

# The never ending



Grahame  
Russell.

## **INTRODUCTION (2021)**

I am pleased to re-release *The Never Ending*. While almost 30 years have gone by, since first published, I believe many of the anecdotes and observations, quotes and stories remain pertinent.

### **Eduardo Galeano & Martha Gelhorn**

Included here for the first time are copies of a lovely post-card I received from Eduardo Galeano, and a moving letter from Martha Gelhorn. As I had learned from and been empowered by their caring and *rabia* (rage), analysis and writing, I mailed them both copies – to Uruguay and Wales - in thanks.

Gratefully, I heard back from them.

### ***La lucha sigue***

The struggles continue, whenever, wherever, always as long as necessary.

Grahame Russell  
Toronto, Canada  
[grahame@rightsaction.org](mailto:grahame@rightsaction.org)



Gracias mil, querido Grahame, por tu envío de palabras entrañables y dolidas— un valiosos testimonio que ilumina la realidad y merece difusión.  
Te abrazo, Eduardo Galeano

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Te abrazo,

Eduardo Galeano

 GALEANO

Thank you so much, dear Grahame, for sending these endearing and painful words — a valuable testimony that illuminates the reality and merits distribution.  
I send you a hug, Eduardo Galeano



MARTHA GEL HORN

This is a typed copy of the handwritten letter from Martha Gelhorn.  
Also included is the first page of the handwritten original.

24/2/93

Tiran Hotel, Naama Bay, South Sinai, Egypt.

Dear Mr. Russell:

This will go to Canada, your home base I assume, because I don't know how long ago you sent me your book - perhaps you have left Costa Rica. You must forgive this delay in writing to you. People generously send me books, which collect in my Welsh cottage. Time is finite and my energy even more finite. I get around slowly to reading the gifts.

Last night I read "The Never Ending" and it moved me very much; heartsick. It brought back all the pain and anger I have felt, like you, not only in those countries I know: Panama, Nicaragua, El Salvador. I've been spared Guatemala; don't think I could stand it now. I felt El Salvador to be a mini-Vietnam: kill the poor and those who help them.

Since 1945, when the U.S. became an imperial superpower, I have detested and despised all American governments. (I give Kennedy the benefit of the doubt; he might, just might, have been different.) When my compatriots twice elected Ronald Reagan, I despised the whole country. Unjust, because there are always decent dissident Americans.

But in general I think it is safe to say all governments are bad (and some are much worse) and they do not govern ever for the well-being of all the citizens. The IMF and the World Bank are evil usurers and have done only harm, terrible harm. They let every set of crooks borrow money, and have enriched numbered accounts in Swiss banks, but nothing they have done ever helped the majority, the poor. People in our world do not realize that Third World debt, the original capital borrowed, has been long repaid - the basis of usury.

It is never ending: poverty, disease, enslavement through illiteracy, and always war. Long ago Nadadja Mandelstam wrote (in Stalinist Russia) "If you can do nothing else, you must scream." I feel that I have been screaming my whole life and a fat lot of good it has done. All the cruelty and waste go on and on. The wicked and the heartless prosper.

I do not trust the U.N. arranged peace in El Salvador. I know the good work of the Sandinistas is undone, and Guatemala is a perpetual killing field. Now there is Bosnia too, and little murderous conflicts we hardly hear of in Georgia and Adjerbijan.



*But*, no matter how discouraged and weary, someone must go on screaming. Otherwise, if there is only silence, *they* have completely won.

I am glad that you, a young man, have joined this also unending relay race - the people who protest, picking up the torch from those who protested earlier, and one day handing it on. I am cheered by that.

And who knows, maybe Clinton and his wife will make the U.S. different, decenter, less a menace in the world. But, at 84, I'm bound to tell you that I have only very small shreds of hope for our species. There are not only bad leaders, there is always a plentiful supply of bad followers.

I'd like to see your book published. I'll take it back to London and ask around. Why don't you send it to my old Spanish war friend, Ted Allan in Toronto, with a note saying that I told you to, because he might have ideas on how to get it published.

I write longhand, for the first time since I was 20, and use ruled paper, trying to keep the lines straight, because a famous London eye surgeon botched a routine cataract operation and has left me with one useful eye. I wear an eye patch like Moshe Dayan to block out an unfocussing eye and do my best with all I've got, a weak left eye. This writing is probably hard to read. It brings you my admiration for your testimony and the work you have chosen, and my hope that you will not give up.

Sincerely,

Martha Gellhorn,  
72 Cadogan Square,  
London S.W.1.

~~Ted Allan,~~  
~~#B 24~~  
~~9 Tennis Crescent~~  
~~Toronto M4K1J4~~

24/2/93 - Naama Bay, Egypt

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## Update, September 1, 1992

Having another 500 copies printed gives me the chance to respond to a number of useful comments made by friends who read earlier drafts of this book. A very important criticism made was that *'the never ending'* overly portrayed Central American peoples as victims, and under emphasized the fact that they are people with enormous dignity and integrity, fighting back, despite tremendous odds, against the many forms of repression and violence that they suffer and experience.

This criticism is correct. To explain what I wrote here - while hundreds of thousands of Central Americans are working for justice and human rights, despite the repression and violence, I think that most Central Americans are victims, for the simple fact of being Central Americans, of being born into very unjust national and particularly international economic, political and military systems.

In *'the never ending'* I chose to spend more time focusing attention on the "system, the very structures" of injustice (military and economic), and less attention on the fact that even despite tremendous odds brave and honest people throughout the region continue to 'fight back'.

In the struggle to bring justice and respect for human rights in Central America I think we must focus more attention and effort on the responsibility of the first world, and in the case of Central America, on the United States in particular, for contributing to and perpetuating unjust economic, political and military systems.

Not long ago a Jesuit Priest, in El Salvador, said:

"In Central America, we are passing from the period of explicit repression, to that of generalized poverty. We are passing from the period of human rights violations caused by security forces, to violations caused by the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the institutions that are imposing economic policies that violate a number of human rights guaranteed by governments". (Father Miguel Czerny, May, 1991, 13th Annual Assembly of CODEHUCA, San Salvador)



During the months of May, June, July and August, of this year, 1992, I travelled to Panama, El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, participating in CODEHUCA (Central American Human Rights Commission) workshops dealing with the issues of economic, social and cultural rights.

The socioeconomic situation in the region is not improving. Arguably it is worsening. What I saw in these countries, and heard during the workshops left it very clear that the levels of poverty and violence are as high as during the 1980s, and that these countries are under the control of development-economic models being implemented by the region's governments, development models that are controlled by the first world, and imposed on the region via such international financial institutions as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The first world, these hugely powerful financial institutions, and other international actors such as Multi-National Companies, are on the top of and control the "system, the very structures" of injustice.

I am not suggesting that all that wrong comes from the north, from the first world. It doesn't. Local governments, economic elites and militaries have their quotas of responsibilities. It is simply to say that with respect to the poverty and misery that characterize much of the region, and that underlie most of the violence in the region, the unjust economic and political/military systems that govern the region have been in part created by, and are supported and perpetuated by the first world.

Much work is left to be done in the first world itself, if peoples of the third world, as in the region of Central America, are to put an end to systemic violations of their human rights.

Grahame Russell

September 1, 1992, San Jose Costa Rica.

## INTRODUCTION

April, 1992

Between May 1989 and July 1991 I worked for the Commission for the Defense of Human Rights in Central America (CODEHUCA) that has its head offices in San Jose, Costa Rica. CODEHUCA is affiliated with non-government human rights commissions in each of the Central American nations. My work took me travelling regularly, visiting Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, and Belize.

The work that I did at CODEHUCA consisted of investigating and reporting (in english and spanish) on human rights violations; the organizing and facilitating of workshops on human rights issues; preparing a bi-monthly publication -the Brecha- on human rights issues in the region; and giving lectures on the human rights in the region.

This book consists of diary entries from the time I spent in Central America. It is an effort to expose and understand the systemic/structural nature of human rights violations I was exposed to. Human rights work involves not only identifying who the victims are, but also analyzing and working to change the underlying causes of human rights violations. It involves, as the former president of CODEHUCA said, "naming the guilty parties".

With respect to underlying causes, increasingly I have been exposed to the workings of international military sys-



tems and sales and the international economic system that are dominated by the first world and that cause human rights violations in the third world. The more I investigated the underlying causes of human rights violations, the more I came to agree with Primo Levi:

"The greatest responsibility lies within the system, the very structure ...; the concurrent guilt on the part of the individual big and small collaborators (never likeable, never transparent) is always difficult to evaluate". (*The Drowned and the Saved*)

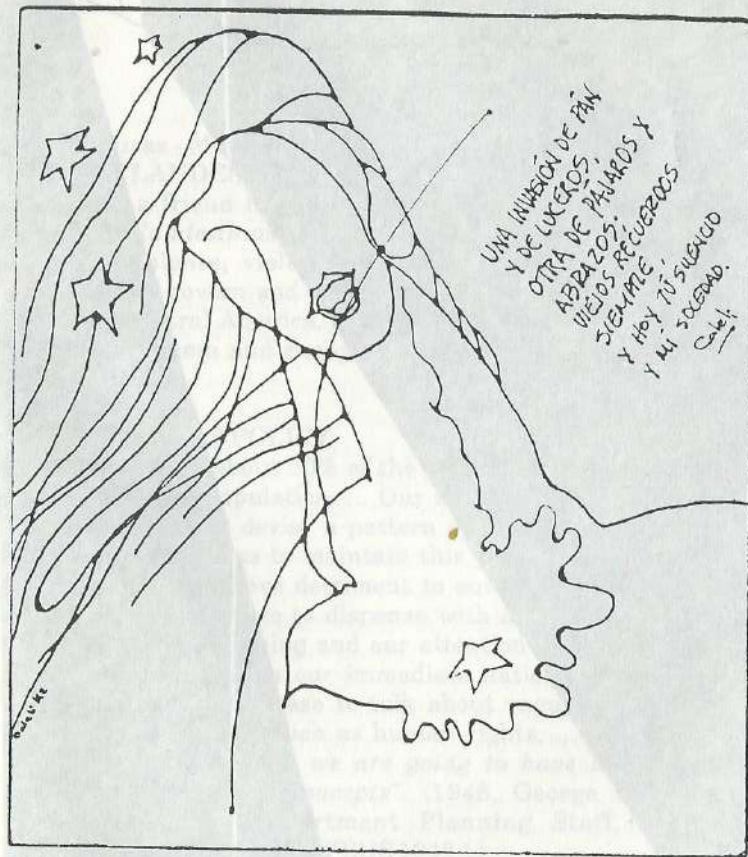
I hope that this book will help to better understand Central America and how some of the first world's economic, political and military policies often have a devastating impact on the people of Central America.

