety.

At the house, the member of the Directiva is joined by Jose Patricino Lopez, the father of two of the children who were killed here. Two of his children who were not hurt in the attack are with him, Blanca Delmes Lopez (7 years old) and Arnaldo Cesar Lopez (5 years old). The children are very quiet and near tears throughout the conversation.

Among the pieces of shrapnel we see is one that says "2.75 inch rocket motor MK 40 Mod, Lot BBG-1-6-70, Cont No. DAAA-21-69-C-0243". One member of our delegation, who was in the military, confirms that it's a US rocket. Money we paid in taxes was paid to a company in the US which employs Americans just like us, who made this rocket, which was provided by our government to the Salvadoran military, who used it to massacre civilians.

Fighting began at about 6:20 a.m. between Salvadoran army and FMLN ground troops. Village residents flew white flags all around the village. The air attack began at about 7:30 a.m. The Salvadoran Air Force sent four helicopters (HUEY gunships) and two planes (A-37 bombers). The helicopters flew so low that they had to know that they were attacking civilians. Village residents say they heard between 30 and 35 rockets explode, and that 45 homes were damaged. During and after the rocket attack people waved white colored cloths but the planes continued to attack.

A helicopter fired the rocket that hit the brick house we were viewing between 10:30 and 10:45 a.m. The rocket blew a section of brick as wide as the door out of the wall. Shrapnel blew holes as large as four inches in diameter in one of the walls, and put many holes in others.

Shrapnel killed Jose Anibal Guardado (32 years old) and his daughter, Blanca Lilia Lopez Guardado (1 year old); crosses commemorating their deaths are near the wall with the four inch wide holes. He was holding her in his arms when they were killed. Shrapnel killed Jose Lopez' daughters, Isabel Estelia Lopez Miranda (10 years old) and Anabel Beatris Lopez Miranda (2 years old). Shrapnel also killed Dolores Serrano (10 years old). Crosses commemorating their deaths are near another wall, on which remnants of flesh and blood can still be seen.

I can't help but think of my own children, and how I would feel if my children had been killed in a rocket attack. I wonder how anyone can allow the U.S. government to give money from taxes we pay to the Salvadoran government, since it pays for rocketing bombing, and strafing, and killing children.

Shrapnel from the rocket also injured the Lopez children's

mother and a brother. Their mother has shrapnel wounds in both sides of her chest and in both legs. The leg wounds are infected and she had left Guancorita for a larger village nearby, Guarjila, to get needed medical treatment. However, she may need to go to the hospital in San Salvador. At the time of our visit, she is nine months pregnant, and so far the baby is still healthy as far as she knows -- great luck, considering the terrible wounds she received. The brother, Medardo Lopez, was injured so badly that they had to amputate his legs, and 30 pieces of shrapnel were removed from his intestines. At the time of our visit he is in the hospital in San Salvador.

As other neighbors removed those who were injured in the attack, the planes continued to strafe the village.

The village's corn grinder was also destroyed in the attack, and three pigs were killed. The pigs would have been a community food supply. Other animals got loose and destroyed crops.

After the air attack, soldiers from the First Detachment came from Charlttenengo. They carried out a house to house search. The soldiers stole radios, sugar, flashlights, and other things. They damaged vegetable gardens, destroying tomatoes and cucumbers. The soldiers captured two people from the community. We were told that as a result, the people of Guancorita felt great fear mixed with their great sadness.

Because of the attack and the occupation by the soldiers, Guancorita residents were unable to work for two weeks after the attack.

After the attack the government offered money to the residents of Guancorita to pay for the damage occurred. The residents felt that the offer of money for the blood of their dead children was a repugnant insult.

We walk to the center of Guancorita, where there is a banner on the church which says, "Bienvenida la Delegacion! Que se solidariza con el Dolor de Nuestra Comunidades -- CCR" (or Welcome to the Delegation, which joins in the grief of our communities -- Committee on the Repopulation").

Over one hundred people welcome us. About half are children. First there is a greeting from a member of the Directiva, then a song. More people arrive as the song is sung by two men playing guitars. The song says, "The children know how beautiful the land is to come back to and grow corn. Our children will be the owners of what we construct."

Scott, from Guancorita's Sister City (Boise, Idaho) speaks. "You have great courage and love for your people." His voice cracks. I see tears in his eyes. "We are outraged by the attack, and know that our taxes buy the weapons that were used. We promise to do everything we can to cut off US aid and fight

the imperialist policies of our government," he says.

