



# Partners In Health

*Compañeros en la Salud*

December 2001

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## A Trip of More Than Miles

*By Dr. Maxwell Barus*

I had been interested in medical care in Central America for several years but only began to look for opportunities last winter when my son Eben and his friend Eric urged me to set up a trip. They are both students at Hampshire College who are interested in medicine (they are both EMTs) and they wanted to gain some understanding of medical issues in the third world. After some call to friends I heard about Partners-in-Health, contacted Bob Bach and eventually made plans to go to Nicaragua with Bob, his wife Gail, and Jill Grant in March. Though we all live in Maine, I first met Jill in the Miami airport, and first met Bob and Gail in Managua.

Bob later told me that he had been a little reluctant to have us come, as he could not guarantee what our experience would be like. We had reassured him that we had no extensive expectations. For Eben and Eric, I hoped for some exposure to some aspects of medicine in the third world. As a family physician I was personally interested in connecting with an organization, which had an established record of service and where I could make a contribution. Not having surgical skills such as plastic surgery or ophthalmology, I felt that many of the groups volunteering in the third world would not have a place for me. I was attracted to Partners-in-Health because the organization was small and seemed to embrace a range of projects where I might prove useful. After being exposed to Jill's boundless enthusiasm over the phone, I was at least sure that I wouldn't be bored.

We spent a week in Bilwaskarma seeing patients with Dr Patricia Ballesteros and Dr. Peters, engaged in activities, which ranged from cleaning a supply closet to seeing patients and assisting at surgery. We then flew to Puerto Cabezas and spent another week at the Hospital Nuevo Amanecer visiting with patients and physicians, assisting in surgery and learning about the medical system.

One day in Puerto I was asked to do a pap smear, and by the end of the day I had done 28. In the next two days Miki MacDonald (a nurse practitioner from Maine, who I met in Puerto) and I did more than 100. These were read, free of charge, by the technologists and pathologists at Central Maine Medical Center. Unfortunately five of these smears were highly suspicious for malignancy and nine more needed follow-up, an extremely high proportion.

Since returning I have become increasingly interested in developing a PIH program directed at supporting cervical cancer screening and prevention. It was clear from our experience that there was a demand for screening, a high prevalence of a treatable disease, and inadequate local services. Cervical Cancer is one of the most common cancers in the third world that strikes women at a young age. There is ample evidence that screening and treatment programs save lives.

We are currently planning a project that will support the physicians and nurses at the Puerto Cabezas Polyclinic, where the majority of women get their health care. We hope to be able to assist them in screening and early treatment of cervical disease by developing materials support, colostomy and cryosurgery services.

So what did I learn from my trip? That supporting and working with Nicaraguan physicians and nurses is extremely rewarding. That Partners-in-Health is a flexible organization that is greatly respected in Nicaragua for the services it provides, and which has room for a variety of projects. That just going there and learning about local needs resulted in project that suits my abilities. As for Eben and Eric, they had a great time too.



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## Doug Partello and Ernie Grant

### *Two Special Volunteers*

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By Dr. Robert Bach

We would like to cite two volunteers in this issue have dedicated an incredible amount of their time and energies over the past several years to the work of Partners in Health.

### **Doug Partello**

Doug Partello is a respiratory therapist who joined Partners in Health 6 years ago and is now the Director of West coast operations. His accomplishments are so many that one cannot possibly include them all. Since 1996 he has sent 9 - 20 ft containers and 2 -40 ft containers of medical equipment, supplies and medicines to the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua. He has organized several projects including dental clinics, community garden projects, clinics at the Managua dump, worm projects, and asthma projects. He has brought several specialists with him including Dr.Solomonson a very wonderful plastic surgeon. He also donated a lot of his time to the orphanage in Puerto Cabezas where the above picture was taken. Finally Doug obtained a grant of \$25,000 with the help of Louise Davis for the construction of the PIH warehouse and guesthouse as well as organized the construction and shipment of necessary supplies.

When I visited Doug I California it was no surprise to find his truck was full of bags of soda cans to cash in to raise money. Yard sales and church functions and making contacts to obtain funds seem to be a frequent part of his life. Finally Doug is a deeply religious person and he portrays himself as a faithful servant of his beloved Lord to whom he gives the credit for any of his successes. Thank you so much Doug.



### **Ernie Grant**

Ernie Grant is one of the nicest people I have ever known. Over the past ten years Ernie has personally collected and packed hundreds of boxes of medical supplies and equipment. "There is no one who can pack a box like Ernie". Despite all his hard work Ernie just shakes off any words of praise in his most unassuming manner. One of his strongest assets is his wife Jill whom we all know and love. Next year we are in anticipation of Ernie going to Nicaragua where he can share his wonderful skill of being able to fix most anything. Thank you Ernie for all your hard work.

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## *Back to the Mines*

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In October, I made my fifth trip to the Mines. This is what the Nicaraguans call the three towns of Rosita, Bonanza and Siuna. Partners In Health has sent two aid shipments to the hospitals located in each town. The past two trips I have carried a new nebulizer for each hospital. These are the only nebulizers that the hospitals have. The hospital director in Rosita expressed his appreciation for all the aid that has been sent. An OR table arrived a day after their OR table had died. They have new much needed beds with mattresses. There is a new complete x-ray unit in place.