I learned alot reading some works by Eduardo Galeano, a Uruguayan writer and journalist who was forced to flee both Uruguay and Argentina in the 1970s. He wrote:

"By writing it is possible to offer ... the testimony of our time and our people - for now and for posterity. One may write in order to say, in a sense: 'This is where we are, this is where we were; we are like this, this is what we were like.' ... And perhaps it may help preserve for the youth to come, as the poet put it, 'the true name of each thing'. ... Perhaps writing is no more important than an attempt to save, in times of infamy, the voices that will testify to the fact that we were here and this is how we were". (*Days and Nights of Love and War*)

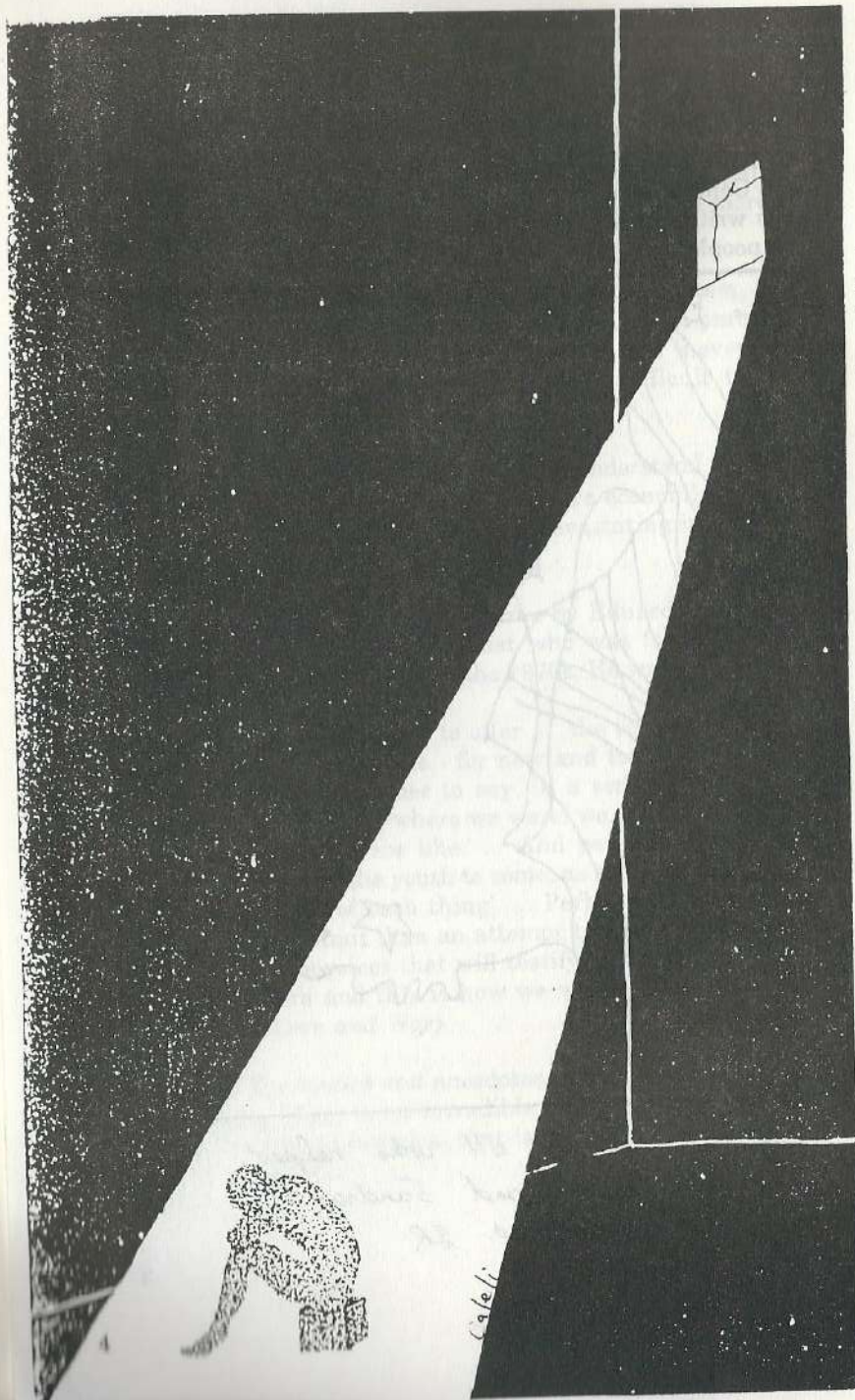
Most of the stories and anecdotes in this publication are not uplifting. There is an incredible amount of poverty and violence in Central America, that is caused by local and international factors.

I dedicate this book to all those persons in CODEHUCA and Central America who are struggling for human rights. It is written that: "Hope lies in the courage and strength of the people".



special thanks to all who helped,  
and to Calleli and Sandra  
for their drawings. JR





## DIARY

*Injustice is not abstract  
Efforts to put an end to it  
are marked at every step  
by horrible crimes  
absolute and final*

**Honduras - May, 1989**

### THE CLANDESTINE LAWS

Maria, a friend from Puerto Rico, wrote a book called the *Leyes Clandestinas*, about the 'clandestine laws' of poverty, power, silence, violence and subservience. These are the laws that govern and characterize the lives of so many people in Central America. And she wrote about the need to expose, condemn and change these 'laws'.

### OFFICIAL U.S. POLICY

"We have about 50% of the world's wealth, but only 6% of its population. ... Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security.

... We will have to dispense with all sentimentality and day-dreaming and our attention will have to be concentrated on our immediate national objectives.

... We should cease to talk about vague and ... unreal objectives such as human rights, ... *The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts*". (1948, George Kennan, U.S. State Department Planning Staff, Policy Planning Study\23, FRUS 1948 1)



## NEW VOCABULARY

In Central America, there is a new transitive verb of action used in the daily language. Not only do things 'disappear', like a pair of socks, or the morning mist. Now, armies and police "disappear" people and invasions "disappear" entire neighbourhoods.

**Honduras - May 17, 1989**

### PLANES FLIGHTS

In a plane on my way to Honduras, flying over poverty. I browse through the "In-Flight Magazine" - Honduran advertisements of rock-stars and movie millionaires, and I am afraid of the Honduran streets below.

Everywhere I turn, on the streets of Tegucigalpa, there is a photo to be taken, never to be published in an In-flight Magazine:

a baby in the dirt, under-nourished;  
a man, hopeless, drunk and hopeless, sprawled on the path;  
a little girl - barefoot - hauling buckets of water;  
mums and babies gathered around a small spring on the edge of town, washing clothes and bodies, hauling buckets of water the long walk home.

### THE CLIFF-DWELLERS OF TEGUCIGALPA

Walking at dawn along a road on top of a cliff, I meet a woman who looks about 60-years-old. The home she shares with her grand-daughter is barely a hut. It has three walls. The fourth wall is formed by the side of the cliff.

She has a stall in the market where she sells trinkets and odds and ends - "que sea" - all day, everyday. There are no weekends for the cliff-dwellers.

She has a rickety old cart and hauls water "from way over there", she says, waving her arm. Her daughter sent \$100

from 'los estados', the U.S., which the grandmother hopes to use to buy a piece of land in a barrio called "La Esperanza" - "Hope". From the edge of the cliff, above her hut, she points over the sprawling city of Tegucigalpa to Hope, a dusty squatter's neighbourhood where there are no trees. Hope is hot in the sun, crossed by a web of trails up the steep mountainsides. In Hope, there is no water, electricity or sewage.

The grandmother wants to move up to Hope because in the rainy season it is dangerous to dwell on the cliffside. She points to her neighbour's hut, below, along the cliff. I look at a hut half-destroyed by last year's rain season. The neighbours still live there.

### FOOD AND TORTURE

A Honduran woman, a victim of torture, said to me: "Do you know how a torturer gets a campesino to talk? Not by beating her or him, not by threats on their lives, but by threatening to starve their children."

**Costa Rica - August, 1989**

### DISAPPEARANCES

Today, in the CODEHUCA offices, information is sent to us about eleven Guatemalan student leaders who were disappeared during the last three days.

Later, I sit in the corner of the Holiday Inn attending a human rights conference. I reflect on the eleven student leaders and on the 90,000 other disappeared persons across the Americas. The hotel chandeliers reflect on me.