A representative of Guancorita says,

"The people of Guancorita are the last ones to have returned, but the first ones attacked. We knew that the attack was possible when we came back. It was a harsh and difficult moment, but we will stay here. The life here is so much better than in the Mesa Grande refugee camp.

We are willing and able to remake our lives here, but our people have suffered from the government's war on the poor. Some powerful people are sitting down at a table and making this war. Tell the people in the U.S. that they are paying for repression against working people like themselves.

Even after the attack, there are many at Mesa Grande who want to return to El Salvador."

Another song: "We Shall Not Be Moved", in Spanish.

Among the gifts the Boise, Idaho representatives have brought are toys for the children, which they present to the representatives of the Directiva.

There are a series of chants, giving thanks to the Sister Cities, international solidarity, the church, and the strength of the Guancorita community. "Que viva. . . , Que viva. . ."

I think to myself that the root of everything here is self-determination, the desire of Guancorita residents for control over their own lives and over the way their community develops. So similar to the issues underlying the efforts for community control in Boston since the early 60's -- dealing with urban renewal, institutional expansion, downtown development, etc.

It strikes me that the world is a small place, not a large one. I look at the children here welcoming us, and think again of my children.

Another speaker from Guancorita says, "When the soldiers came into the community, they left mines, bullets, even a grenade around. These are dangerous for us, especially for the children."

After the welcome, we go on a tour of the village. While we walk around we find M-16 and M-60 bullets, and a flare canister made by Morton Thiokol. I think back to the first thing I saw after getting off the plane in San Salvador, a poster in the jetway just steps away from the airplane. It graphically showed a child on crutches, with one of her legs amputated, and said that a mine left by FMLN terrorists had blown off her leg. Here we get a different understanding of what's going on.

As we walk we hear bombs exploding. We see a C-47 on the way to bomb and strafe. Our guides think they are heading to las Vueltas, a nearby village. Three minutes later we hear heavy machine gun fire. Steve, who is with our delegation and who trained as a helicopter door gunner, guesses that it's the plane strafing.

It's late morning now. Our guides tell us that on average they hear strafing for two hours each day. Some days it will go on for six hours, and during combat its constant.

We see the plane drop a flare. Steve says that the flare is used to protect the plane from heat-seeking ground to air missiles, and sometimes to start fires that cut off a possible line of attack or retreat.

One house that wasn't too badly damaged when the military forced residents to leave is used as a Health Center. The clinic has two beds in one room and a separate consultation room. It is supported by the Episcopal church. The primary health problems in Guancorita are diarrhea and resulting dehydration, malaria, infections of open sores, and bronchitis. Non-infectious diarrhea and dehydration in children from birth to five years old is the main health problem.

They have problems getting any kind of medicine, which is embargoed by the military. In addition, they point out their need for a microscope to detect parasites, and ask us to help them get one if we can.

There are five Promotoras de Salud (Health Promoters), two men and three women. The first we talk to is new. Two had training in Mesa Grande, and the other three are learning through training and experience. A doctor visits weekly to provide training and back-up health care.

Another flare is fired by the C-47. The plane is closer and louder. The strafing is still going on.

In recruiting new Health Care promoters they look for a person who is very interested in the work (which is completely volunteer), honest, able to read and write, able to do a little math (weights and measures), and able to listen to a training session, take notes, and summarize the lessons.

Now two propeller planes are flying over. One community member calls them Push and Pull planes and says they're going in to rocket. They are made in the U.S.

All the planes used in the war are made in the U.S.

There is a policy here, as there is in las Flores and all the other repopulations, of no alcohol.

We leave the Health Clinic, have lunch, and meet with the Directiva. The bombing and strafing continues.

Members of the Directiva are elected by the community at a meeting of the General Assembly (town meeting) which includes all community members. Twelve candidates were nominated at the meeting for the ballot. Six were elected. Members of the community can bring up any mistake they feel that the Directiva has made, any other concern, or any viewpoint. Members of the community can vote to remove and replace a member of the Directiva at any time, for any reason.

People in Guancorita work for the benefit of the community on four days a week from 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. This schedule was decided upon by a vote of the General Assembly. Sunday is left for religious activities and meetings (of work groups, the Directiva, the General Assembly, etc.) People work on their own plots of land, maintain their own animals, etc, before 7:00 a.m. and after 3:00 p.m. on weekdays and on Saturdays.

Community work proposals are developed by the Directiva, and presented to the General Assembly. Two-thirds of the General Assembly must vote in favor of a proposal for it to be adopted.

In regard to the community work, people choose which work they want to do; it is not imposed. Women have complete liberty in choosing what kind of work they want to do. All community work is done cooperatively and the results are distributed to meet community needs.