It is our plan to continue to provide medial equipment and supplies for the hospital in this underserved area of Nicaragua.

the best possible care for their patient



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## *Teddy Bears and Prayers*

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Cleft lip/palate project 2001  
Puerto Cabezas  
By Janyce Churchill Chase, RNC

In 1994, when I was 5 years since the cancer, I asked Dr. Bach if he knew of a place that I might go to volunteer my help. His response was, "Yes, we could use you to do inventory and coordinate Operating Room equipment in Nicaragua." At first I didn't want to do that...I wanted to be the scrub nurse. But, when you volunteer you can't really say, "No, you can't use my talents." So, within 9 days, off I went on the first of what was to become many trips on adventures that would change my life.

I was dropped into a world that I knew nothing about. The people I met have the same hopes and dreams that we all do. They hope and pray for peace...for a chance to raise their children...for prosperity. I started working at the old Gray Memorial Hospital and helped in moving into Nuevo Amanecer Nancy Bach. (Nancy Bach Memorial Hospital). I've been the nurse that helps coordinate surgical supplies for visiting teams and teaches the nursing staff. On each trip, I try to teach the staff new skills and I watch to see in they remember. They do.

For many years, I have had several wishes. One would be for an Eye Project. Dr. Sandy Palmer headed up a team that I was a part of. The Eye Project had been in place for four years now. For the first several years, I went in February to work with Dr. Palmer on the Eye Project.

This past year, as I thought about a trip in 2001, I really wanted to branch out in another project. The eye team had grown strong and could do well without me. So, I asked the universe for guidance. In early winter I got a call from Douglas of the West Coast Partners asking if I could join a surgeon in Puerto to do cleft lip/palate surgery. At first I was nervous. I did not know the surgeon or her technique. That same week it just so happened that Dr. Bach was visiting North Haven Island and we had dinner with Marie Underwood. He encouraged me to go with the plastic surgery team. I decided to go but then had to face up to the next problem...I did not have the money. After my February 2000 trip, church members who offered to help me with this trip approached me. They encouraged me to approach the Outreach Committee and to ask Rev. Glenn Rainsly for money. Many other people asked me what they could give. Because, many times, there is not enough oxygen to do surgeries, I asked for energy and prayers for oxygen.

So, I was off again with passport in hand. On Sunday March 4, 2001 I landed in Puerto Cabezas and tried to settle in, but I couldn't sleep. I was up before the roosters. On Monday morning...we arrived early at the hospital. I was going to do inventory and coordinate...that means picking through boxes until you find the right equipment and supplies. Douglas had also included a

massive box of teddy bears. I had been told that Dr. Janet Salomonson was not going to arrive until the 2pm plane. Our anesthesia support...Sandra Taylor was coming at 12:30pm. However, Dr. Salomonson arrived on the early plane. We were introduced and she gave me two 3 by 5 cards (her preference cards) They contain the information an OR nurse needs to know in order to prepare for the surgery. I was frantic with worry. Would we have everything??? Would the child wake up after surgery??

**The notation that I made in my journal for 5 MAR 01 merely says**

**It worked!!** We had everything. The First surgery started at 11:30am on Monday. Between that time and 11am on Friday.

Janet did 11 cases and 18 procedures. With each and every move, she was teaching Dr. Patricia Sarmiento. There were children with cleft lips, cleft palates, giant hairy nevus, a young man with cancer of the lip, a revision of a gunshot to the face and a child with two faces. We had the autoclave, the oxygen, the sutures, the medications and the staff. As each surgery finished, the children were taken to the recovery area surrounded by teddy bears and prayers, skillfully and lovingly watched by Dr. Heather Holmstrom and Nina Alexander before being returned to their parents waiting and thankful arms.

God willing Partners' will return next March to take care of the children who wait and who without us would have no hope of having their faces fixed.



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## *Hospital Security Project*

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By Jill Grant

On my March trip to Puerto Cabezas I had the opportunity to talk with my friends at Hospital Nuevo Amanecer. From the Director of the hospital to the grounds keeper, all the personnel expressed concern for hospital security. Even in this country every hospital has security problems. The economy in Nicaragua leaves people struggling to survive. In this environment stealing become a great problem. After walking around the hospital grounds it became

apparent that a few basic security measures would help the situation greatly. Several vulnerable buildings would be much more secured with bars on the windows. Partners is paying for the installations of these bars. Other areas would be helped with some basic motion sensing lighting. In the OR, Motion sensing alarms would alert the security guard where there was a problem. Finally installation of some timers on lamps in some of the offices would discourage robbers. The hospital has a full time security guard, but the grounds are large for one person to keep track of. These few basic security measures should help the hospital maintains better security. These basic security measures should only cost around \$500, but would make life much easier for the hospital personnel who are trying to provide

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## *Do You Have...*

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Some of the medical items we are looking for:

1. Nebulizers
  2. Stethoscopes
  3. BP cuffs
  4. OR instruments
  5. An electric cast cutting saw for orthopedics at Hospital Nuevo Amanecer
- If you have any of these items please put them in a box and mail them to Jill Grant, 150 State Street, Brewer, Maine 04412.




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## *Help Us Help!*

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- Imagine an operating room without a table
- Imagine a hospital without a functional X-ray
- Imagine a hospital without an anesthesia machine
- Imagine a hospital without an autoclave to sterilize instruments

These are the problems that face three hospitals in the mountainous mining regions in Nicaragua. Equipment that would make such a difference to these hospitals has already been collected and crated. We need only the funds to ship it. We estimate the cost to be \$10,000.

**Your help is greatly needed.**

Robert Bach MD

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## *E-mail Addresses of our authors*

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If you would like to communicate with the authors of our articles, we would like to hear from you.

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