**August 29, 1989**

### REAPPEARANCES

Five of the eleven Guatemalan student leaders "reappear", mutilated,



tortured and dead,  
scattered on a street near the university,  
for all their friends to see and fear,  
for anyone to see and fear.  
Fear is as strong a tool of repression as a disappearance.

### MAN'S WORLD

Aurora works as a chambermaid in the Holiday Inn. From a farming community in the north, she came to San Jose to earn money, in the \$100 a night hotel. After I told her what the human rights conference was about, she told me what her life with her husband was about: "Sometimes my head hurts so much I can't comb my hair. ... Sometimes I wear baggy shirts, to cover the bruises on my arms and back ... I feel so alone - all my life I have been alone". She cries as she stands on the 15th floor of the hotel, holding a mop.

### MAN'S WORLD

"This is not random violence, the risk factor is being female". (Lori Heiss, *World Watch*).

### MAN'S WORLD

A local ad reads: "Successful 30-year-old American male looking for attractive 18-28 year old "Tica" (Costa Rican woman) to accompany me while on business in Costa Rica. Please send photo. Signed ....". (*Tico Times*).

### THE RULE OF LAW

At CODEHUCA, I work on a human rights project: 'the efficacy of the legal writ of habeas corpus in Central America'. Habeas Corpus is a legal writ that obliges the authorities who have detained someone "to present the accused before a court of law and justify her or his detention".

In Central America, when someone has been detained, the Judge probably won't do a thing, or he might name a special investigator, who probably won't do a thing, or if the special investigator does act, he will not find the missing person. They are too afraid or they are too rich to upset the boat.

### FREEDOM OF SPEECH ...

I work with Mirna, a single mum from El Salvador, who has five children. In October, 1987, her husband, Herbert Anaya, was killed by hired assassins. In Latin America hired killers are called "death squads" and they have names like the "White Warriors Union", the Anti-Communist Alliance", etc.. Herbert Anaya was murdered one morning while taking his two daughters to school. He was assassinated because he worked with the Human Rights Commission of El Salvador.

### ... IS ONLY FOR THE DEAD

"It is a tragic fact that, because he (Herbert Anaya) is dead, we can acknowledge his testimony. We cannot name many other people we met. Freedom of speech is a privilege reserved for the dead". (Catholic Institute for International Relations, *A Thousand Times Heroic*).

### A PRISONER TALKS OF TORTURE

In 1986, before he was assassinated, Herbert Anaya was illegally detained by the Armed Forces for six months. The human rights commission presented a writ of habeas corpus that didn't do any good. The armed forces claimed he was a "subversive" or they claimed he was a "communist" or a threat to national security or that he was some other "ist"...

When he was released from jail in early 1987, he said: "I told my torturers I could not collaborate with them - that I had



something inside me, that wouldn't allow it". The torturers responded: "That won't help you at all, not at all", and they tortured him.

### MAKE-WORK PROJECTS

I sit in the land "discovered" by Europe 500 years ago, by Columbus, Pizarro, Amerigo and other Europeans looking for India, or so it is written. I work here. I receive a salary here. Human rights violations are systemic and predictable throughout the Americas. They are one of the legacies of the "discovery" of the Americas.

September, 1989

### A CLOWN TALKS OF TORTURE

Last night Caleli came by my apartment. He is from Guatemala, where he returns to occasionally and afraid, to visit his mum. In my apartment, in the dark of the night, we pass the beer around. He talks of the days he spent being tortured in a dark and clandestine jail. He minimizes how horrible the torture was - "not much", "ohh, not so bad", ...

Once freed, he pulled himself together, but you don't pull yourself together after torture. You live with it forever. Caleli is a street clown. He works with children, making them laugh.

### A WRITER TALKS OF TORTURE

"It must be a nerve, tenderness. A nerve that breaks and cannot be mended. I have known few people that have survived the tests of pain and violence - a rare feat - with their capacity for tenderness intact."  
(Eduardo Galeano, *Days and Nights of Love and War*)

### THE RULE OF LAW

I study the decision of the International Court of Justice (at the Hague) concerning the case: *Nicaragua v. U.S.*. From the court transcripts, I read excerpts from a CIA manual, produced as evidence at the trial. It was written by the CIA to train the Contra "freedom fighters" who were trying to overthrow the Nicaraguan government. The manual is called: "Psychological Operations in Guerilla Warfare". It is a military training guide used to teach "freedom fighters" to:

"neutralize carefully selected and planned targets after the local population has been gathered to take part in the act, and formulate accusations against the oppressor ...".

I want to laugh, you know, the CIA, James Bond, the White House, the 'cold war', international political intrigue, etc. But I cry. It is real and 30,000 Nicaraguans, "carefully selected", or not, have been killed, perfectly "neutralized" - by the Contras, and the CIA. The International Court found the U.S. guilty of numerous violations of International Law and determined that they would have to pay Nicaragua billions of dollars of compensation for loss of human life and destruction. The U.S. did not comply with the court's decision. These are the clandestine laws of power.

El Salvador - October, 1989

### PLANE FLIGHTS

It is dark flying into El Salvador, which means "The Saviour". Walking into the hot night from the air-conditioned terminal, I encounter the beggars with their hands out, forever seeking the hand-outs.

I stay in a "safe-house" with members of the national human rights commission. Human rights workers hide at night. These people knew Herbert Anaya and so many more human rights workers who couldn't be saved. Nearby, on the



mountain-side, three bombs blast. We hear the Air Force helicopters flying back from a night raid.

### **IGLESIA ROSARIO**

In downtown San Salvador, I stand quietly in Rosario Church, attending an ecumenical act commemorating the second anniversary of the assassination of Herbert Anaya, the human rights worker who could be quoted because he was dead. Father Segundo Montes, a Jesuit Priest, stands at the front of the large gathering and speaks of god, of how one must 'walk with the poor'. A popular saying in the Catholic Church is that "Jesus is verb, not noun".

After the service many poor people walk in procession to the cemetery. They walk together, to the dead, to where Herbert is buried. You can only assassinate a dead person once.

I don't pray to god, sitting in the Rosario Church. Were god real, she or he or it wouldn't permit this humanity. Rather, I pray for those killed of human hand. I pray because, in the Rosario Church, it is peaceful and calm.

**October 30, 1989**

### **THE RULE OF LAW**

During the 1980s, hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans fled military violence and repression in El Salvador. When they now try to return, the military waits for them. Today, 1000 refugees return from Honduras, but only 994 cross the boarder. Six leaders of the refugees are illegally detained by the Security Forces. Is there any use presenting a writ of habeas corpus?

### **LIFE IN A PRISON**

Lawyers from the national human rights commission go to the authorities to demand the release of the detained refugee

workers. The lawyers are detained, illegally. In the land of The Saviour, police and military personnel detain the people who come to the jails to free the illegally detained.

### **DOCUMENTING THE EVIDENCE**

Yesterday, a member of the human rights commission went to investigate the situation of a cadaver that "turned up". The human rights commission often gets calls advising them of a cadaver that "turned up".

I look at the photos and read the testimony of the persons who found her. There are six photos of the cadaver of a woman, from all angles. You can almost see the men who hacked her head, arms, and limbs, leaving her body thrown in the long grass of a field, somewhere in El Salvador, for someone to come along, find her, report it and create more work for the human rights commissions.

**Guatemala, November 1989**

### **BUS RIDES**

The bus winds north through El Salvador to Guatemala, through beautiful mountains, by hundreds of thousands of people subsisting and working for less than survival wages, helping to bring coffee, cotton and bananas to demanding and expanding markets in North America.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS BARRACKS**

In Guatemala City, I visit the GAM office to discuss the project on Habeas Corpus. GAM is the Mutual Support Group, a human rights organization that investigates and denounces the state practice of disappearing people. There are filing cabinets, desks, offices and ten bustling people. There are



holes in two walls and the roof where bombs exploded only two weeks before. No one was killed this time.

I am told that the person I wish to speak with is not there. She has gone to investigate and document five cadavers that were found today, tortured and killed, lying in long grass in a field, somewhere in Guatemala City, creating more work for the Mutual Support Group.

"Every one of the members of the GAM has lost someone in their life", I was told.

#### **WHITE NIKE SHOES**

6:00 a.m., I stride down the cold morning cement in Guatemala City, in white Nikes. The street, home to thousands of orphans, is a cement bed. I hurry past four shoeless street orphans curled together asleep on their cement bed. The shoeless foot of one of the boys is shaking violently. In the early cold morning, I walk by the violently shaking bare foot of a small boy whose home is a cement bed on the sidewalks of Guatemala City.

In a taxi I drive to the airport. Here, the Nikes fit. I am "at home". Here there is free time, before the flight, to drink the rich grade 'A' coffee, "for export only" the sign says in English. The coffee is hand-picked by Guatemalans who never get to drink it, who never have free time.

The vendor's stalls in the airport sell well-made clothing, wall hangings, shoulder bags, ... all produced by the indigenous people of Guatemala, who can never afford to buy these wares and who never travel by plane. There are no indigenous people in the airport. Rather, indigenous people sell and subsist in the streets, in the marginalized barrios, in the dumps, ... selling chicklets, combs, hairpins, lipstick,

hairspray, laces, pens, peanuts, oranges, a myriad of small tools, a pile of trinkets, a million watches, ... selling almost anything, for next to nothing.

They call my number and I fly.

#### **WORKERS RIGHTS IN EL SALVADOR**

Flying back to Costa Rica, the plane stops over in El Salvador, where I was two days ago. A local newspaper. Dateline - November 1, 1989. A headline - "Bomb-Blast Rocks ...". Violence rips across the page, and my memory. At 12 noon, Tuesday, the death squads (the newspaper says "it is not known ...") threw a bomb in the office of FENASTRAS, a union organization, when most of its leaders were there.