Since they don't have a child care center yet (no money, no construction materials) there are many mothers who must take care of their children, rather than helping with production and participating in the life of the community.

Members of the Directiva discuss with us the development projects they want to undertake, the obstacles posed by the military, and the material aid they need to accomplish their objectives.

Another run of bombers passes over.

They would like a six-ton truck, but even a small one would be good. Equipment for planting corn is available, but they need pressure so that the military will allow it to be delivered before May, when the corn must be planted. Many other types of supplies are needed, but the priorities are wood, tin, and other materials to finish building permanent houses before May, when the rainy season starts, the equipment needed to plant corn, and materials to expand their water system and latrine system.

The people from Boise, Idaho will know best what the needs are at any particular time.



Members of the Directiva are soft-spoken and gentle as they make presentations. They work very well as a group, never interrupting each other, and supporting each others presentations with details when asked. The woman who heads the Women's Directiva is treated the same way as the men.

They ask that the Sister Cities help develop a large campaign to end the repression and human rights violations, and to cut off U.S. aid.

Scott's eyes tear up again as he says, "I speak for the people of the Boise Sister City Project in recognizing that it is our taxes that paid for the murder of our brothers and sisters in Guancorita.

Another O2 Push and Pull flies over. We hear the bombs exploding. It's 4:05 p.m.

We talk to a group of children about the bombing. They are interested by Nina's video tape camera, but distracted by the sound of the planes. They are very quiet, but their attention immediately shifts when a plane flies over. Their bodies tense up. They know how many planes and helicopters were involved in the attack on February 11. They say that one of the soldiers who came later was crying. However, other soldiers said that those who were killed by the rocket were guerrillas. Then one plane is louder as it passes over. One child is particularly preoccupied. He has looked up at the sky several times, and points and whispers when the louder plane passes over. He says it makes them afraid.

Meeting with the Permanent Committee for a National Debate

We met with three members of the Directiva (Board of Directors), the Director of the Religious Sector (a Baptist minister), the Director of the Women's Sector, and the Director of the Humanitarian Institutions Sector.

The Permanent Committee is formed from representatives of twenty (20) sectors of Salvadoran society, and is to be noted for its ideological pluralism. Among those sectors represented are workers, peasants, churches, women's organizations, human rights organizations, universities, small businesses, and indigenous peoples (indians). Each sector involves organizations across the political spectrum; for instance, there are three or four groups of unions involved that represent workers. The left-leaning union groups involved and so is UNOC (the trade union organization set up by AFLID, the AFL-CIO affiliate). Its representatives are presently planning a trip for labor unions and others to the US, and hoping to gain political and financial support in order to push forward the Permanent Committee's cause.

Shared by all constituencies represented by the Permanent Committee is their mission: defense of the interests of the large majority of the poor in El Salvador, and the pursuit of authentic social justice.

The most important experience of members of the Permanent Committee is that in working as a team they discover that more brings them together than separates them. Unity grows daily. All members want peace, independent of any political or ideological position. All members have also found that there must be economic and social change to bring about a lasting, just peace. Involvement in the Permanent Committee has brought the lesson that there is strength in unity, the courage of not feeling defeated in the challenge. There is a feeling of being evangelized by the poor, who face the most suffering.

The Permanent Committee has a remarkable national presence. They have met with all political parties. Political parties are not members of the Permanent Committee, but have been showing increasing interest in supporting their work as the situations has changed in El Salvador. They have gotten meetings with ARENA and they have also met with the High Command.

The Permanent Committee also has an international presence. They have worked with and testified before Congress. In the near future they will be meeting in Washington about the negotiations they are attempting to bring about. In addition they have worked with the United Nations.

Negotiations, to occur within the next four months, are planned for Washington D.C.

The Permanent Committee's proposal for the structure of the negotiations is that there would be two tables. At one table would sit representatives of the United Nations, the government of El Salvador, and the FMLN. President Arias (of Costa Rica) may facilitate the organization of this table by bringing together representatives of the Permanent Committee with representatives of big business and ARENA.

At the other table (which the Permanent Committee feels to be as important as the first) would sit representatives of all sectors of civilian society. There are some indications that Suarez of the Organization of American States (OAS) would take part in the talks at this table.

The implication of the structure of the negotiations is that a consensus developed by representatives of civilian society will, with the accords reached between the FMLN and the government, form a new political and social compact for Salvadoran society. The Permanent Committee's attempt is to develop a consensus on a broad variety of issues, including those which are not dealt with in the negotiations between the government and the FMLN.