I look at photos of the lovers and family members of the murdered, picking through the debris, finding the bodily remains of ten union workers. Thirty more people were wounded. Included among the casualties is Febe Elizabeth, a young union representative who I met three days ago.

#### **Costa Rica - October, 1989**

#### **COMMEMORATIONS**

In the CODEHUCA office, my Central American co-workers commemorate the massacre of the union workers. Febe Elizabeth's voice speaks from a cassette recording made two years ago, when she spoke at the burial service for Herbert Anaya. She speaks of justice, of people, and of how one must fight for dignity. It is a moment of collective silence. There are many such moments in Central America.

"The living have been shutting the eyes of the dead. Now it is time for the dead to open the eyes of the living". (Movie: *Dry White Season*)



**November 13, 1989**  
**CIVILIAN TARGETS**

Full scale fighting breaks out in El Salvador. The rebel forces are in San Salvador, and the Air Force is bombing civilian targets. Military sales increase from the north.

**November 17, 1989**  
**THE JESUIT MASSACRE**

Early in the dark morning of November 16, soldiers, obeying orders (the newspapers say "it is not known ...") creep into the University of Central America and slaughter six Jesuit priests and their two helpers, including Father Segundo Montes who I heard speak only two weeks ago. Photos show brains of some of the priests scattered on the lawn.

"Those that abducted her were frustrated in their knowledge that they could not also abduct her words". (*Imagining Argentina*, Thornton)

**THE PHONE CALL**

Father Jon Sobrino is a member of the Jesuit order, and happened to be in Thailand working with Christian communities at the time the fighting broke out in El Salvador. He received a long distance phone call:

"Call for J.S., is he there?"

"Yes, one second please ... Hello, J.S. here".

"Hi J., this is so-and-so, how are you?"

"Fine thanks. I didn't expect to get a call from you. Is there anything wrong in El Salvador. I hear that the fighting is very fierce?"

"Yes there is something wrong. Are you there with a friend? ... because they ... Jon ... they massacred all six Jesuit brothers and the two women that lived with you at the University. They taunted them, they tortured them, they took the brains out of some of their heads and threw them on the

lawn ... They killed them all. ... So Jon ... I pray you have a good support group with you. I can't talk anymore. Call if you need to. I will call again. Jon, I am very sorry. Goodbye".

This is a call many Central Americans have received, receive and will receive.

**THE RULE OF LAW**

Trying to do human rights work in a war in El Salvador ... In law school, I studied the international laws of war. I wondered with derision how humanity could be so cruel as to make laws about how to kill people? Now, all I want is for the El Salvadoran Armed Forces to respect the international laws of war and stop bombing civilians in their beds. They won't stop.

First world arms manufacturers must look on with glee - more business, work and profits.

**HOW COULD I KNOW? I COULDN'T**

Just three weeks ago, I sat and listened as Father Segundo Montes spoke at an ecumenical service. Just three weeks ago, I sat and listened as Febe Elizabeth gave a press conference. After, we all spoke and I left the country. How could I know that they would soon be murdered by death squads?

"I went to Fossano, to see him again. I found a tired man; mortally wounded, a weariness without remedy. We went for some wine together. From the few words I managed to wrest from him, I understood that his margin of love for life had thinned, almost disappeared. He had stopped working as a mason ... He wanted no more rules or bosses or schedules. The little he earned, he spent at the tavern. He didn't drink as a vice, but to get away from the world. He



had seen the world, he didn't like it, he felt it was going to ruin. To live no longer interested him". (Primo Levi, *Moments of Reprieve*)

### **Nicaragua - November 30, 1989**

I arrive at the home of my 'Nicaraguan family' who I stayed with for three summers in the 1980s. I've been gone for two years. For these two years, and so many before, they have been there, living through a war they don't need or want. My friends and their country have become poorer and poorer. The only people who need this war are first-world weapons producers and exporters. The only ones who want this war are the U.S. and the Contras.

### **BAREFEET**

I have seen those feet before, cut, beaten and worn, hardened and thick. This time, the feet belong to a six-year-old Nicaraguan boy working the bus-line, singing a ballad, collecting a few cents, and heading out to the next bus. He knows his way around. His bare feet have been around.

### **THE NEWS REPORTS WHAT THE PRESIDENT SAYS**

I stand in the hot and destroyed streets of Managua, product of a war, greed and an earthquake. George Bush took over from Ronald Reagan in the U.S.'s efforts to crumble this small country and people into the ground. They are doing a fairly good job.

In October, Costa Rican President Oscar Arias had a 'party' in honour of "democracy". In attendance were President Ortega of Nicaragua, President Bush of the U.S., and 20 other leaders, with tuxedos, limousines and wealthy democratic supporters. The celebration lacked nothing, or almost. 'Something was amiss', or so said President Bush, and that is what was reported in the news. Amongst the tuxe-

dos and three-piece suits was, according to President Bush, a "little man". This little man, President Ortega, was dressed in green fatigues, the ones he wears everyday fighting against the U.S.-Contras. President Bush said it was like having a skunk at a garden party. This is what was reported.

### **THE SPACE BETWEEN**

I leave my hotel in Managua to buy some rum and coke. Again and again, I walk by the look in the eyes of people hanging out on the streets, the look I have seen before, and will again, the look of they who have no money, looking at the northern visitor, usually white, usually with money. What do they stare at? - money, privilege and opportunity! What do I have? - money, privilege and opportunity, a wallet with money, a charge-card, a ticket out of Nicaragua, an endless list of things and opportunities they don't and never will have.

I stare back through the space between the rich and the poor. I live in a world of spaces.

### **STORIES OF THE WAR**

My friend Ali, a Lieutenant in the Nicaraguan army, tells me of a time, three months before, when he and his soldiers were on patrol near the Atlantic coast, where the Contras had a strong military presence. They were caught in an ambush, going up a lowland river. No one from Ali's crew was killed but the guy sitting beside him was shot in the head. He is now blind in one eye.

### **WEDDING DAY IN MANAGUA**

I walk back from the junked-out shoreline of dirty and beautiful Lake Managua, through many barrios of subsistence and poverty, and of friendly children. I walk by a



small hut, roof and walls patched with a collage of tin, cardboard, wood and plastic sheeting. The dirt floor inside the hut extends into the swept front-yard, all shaded by matted trees, blocking a piercing sun.

There, family and friends sit on stumps and rocks, and a few wooden rocking chairs. They sit in their assorted clothes, worn and repaired, faded and clean for wedding day. Under the matted trees, in the poor barrio, standing on the swept dirt, a young woman wears a splendid white full-length wedding dress. It is so incongruous, and yet not so, to glance at this young girl, dressed white and waiting in the poor barrio, surrounded by earthquake flattened Managua, on the edge of the lake, during an economic and military war being waged by the U.S..

### SHAME

The home of the young woman in the white wedding dress is a castle compared to the next "home" - a square box made of scraps of wood and tin, with a small entrance way that is a "door". There are no windows. There is no yard, protected from the sun, to be swept for brides to stand in. In this box, a very young and defeated woman lives, so very old in her ragged clothes. Five or so barefoot children run in and out and around.

I look at her, as I stroll by. Her eyes seek the ground. She had learned to turn her head and eyes in shame. I walk by, wondering what is the shame here?

### Honduras, December 1989

#### PLANE FLIGHTS

I leave Nicaragua, and fly to Honduras. The In-Flight Magazine encourages tourism, with pictures of white bikini clad women.

### Costa Rica, December 20, 1989

#### CHRISTMAS IN PANAMA

As I walk from my apartment, I overhear an English news service on cable T.V., which was strange, at 9 a.m. I poke my head in my neighbour's apartment and find friends crowded around the television, watching the U.S. Air Force bomb the minuscule nation of Panama. My neighbour, a Costa Rican woman from apartment three, cries out with glee: "Excellent, this is what they should have done in Nicaragua a long time ago". A young man from Panama, apartment nine, says: "General Noriega had this coming to him for a long time". Someone else says: "Now they're going to kick them all out of there". A traveller from the U.K. agrees: "Bloody right".

Something inside of me dies, standing there, with my friends. I work with Panamanians. I know Panamanians. I leave my friend's apartment and walk to the office. This invasion will create a lot of work for human rights commissions.

#### THE PRESS REPORTS ON "OPERATION JUST CAUSE"

On the U.S. newscasts I listen to the newscaster's indignant voice. You might have thought Panama was invading the U.S., rather than the U.S. Air Force air-bombing civilians, ... but this is not reported.

The U.S. calls this invasion the "Just Cause", in the name of democracy and freedom, and in the name of capturing Noriega. Noriega is an accused drug dealer who was on the CIA payroll through the 1970s and most of the 1980s, and who worked closely with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency through the 1980s ... but this is not reported.

When President Bush worked with the CIA, he used to have breakfast with General Noriega, and discuss how Panama



could help with the U.S.'s illegal war against the Nicaraguan government and its people, that also is in the name of "freedom" and "democracy", ... but these breakfast discussions are not reported now.

So I sit here writing in my diary as American F-117 Stealth Bombers and Apache Attack helicopters drop 2000-pound bombs - Christmas presents for Panamanians from the weapons producers and the U.S. The Pentagon states, and the New York Times reports, that the Air Force is using computer-guided 'smart bombs' and there is minimal "collateral damage".

Collateral damage means killing of civilians, and destruction of civilian homes and buildings.

Christmas is not celebrated this year. We spend two weeks following the invasion reporting on the invasion. As many as 1000 people, mostly civilians, have been murdered from the air. It isn't hard to report on - the invasion has created lots of human rights work for us. The problem is not the reporting but getting reported. No one in North America, sitting down to Turkey dinner, wants to hear of this massacre.

**Panama, January 20, 1990**

### **MY FIRST TRIP TO PANAMA**

Today, I travelled by bus south-east, through Costa Rican mountains and lowlands, to Panama, with a fact-finding delegation. For the next ten days we will investigate and report on the aftermath of the U.S. invasion called "Operation Just Cause".

### **LAW AND ORDER**

9 p.m., first night in Panama City, we leave our hotel to buy some food. Bedlam and violence on the streets of invaded Panama. Thousands of people crowd the down-town streets.

Screams pierce the tension in the air. We swing around this way - a woman is robbed. We swing around that way - a man with a pistol runs off. Two white North Americans, conspicuous on the destroyed streets of the city that the Army from the north had recently bombed, we are careful.

Men with pistols everywhere. People are running and shouting, dodging piles of glass and garbage, ducking in doorways of looted stores, jumping over metal security gates hanging from their hinges. Another scream, another robbery, another pack of people trying to loot a store. A lone guard confronts the pack waving a gun in each hand. Frenzy. A man sprints in front of us with a pistol. We duck behind some overturned carts.

Suddenly, in the midst of this mad, violent carnival, a silence descends. We look up the street, where Panamanians are splitting off to the sides. Three U.S. marines, in full combat gear, fingers on the triggers of huge M-16 machine guns, that look bigger than their torsos, are walking in triangle-formation down the centre of the street. They exchange hand signals with one another.

We run down a sidestreet, around to the hotel, not waiting to see what law and order would be imposed that night, in the newly free and democratic Panama.

### **CHORRILLOS**

Nothing I had ever learned prepared me for what I saw when we arrived the next morning at Chorrillos, that used to be a poor, crowded and lively neighbourhood in downtown Panama City, close to the headquarters of the Panama Army. We saw what was left from the U.S. ground-air-naval attack. Half of the neighbourhood had been flattened. Fifteen city blocks - houses, churches, stores and warehouses - were "disappeared".



It looked like a land development project in the suburbs. Everywhere, U.S. soldiers driving army bulldozers and heavy equipment were busy at work, cleaning up the remains of buildings, burnt-out buses and cars.

"[They] were engaged in a military operation which had an amazingly self-explanatory name, a human enterprise which is seldom described in detail, whose name alone, when reported as news or history, gives many war enthusiasts a sort of post-coital satisfaction. It is, in the imagination of combat's fans, the divinely listless loveplay that follows the orgasm of victory. It is called "mopping-up". (Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse Five*)

#### A CIVILISED NATION APPLAUDS

I looked all around me and remembered that the Canadian government was one of the governments to openly support the U.S. 'just cause' invasion. Canada's first act, as a new member of the Organization of American States, was to support what the U.S. army was now mopping up before my eyes.

I walked through the hollow shell of a blackened and bombed residential apartment - 'el 24 de diciembre'. It had been a civilian target of Apache attack helicopters. Lots of "collateral" damage here, never reported on in the press. Death could be smelt in the elevator shafts and garbage drops of the 24th of December apartment buildings, where pajama-clad Panamanians had tried to hide from the flying 50 millimetre bullets that cut through three walls. Some of them couldn't hide in time, and were found dead, in the elevators and at the bottom of the shafts.

I met a 13-year-old boy poking around in the rubble, scrounging for anything that might be of value. He had lived on the fifth floor, up till the night of the invasion. His family had been their in beds, when the Apache helicopters attacked. He had seen them outside his window, firing on

his building. As we walked around, he stuck his hand in the holes in the walls of what used to be his apartment. He talked of his blown-out apartment, of his homeless family, of unemployment, of ...

#### THE BOMBING CONTINUES

I lay in bed last night in the home of a Panamanian friend, thinking about all the testimonies we had received, that never were reported in the news. I lay in bed last night and couldn't sleep too well. I couldn't sleep well any night that I was in Panama. One month after the invasion, the U.S. army was still dropping bombs, blasting all night long, reminding the Panamanians of the new law and order.

#### PEOPLE DISAPPEAR LIKE SMOKE

Survivors, wide-eyed, told us of seeing U.S. soldiers walking through the remains with what looked like scuba tanks on their backs. They were actually flame-throwers used to cremate the bodies there on the spot. No effort was made to identify the cadaver and let the family members know. A lawyer would say this practice was a violation of international humanitarian law.

"I've seen pretty people disappear like smoke". (Bob Dylan)

A Panamanian child told of the "laser gun" that was shot by the Apache attack helicopters, that came through the night, a direct red laser beam - "You heard it 'wiiin, wiiin, wiiin'", and then you saw it hit its target - "'puun, puun, puun', and the whole thing explodes", and more people disappear like smoke.



## THE CHILDREN OF WAR

We walked through another the city of Colon, through the burnt and blackened remains of a child-care centre. Drawings, toys and games -torn, trashed and melted- lay scattered. Walls blown in, windows blown out, glass shattered, ghosts and children's laughter scattered.

## WHY, WHAT, WHY?

We conduct a short interview with a poor family in a school gym converted into a refugee centre.

"Hi, we are a visiting human rights delegation ... Please tell us your story".

"Well they came ...".

"Who?"

"The U.S. troops, at 4 am, on the 20th, ... They ordered us out of the house, and fire bombed it to the ground".

"Why?"

"What?"

"Why?"

"We don't know why ... So here we are. We have nothing from our home. We lost all ... They give us rations here every two weeks. The rations last two or three days. We are a family of eight. There is no work".

And all of this was said with smiles. But in their eyes, confusion and pain. "Thank you for your testimony". We walk from the gym/refugee centre, through the hot and ransacked streets of Colon, to our air-conditioned van. Ten minutes to cool down before the next interview.

## THE COLON YACHT CLUB

We lunch at the Colon Yacht Club. U.S. soldiers sit nearby with Panamanian wives or friends, or with sergeants and colonels. At other tables, some Caribbean travellers sit, their cabin cruisers docked outside. Was the invaded country of Panama now a tourist attraction?

We lunch at the yacht club, where english is spoken. I feet white and english speaking. I walk through the dark and cool bar, where soldiers sip on beer and snuggle with Panamanian girlfriends. President Bush gives an interview on a TV newscast saying "there will be 1 billion dollars for the recovery of Panama".

## MAKE-WORK PROJECT

It came to me in a flash, in the cool of the dark bar, in the Colon Yacht Club, watching Persident Bush on the news - this was and is the perfect make-work project:

blow them up,

bomb them down,

fill the morgue,

dig deep the common graves,

and the result?

a perfect investment opportunity for new money.

And of course, it creates work for human rights commissions.

## HEY, ARE YA DOIN' THE CARRIBEAN?

Leaving, I hear one Caribbean traveller say to another: "Hey buddy, are ya doing the Caribbean?"

## WHAT IS A COMMON GRAVE?

A common grave is a deep hole dug in the ground where the victors place the loser's unidentified bodies. The victors then fill in the hole and deny its existence.

## DEAD PEOPLE LIE

When the lie, that these common graves don't exist, is accepted by all, then the 'truth' is that the families of the bodies in the holes become the liars, because, according to the 'truth', reported in the international press that comes from



New York and Washington, their lost ones simply don't and didn't exist. The common graves and the dead are disappeared. And besides, it was a just cause ...

### **JUST BECAUSE**

I write this rambling tale about the Just Cause invasion. Samantha, a member of the delegation, calls it the 'just because' invasion - just because Central America is in the "sphere of interest" of the U.S. ...

### **"THEY ARE KILLING MY HEART"**

I finish a 2nd or 4th rum and coke, and my mind tales off and loses its centre because the little Panamanian boy said to us "they are killing my heart".

### **THE DOG WHO NIPPED MY HAND**

Mercedes, a grandmother, talks about her daughter, a victim of the 'just cause' invasion. Mercedes' grandson - motherless - sits on her knee. While civilian deaths and common graves don't exist, according to the Pentagon and the press, Mercedes knows very well that her daughter was shot by U.S. troops. Mercedes and her husband continue to look for the body of their daughter which most likely they will never find. She now lies in a black and green body bag at the bottom of a common grave, somewhere.

As we leave Mercedes' house, her dog nipped my hand. Her husband says: "I'm sorry my dog bit your hand". I say: "I'm sorry about the war". He says, shaking his head slowly, staring at the ground or deep inside, "the massacre, the massacre".

"This book is so short and jumbled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say any-

thing or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds. ... Absolutely everyone in the city was supposed to be dead, regardless of what they were and that anybody that moved in it represented a flaw in the design". (Kurt Vonnegurt, *Slaughterhouse Five*).

### **IN SUPPORT OF THE INVASION**

After completing five days of interviewing victims of the invasion, I find myself having breakfast with my friend in the home of his wealthy Panamanian girlfriend - Patricia - who is in favour of the Just Cause invasion. We sip coffee, munch toast, look at a fruit plate, and talk about the invasion and all the civilians who were killed. We don't agree, but we have the luxury to disagree - we aren't the victims.

She calls in her maid - an indigenous woman - and asks her to tell me what had happened to her cousin. The maid stands away from the table and looks at the ground: "One night, he had been drinking, which he did a lot, and then he went out to drink some more and some U.S. soldiers shot him dead in the street. It was after curfew".

Silence.