The Permanent Committee representatives speaking to us made it very clear that if there are no answer to the problems that the popular organizations (especially those of workers and peasants) address their members will be forced to "go into the mountains" (that is, join the FMLN).

The principal obstacles to a negotiated settlement are economic and military. Sectors of big business are very conservative and closed to the idea of negotiating. They want to keep the population poor and maintain violence against the poor. They have a Cold War mentality. Some elements of the military oppose political, economic, and social change.

After the FMLN offensive against the military, there was the military offensive. The military offensive was against the popular organizations, the political parties, and church representatives. The assassination of the Jesuit priests was part of the military's offensive. The persecuted churches, and carried out a heavy offensive against civilian organizations.

In spite of this repression and psychological war against the people, various organizations did not allow themselves to be intimidated. By the end of January you could see the faces of all the popular organizations again. The experience of the FMLN offensive and the military counter-offensive proved that there

cannot be a successful reactivation of the economy during a war situation.

Since the offensive there has been better organization and an increased understanding of the need for negotiations. There seems to be a shift in political space, especially in the small business and PDC sectors. Senor Bach, a small business leader, is on the Executive Committee of the Permanent Committee for a National Debate. However, the opening of political space in the business sector as a whole is not very clear, because meetings with representatives of various parts of the business sector have not yet been held. The Permanent Committee wants to move toward those meetings. There are indications that business people may be interested in attending the conference. They've asked to find out who is paying for it, who's leading it, and who's participating. They don't want to be trapped into positions they don't want to be in, for instance, they don't want to be forced to agree (or disagree) with proposals they don't want to state opinions about.

They would ask churches in the US to help bring together the effort before the US Congress to end aid to El Salvador. Economic and humanitarian aid should be conditioned to:

1. respect of human rights,
2. fruits of real negotiations,
3. an end to persecution of the church and other sectors in El Salvador.

The Permanent Committee hopes that the US Council of Churches joins them at the conference. The Permanent Committee's budget for the conference is \$90,000, although it could be cut to \$70,000, and they hope that the Council of Churches or funding agencies close to it will help provide funding.

The German Church has already given \$5,000 and has asked the Permanent Committee to make a request for \$100,000 more for a full conference in Germany.

In regard to the role of the media, there needs to be punishment of both the planners of the death squad murders and the media which identifies anyone they choose as communists (or alternately, leftists, people with ties to the FMLN, and people who are not welcome in El Salvador). The media's identification of people in this way is the same as giving them a death sentence. Diaria de Hoy is one of the media that play this key role in this system of death. This is the system of death that has to change in our country.

MEETING WITH US EMBASSY MARCH 23, 1990

Participants: David Grosser, Scott Nicholson  
Susan Jacobs, Executive Assistant (to ?, I didn't  
get that)  
Political Section

The purpose of the meeting was to present the Summit Agreements, not to get into a lengthy discussion or to receive one of their standard briefings. It lasted about 15 minutes.

We made three points:

1) We complained about the way that the High Command changed the conditions for obtaining a Salvo Cond that the Embassy make it easier to get access to the repopulations.

Her Response: Couldn't do that. Salvador is a sovereign country. Also, repopulations in a war zone, not safe. If army feels people can't go there, then Embassy shouldn't make it possible and put people in danger. She disputed our claim that the terms for Salvo Conducto were changed arbitrarily and said that the new conditions had been in effect since January. Said that she would mention our feeling that we had been jerked around to High Command.

2) We asked what was going to be done to punish those who ordered the attack on Guancorita.

Response: Nothing, it was an accident, regrettable but understandable in war time. FMLN had been active in area and attacked soldiers in vicinity earlier in day. Helicopter fired one rocket. Government had offered to indemnify families of victims. All these claims come from investigation carried out by Special Investigative Unit.

We asked for a copy of the report, and she took Scott's name and address to send one.

3) We said that in light of continual reports of human rights violations from villages, it was impossible to believe that it was an accident. Rather it appeared that the army had a systematic policy of attacking villages. She disputed this, saying that it was renegade elements in army who carried out human rights violations. Also, Embassy was continually working to strengthen elements in High Command that respected human rights, and that incidents had declined.

I said that based on my observation of the situation since 1986 the violations had not declined.

She said "Well I guess we disagree on that point."

A note on her approach: In contrast, to the briefing we had in 1987 at the Embassy, her tone was almost conciliatory. In 1987 they had called us dupes of NEST which was a front for CISPES and the FMLN and asserted that everyone in Chalatenango was a guerilla. Jacobs' approach was to assert that we shared goals, particularly around human rights, but differed on whether there was progress and whether the Salvadoran army shared that commitment.