Patricia asks "How did you and your family feel?". The maid, eyes on the ground, says: "He deserved it, and his family thinks that he deserved it as well". Patricia has made her point to me - that it was a Just Cause invasion. I don't say a thing, but I don't believe the maid. Later I have another thought about the maid's story and it is that if she was sincere, then how hateful it is, the propaganda, used and manipulated, such that a family and cousins will blame their brother and son because he went out in the streets of his country, drunk or not, and got shot by invading and occupying forces.



"We killed all those people. Shouldn't we do or say something, anything?". (Chaim Potok, *The Book of Lights*)

**January 31, 1990**

### **CRIMES, GREAT AND SMALL**

We enter a cemetery to photograph recently dug graves, whose headstones read 'In Memory, December 20, 1989'. The cemetery borders one side of the disappeared neighbourhood of Chorrillos.

In broad daylight, at the entrance, three 13 or 14-year old boys, approach our group with a stick, and a small knife. I thought it was a joke and didn't have time to get scared before they robbed us and ran off with Samantha's camera.

It is illegal for these boys to rob, it is immoral, ... but is it not illegal to blockade a small dependent country for over two years, creating unemployment, shortage, poverty and crime, and then invade and drop death and destruction from the air, and deny that the dead ever existed?

### **EQUALITY OF TREATMENT**

I am reminded of a conversation I had with a North American friend just before coming to Panama. He was travelling through Central America and was mad because some guy on the street had given him a low black market exchange rate for his U.S. dollars. "That guy treated me that way just because I was a foreigner. I expect to be treated equally ...".

Yet, why do we expect equal treatment? We don't treat other nations and their people equally. The systems of wealth between and inside nations are not equal. Is it so outrageous that someone will try to rip you off by giving you a lower ex-

change rate for your U.S. dollar - the very dollar that is helping render the local currency useless? Is it so outrageous that, going into a cemetery in Panama after an invasion, three young boys might rob your camera?

**February 1, 1990**

### **LET THE KIDS PLAY**

We are busing from Panama, heading north-west towards Costa Rica. I sit at the back of an empty bus, window wide open, wind blowing away 10 days of testimonies from the survivors of a massacre.

We cross a river, and I see four or five kids playing in the river below. I am happy, glancing at the kids, because they are happy, hooting and hollering, and because they are not from Chorrillos.

### **"BE WITNESS"**

I drive from the invasion/massacre, tired of the writing of this tale. I remember some ideas of Elie Wiesel:

'Be witness.

Do not let them turn deaths into fiction, blown-out houses and day-care centres into fantasy, mutilated people into imagination.

At a minimum, tell this tale. Remember, the massacre was much worse than the telling of it. The memory must live, for the sake of the dead ...'.

"To allow any of them to pass into the comfort of forgetting would be utterly obscene". (Thornton, *Imagining Argentina*)

The bus drives on, heading towards the mountains in north-western Panama. Some songs are singing: "My heart feels like a blister for doing what I do". (Leonard Cohen).



"Sometimes I feel I can't even sing. I am very scared for this world, I am very scared for me". (REM)

**Costa Rica, February 2, 1990**

### **LIFE IN A JAIL**

Everywhere in South Africa today they are dancing in the streets. Maybe they should dance everywhere in the world. It is a day to dance, because it is the day that Nelson Mandela was freed, after 27 years in jail. Nelson said: "I fought against white domination. I fought against black domination. I have fought for a democratic and free society, wherein all live in harmony with equal opportunities". For this they put him in jail for 27 years, almost my whole life.

### **COMPLICITY**

I sit in the Central Plaza of San Jose, drinking coffee, feeling calm. A North American traveller comes strolling through the Plaza, checking out the local artisanry. He wears a "U.S. Operation Just Cause" t-shirt, glorifying the U.S. invasion of Panama. I am no longer calm. Rage builds. I hear again the little boy say "they are killing my heart". I would like to force this carefree traveller to go to the disappeared barrio of Chorrillo and dig up the common graves, see the cadavers dumped there - the ones that he helped to bury.

### **URGENT ACTIONS**

Thursday night in the CODEHUCA office, working on the word processor. Today, like so many days, a fax comes to our offices.

Somewhere in Central America, Dr Valenzuela was stopped and pulled from her car. She was beaten, her hair pulled. The five armed men, dressed in civilian clothes, pushed her into one of those jeeps that have no licence plates, that have darkened windows.

We write the information down and immediately send urgent actions to groups and concerned persons and organizations in North America and Europe. Sometimes it seems pretty futile. It is doubtful that she'll reappear, unless they reappear her, like the mutilated and dead Guatemalan students.

**February 26, 1990**

### **MONEY, GUNS AND IDEOLOGY**

The Sandinistas lost the elections to the United Nicaraguan Opposition after ten years of U.S. economic and military aggression. No civilized country of the western world said anything of real importance during the whole time that the U.S. were putting Nicaraguans in graves.

**February 28, 1990**

### **THE BACKYARD OF THE U.S.**

Professor Taylor is quoted in the New York Times (28/02/90): "I can't imagine anyone else's lap that Nicaragua will fall on except ours". He refers to the fact that its economy and social infrastructure are in shambles. Neither he nor the press refer to how the U.S. economically squeezed this poor and dependent country and trained and equipped the Contras to fight the government and people of Nicaragua.

I am not calm. I wish I could force Professor Taylor to go and live in one of the innumerable barrios of poverty in Nicaragua, created in large part by U.S. policies and actions. I would like him to really live there, for a life-time of poverty, and then think about falling into someone's lap.

**Nicaragua, March, 1990**

### **FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY**



I travel in a bus to Nicaragua, the country the newspapers now call "democratic". After the invasion of Panama, I read in the news that Panama is now "free".

### "THE EARTH IS A SATELLITE OF THE MOON"

"Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1. Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 3 cost more than Apollo 2. Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1. Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 4 cost more than Apollo 3. Apollo 3 cost more than Apollo 2. Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1.

Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 8 cost a fortune, but no one minded because the astronauts were Protestant. They read the Bible from the moon, astounding and delighting every Christian, and on their return Pope Paul VI gave them his blessing.

Apollo 9 costs more than all these put together, including Apollo 1, which cost plenty.

The great-grandparents of the people of Acahualinca were less hungry than the grandparents.

The great-grandparents died of hunger.

The grandparents of the people of Acahualinca were less hungry than the parents. The grandparents died of hunger.

The parents of the people of Acahualinca were less hungry than the children of the people there. The parents died of hunger.

The people of Acahualinca are less hungry than the children of the people there.

The children of the people of Acahualinca are not born to be hungry. They hunger to be born, only to die of hunger.

Blessed are the poor, for, because of them, we send rockets to the moon". (poem by Leonel Rugama, a Nicaraguan man killed fighting the Somoza family regime, in 1978)

As I bus to Managua, I see the 'people of Acahualinca', those who, during the 1980s, worked for the first time with a government to get rid of the systems of violence and hunger; that was before the U.S. blockade and Contras brought back the bullets and hunger they die of, while "Challenger" rockets keep flying to the moon.

### MEN-OF-ONE-LEG IN SILENCE

I walk on the streets of Managua, still from the sounds of war, because the Sandinistas lost the elections. I hate the U.S. and the Contras for starting and carrying out this ten year war. I am glad that they have stopped it now.

In doorways, sitting in the shade of trees, waiting in the park, hobbling out along the dusty road, I see, all over town, the men of-one-leg. The war is over and now the men of-one-leg, sad-eyed statistics of the U.S. struggle for freedom, wait in the shade.

Wars never end for the victims.

Coffins, shallow graves, wounds and scars, are seen in the eyes of Nicaragua people all over the streets of Managua. I wonder, I walk and wonder what Managua would've looked like if the U.S. hadn't starved and killed Nicaraguans for 10 years. Then I wonder why I wonder - it doesn't help much.

### IN THE SHADOWS

U.S. Vice-President Dan Quayle gives a speech, about the new democracy in Nicaragua: 'The Contras won't demobilize. They will remain armed until democracy is at work'. I look again to the shadows, where there is little love, filled with men-of-one-leg, mothers looking for their disappeared, and orphaned children, all waiting for Quayle and the U.S. to unilaterally decide that "democracy" is at work, and to stop supporting the Contras.



## SUFFERING

Dr. Rieux: "When I entered this profession (medicine), I did it 'abstractedly', so to speak; because I had a desire for it, because it meant a career like another, one that young men often aspire to. ... And then I had to see people die. Have you ever heard a woman scream "Never" with her last gasp? Well, I have. And then I saw I could never get hardened to it. I was young then and I was outraged by the whole scheme of things, or so I thought... Only, I've never managed to get used to seeing people die. That's all I know".

Tarrou nodded. "Yes, but your victories will never be lasting; that's all".

Rieux's face darkened. "Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the struggle".

"No reason, I agree. Only, I now can picture what this plague must mean for you".

"Yes. A never ending defeat".

Tarrou, who was staring at the floor, suddenly said: "Who taught you all this doctor?".

The reply came promptly: "Suffering". (Albert Camus, *The Plague*)

## TRIBUTE TO THE ARMS MANUFACTURERS

I want to thank the arms merchants, the masters of war, who build guns and bullets and hoard their profits as the fast bullets fly, for being so greedy, for trading weaponry on the international stock exchange, in exchange for lives and misery, for a dollar, a Mercedes Benz, an air-conditioned Cherokee Jeep, two pairs of Nikes, a banana-split. All of this I think of, walking on the streets of Managua.

## THE ABSENT ONES

Pablo Milanes, a Cuban musician, sings a song about the 'absent ones' throughout the Americas, the hundreds of thousands of disappeared and assassinated.

Sister Maureen was from the U.S. She hated the masters of war. She came to work in Nicaragua. On New Year's Day, 1990, she was killed, blown up by Contras in the jeep she was travelling in. Shortly before her death, she wrote:

"What matters most ... is to walk with the poor, to suffer with them, to struggle with them, to bring about a better tomorrow. ... Martyrdom [is] being with the poor - accepting the risks of that stance. I count each day of Ministry of these people as a blessing".

Sister Maureen knew that it was dangerous to work with the poor, which is to try and change economic and legal systems that distribute wealth and poverty. She prophesied "I believe I may die one day soon".

## Costa Rica, March, 1990

### THE DISCORDANCE

In San Jose, at the Holiday Inn, I attend a meeting with a United Nations official. Here, everything works - cold and hot water, flush toilets and electricity. The food is plentiful and there are porters galore to carry bags. Here, the guests wait to be served in their dinner loafers. Here, no one talks of Sister Maureen, nor of walking with the poor. I can't see into the hearts of the people I meet here. Their eyes are kind and confident.

In Nicaragua, the people don't lounge around in loafers or Nikes, don't get served and many don't have water, electricity or much food. I can't see into the hearts of the people. But sometimes, speaking with them, I see, in their eyes, stories and tales of the absent ones.



## THE CHILDREN OF WAR

We walked through another the city of Colon, through the burnt and blackened remains of a child-care centre. Drawings, toys and games -torn, trashed and melted- lay scattered. Walls blown in, windows blown out, glass shattered, ghosts and children's laughter scattered.

## WHY, WHAT, WHY?

We conduct a short interview with a poor family in a school gym converted into a refugee centre.

"Hi, we are a visiting human rights delegation ... Please tell us your story".

"Well they came ...".

"Who?"

"The U.S. troops, at 4 am, on the 20th, ... They ordered us out of the house, and fire bombed it to the ground".

"Why?"

"What?"

"Why?"

"We don't know why ... So here we are. We have nothing from our home. We lost all ... They give us rations here every two weeks. The rations last two or three days. We are a family of eight. There is no work".

And all of this was said with smiles. But in their eyes, confusion and pain. "Thank you for your testimony". We walk from the gym/refugee centre, through the hot and ransacked streets of Colon, to our air-conditioned van. Ten minutes to cool down before the next interview.

## THE COLON YACHT CLUB

We lunch at the Colon Yacht Club. U.S. soldiers sit nearby with Panamanian wives or friends, or with sergeants and colonels. At other tables, some Caribbean travellers sit, their cabin cruisers docked outside. Was the invaded country of Panama now a tourist attraction?

We lunch at the yacht club, where english is spoken. I feet white and english speaking. I walk through the dark and cool bar, where soldiers sip on beer and snuggle with Panamanian girlfriends. President Bush gives an interview on a TV newscast saying "there will be 1 billion dollars for the recovery of Panama".

## MAKE-WORK PROJECT

It came to me in a flash, in the cool of the dark bar, in the Colon Yacht Club, watching Persident Bush on the news - this was and is the perfect make-work project:

blow them up,

bomb them down,

fill the morgue,

dig deep the common graves,

and the result?

a perfect investment opportunity for new money.

And of course, it creates work for human rights commissions.

## HEY, ARE YA DOIN' THE CARRIBEAN?

Leaving, I hear one Caribbean traveller say to another: "Hey buddy, are ya doing the Caribbean?"

## WHAT IS A COMMON GRAVE?

A common grave is a deep hole dug in the ground where the victors place the loser's unidentified bodies. The victors then fill in the hole and deny its existence.

## DEAD PEOPLE LIE

When the lie, that these common graves don't exist, is accepted by all, then the 'truth' is that the families of the bodies in the holes become the liars, because, according to the 'truth', reported in the international press that comes from



New York and Washington, their lost ones simply don't and didn't exist. The common graves and the dead are disappeared. And besides, it was a just cause ...

### **JUST BECAUSE**

I write this rambling tale about the Just Cause invasion. Samantha, a member of the delegation, calls it the 'just because' invasion - just because Central America is in the "sphere of interest" of the U.S. ...

### **"THEY ARE KILLING MY HEART"**

I finish a 2nd or 4th rum and coke, and my mind tales off and loses its centre because the little Panamanian boy said to us "they are killing my heart".

### **THE DOG WHO NIPPED MY HAND**

Mercedes, a grandmother, talks about her daughter, a victim of the 'just cause' invasion. Mercedes' grandson - motherless - sits on her knee. While civilian deaths and common graves don't exist, according to the Pentagon and the press, Mercedes knows very well that her daughter was shot by U.S. troops. Mercedes and her husband continue to look for the body of their daughter which most likely they will never find. She now lies in a black and green body bag at the bottom of a common grave, somewhere.

As we leave Mercedes' house, her dog nipped my hand. Her husband says: "I'm sorry my dog bit your hand". I say: "I'm sorry about the war". He says, shaking his head slowly, staring at the ground or deep inside, "the massacre, the massacre".

"This book is so short and jumbled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say any-

thing or want anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds. ... Absolutely everyone in the city was supposed to be dead, regardless of what they were and that anybody that moved in it represented a flaw in the design". (Kurt Vonnegurt, *Slaughterhouse Five*).

### **IN SUPPORT OF THE INVASION**

After completing five days of interviewing victims of the invasion, I find myself having breakfast with my friend in the home of his wealthy Panamanian girlfriend - Patricia - who is in favour of the Just Cause invasion. We sip coffee, munch toast, look at a fruit plate, and talk about the invasion and all the civilians who were killed. We don't agree, but we have the luxury to disagree - we aren't the victims.

She calls in her maid - an indigenous woman - and asks her to tell me what had happened to her cousin. The maid stands away from the table and looks at the ground: "One night, he had been drinking, which he did a lot, and then he went out to drink some more and some U.S. soldiers shot him dead in the street. It was after curfew".

Silence.

Patricia asks "How did you and your family feel?". The maid, eyes on the ground, says: "He deserved it, and his family thinks that he deserved it as well". Patricia has made her point to me - that it was a Just Cause invasion. I don't say a thing, but I don't believe the maid. Later I have another thought about the maid's story and it is that if she was sincere, then how hateful it is, the propaganda, used and manipulated, such that a family and cousins will blame their brother and son because he got shot in the streets of his country, drunk or not, and got shot by invading and occupying forces.



"We killed all those people. Shouldn't we do or say something, anything?". (Chaim Potok, *The Book of Lights*)

January 31, 1990

### CRIMES, GREAT AND SMALL

We enter a cemetery to photograph recently dug graves, whose headstones read 'In Memory, December 20, 1989'. The cemetery borders one side of the disappeared neighbourhood of Chorrillos.

In broad daylight, at the entrance, three 13 or 14-year old boys, approach our group with a stick, and a small knife. I thought it was a joke and didn't have time to get scared before they robbed us and ran off with Samantha's camera.

It is illegal for these boys to rob, it is immoral, ... but is it not illegal to blockade a small dependent country for over two years, creating unemployment, shortage, poverty and crime, and then invade and drop death and destruction from the air, and deny that the dead ever existed?

### EQUALITY OF TREATMENT

I am reminded of a conversation I had with a North American friend just before coming to Panama. He was travelling through Central America and was mad because some guy on the street had given him a low black market exchange rate for his U.S. dollars. "That guy treated me that way just because I was a foreigner. I expect to be treated equally ...".

Yet, why do we expect equal treatment? We don't treat other nations and their people equally. The systems of wealth between and inside nations are not equal. Is it so outrageous that someone will try to rip you off by giving you a lower ex-

change rate for your U.S. dollar - the very dollar that is helping render the local currency useless? Is it so outrageous that, going into a cemetery in Panama after an invasion, three young boys might rob your camera?

February 1, 1990

### LET THE KIDS PLAY

We are busing from Panama, heading north-west towards Costa Rica. I sit at the back of an empty bus, window wide open, wind blowing away 10 days of testimonies from the survivors of a massacre.

We cross a river, and I see four or five kids playing in the river below. I am happy, glancing at the kids, because they are happy, hooting and hollering, and because they are not from Chorrillos.

### "BE WITNESS"

I drive from the invasion/massacre, tired of the writing of this tale. I remember some ideas of Elie Wiesel:

'Be witness.

Do not let them turn deaths into fiction,  
blown-out houses and day-care centres into fantasy,  
mutilated people into imagination.

At a minimum, tell this tale. Remember, the massacre was much worse than the telling of it. The memory must live, for the sake of the dead ...'.

"To allow any of them to pass into the comfort of forgetting would be utterly obscene". (Thornton, *Imagining Argentina*)

The bus drives on, heading towards the mountains in north-western Panama. Some songs are singing: "My heart feels like a blister for doing what I do". (Leonard Cohen).



"Sometimes I feel I can't even sing. I am very scared for this world, I am very scared for me". (REM)

**Costa Rica, February 2, 1990**

### **LIFE IN A JAIL**

Everywhere in South Africa today they are dancing in the streets. Maybe they should dance everywhere in the world. It is a day to dance, because it is the day that Nelson Mandela was freed, after 27 years in jail. Nelson said: "I fought against white domination. I fought against black domination. I have fought for a democratic and free society, wherein all live in harmony with equal opportunities". For this they put him in jail for 27 years, almost my whole life.

### **COMPLICITY**

I sit in the Central Plaza of San Jose, drinking coffee, feeling calm. A North American traveller comes strolling through the Plaza, checking out the local artisanry. He wears a "U.S. Operation Just Cause" t-shirt, glorifying the U.S. invasion of Panama. I am no longer calm. Rage builds. I hear again the little boy say "they are killing my heart". I would like to force this carefree traveller to go to the disappeared barrio of Chorrillo and dig up the common graves, see the cadavers dumped there - the ones that he helped to bury.

### **URGENT ACTIONS**

Thursday night in the CODEHUCA office, working on the word processor. Today, like so many days, a fax comes to our offices.

Somewhere in Central America, Dr Valenzuela was stopped and pulled from her car. She was beaten, her hair pulled. The five armed men, dressed in civilian clothes, pushed her into one of those jeeps that have no licence plates, that have darkened windows.

We write the information down and immediately send urgent actions to groups and concerned persons and organizations in North America and Europe. Sometimes it seems pretty futile. It is doubtful that she'll reappear, unless they reappear her, like the mutilated and dead Guatemalan students.

**February 26, 1990**

### **MONEY, GUNS AND IDEOLOGY**

The Sandinistas lost the elections to the United Nicaraguan Opposition after ten years of U.S. economic and military aggression. No civilized country of the western world said anything of real importance during the whole time that the U.S. were putting Nicaraguans in graves.

**February 28, 1990**

### **THE BACKYARD OF THE U.S.**

Professor Taylor is quoted in the New York Times (28/02/90): "I can't imagine anyone else's lap that Nicaragua will fall on except ours". He refers to the fact that its economy and social infrastructure are in shambles. Neither he nor the press refer to how the U.S. economically squeezed this poor and dependent country and trained and equipped the Contras to fight the government and people of Nicaragua.

I am not calm. I wish I could force Professor Taylor to go and live in one of the innumerable barrios of poverty in Nicaragua, created in large part by U.S. policies and actions. I would like him to really live there, for a life-time of poverty, and then think about falling into someone's lap.

**Nicaragua, March, 1990**

### **FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY**



I travel in a bus to Nicaragua, the country the newspapers now call "democratic". After the invasion of Panama, I read in the news that Panama is now "free".

### **"THE EARTH IS A SATELLITE OF THE MOON"**

"Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1. Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 3 cost more than Apollo 2. Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1. Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 4 cost more than Apollo 3. Apollo 3 cost more than Apollo 2. Apollo 2 cost more than Apollo 1.

Apollo 1 cost plenty.

Apollo 8 cost a fortune, but no one minded because the astronauts were Protestant. They read the Bible from the moon, astounding and delighting every Christian, and on their return Pope Paul VI gave them his blessing.

Apollo 9 costs more than all these put together, including Apollo 1, which cost plenty.

The great-grandparents of the people of Acahualinca were less hungry than the grandparents.

The great-grandparents died of hunger.

The grandparents of the people of Acahualinca were less hungry than the parents. The grandparents died of hunger.

The parents of the people of Acahualinca were less hungry than the children of the people there. The parents died of hunger.

The people of Acahualinca are less hungry than the children of the people there.

The children of the people of Acahualinca are not born to be hungry. They hunger to be born, only to die of hunger.

Blessed are the poor, for, because of them, we send rockets to the moon". (poem by Leonel Rugama, a Nicaraguan man killed fighting the Somoza family regime, in 1978)

As I bus to Managua, I see the 'people of Acahualinca', those who, during the 1980s, worked for the first time with a government to get rid of the systems of violence and hunger; that was before the U.S. blockade and Contras brought back the bullets and hunger they die of, while "Challenger" rockets keep flying to the moon.

### **MEN-OF-ONE-LEG IN SILENCE**

I walk on the streets of Managua, still from the sounds of war, because the Sandinistas lost the elections. I hate the U.S. and the Contras for starting and carrying out this ten year war. I am glad that they have stopped it now.

In doorways, sitting in the shade of trees, waiting in the park, hobbling out along the dusty road, I see, all over town, the men of-one-leg. The war is over and now the men of-one-leg, sad-eyed statistics of the U.S. struggle for freedom, wait in the shade.

Wars never end for the victims.

Coffins, shallow graves, wounds and scars, are seen in the eyes of Nicaragua people all over the streets of Managua. I wonder, I walk and wonder what Managua would've looked like if the U.S. hadn't starved and killed Nicaraguans for 10 years. Then I wonder why I wonder - it doesn't help much.

### **IN THE SHADOWS**

U.S. Vice-President Dan Quayle gives a speech, about the new democracy in Nicaragua: 'The Contras won't demobilize. They will remain armed until democracy is at work'. I look again to the shadows, where there is little love, filled with men-of-one-leg, mothers looking for their disappeared, and orphaned children, all waiting for Quayle and the U.S. to unilaterally decide that "democracy" is at work, and to stop supporting the Contras.



## SUFFERING

Dr. Rieux: "When I entered this profession (medicine), I did it 'abstractedly', so to speak; because I had a desire for it, because it meant a career like another, one that young men often aspire to. ... And then I had to see people die. Have you ever heard a woman scream "Never" with her last gasp? Well, I have. And then I saw I could never get hardened to it. I was young then and I was outraged by the whole scheme of things, or so I thought... Only, I've never managed to get used to seeing people die. That's all I know".

Tarrou nodded. "Yes, but your victories will never be lasting; that's all".

Rieux's face darkened. "Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the struggle".

"No reason, I agree. Only, I now can picture what this plague must mean for you".

"Yes. A never ending defeat".

Tarrou, who was staring at the floor, suddenly said: "Who taught you all this doctor?".

The reply came promptly: "Suffering". (Albert Camus, *The Plague*)

## TRIBUTE TO THE ARMS MANUFACTURERS

I want to thank the arms merchants, the masters of war, who build guns and bullets and horde their profits as the fast bullets fly, for being so greedy, for trading weaponry on the international stock exchange, in exchange for lives and misery, for a dollar, a Mercedes Benz, an air-conditioned Cherokee Jeep, two pairs of Nikes, a banana-split. All of this I think of, walking on the streets of Managua.

## THE ABSENT ONES

Pablo Milanés, a Cuban musician, sings a song about the 'absent ones' throughout the Americas, the hundreds of thousands of disappeared and assassinated.

Sister Maureen was from the U.S. She hated the masters of war. She came to work in Nicaragua. On New Year's Day, 1990, she was killed, blown up by Contras in the jeep she was travelling in. Shortly before her death, she wrote:

"What matters most ... is to walk with the poor, to suffer with them, to struggle with them, to bring about a better tomorrow. ... Martyrdom [is] being with the poor - accepting the risks of that stance. I count each day of Ministry of these people as a blessing".

Sister Maureen knew that it was dangerous to work with the poor, which is to try and change economic and legal systems that distribute wealth and poverty. She prophesied "I believe I may die one day soon".

## Costa Rica, March, 1990

### THE DISCORDANCE

In San Jose, at the Holiday Inn, I attend a meeting with a United Nations official. Here, everything works - cold and hot water, flush toilets and electricity. The food is plentiful and there are porters galore to carry bags. Here, the guests wait to be served in their dinner loafers. Here, no one talks of Sister Maureen, nor of walking with the poor. I can't see into the hearts of the people I meet here. Their eyes are kind and confident.

In Nicaragua, the people don't lounge around in loafers or Nikes, don't get served and many don't have water, electricity or much food. I can't see into the hearts of the people. But sometimes, speaking with them, I see, in their eyes, stories and tales of the absent ones.



"I find myself between two beliefs - the belief that life should be better than it is and the belief that when it appears better it is really worse". (Graham Greene, *Journey Without a Map*)

### THE EMPTINESS, RAGE AND TEARS OF HUMAN RIGHTS WORKERS

I walked with Melanio through the bombed and disappeared barrio of Chorrillos in Panama. He pointed to an empty space where his house used to be. His eyes were empty, like a vacant gravel parking lot.

Ramon talked about how death squads murdered his best friend Miguel Angel, and I heard the rage in Ramon's voice as he explained how he was accused of Miguel's murder. (Miguel Angel Pavon, former Vice-President of the Honduran Human Rights Commission, was murdered by death squads in 1989 while testifying before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights).

I saw tears in Ana's eyes when she said that upon going back to Guatemala, for the first time in ten years, her family told her not to visit them - they were too scared.

### MAN'S WORLD

Florencia came to work today with the mark of her ex-husband's fist circling her blue eye. Women's issues are not human rights violations. The doctor told her it was "nothing".

### THE STRUGGLE

"Your job, when you leave here -as it was the job of educated women before you- is to change the world,

nothing less or easier than that". (Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mother's Gardens*)

### FREE MARKET POLICY

Nicaragua is democratic and has a free market economy again. The U.S.-backed 'freedom fighters' left 30,000 dead and a country in ruins. These are investment costs, invisible to the investor. Panama is democratic and open to foreign investment again. The civilians killed by the U.S. invasion are investment costs, invisible to the investor. Now President Bush, the press, and much of the 'civilized' world turn their attention to Cuba. Idealogues make speeches against communism and the press type along to the beat. The fact that Cuba, according to the United Nations, has the highest social and economic standards in the Americas is not to be factored into the free market equation. The actual living conditions of people are not factors in the struggle for freedom and democracy and, of course, free markets.

### FREE CHOICE

I have been brought up with free choice, or that is to say that I have been brought up with the material ability, the money to be able to live where I want, to work where I want, to be able to move around, etc. In Central America free choice often means slow death, or deadly survival.

### Guatemala, April 18, 1990

With a delegation, I arrive in Guatemala to undertake a ten day investigation into the human rights situation ...

"Amidst so much provoked death, to be able to provoke life". (*Las Leyes Clandestinas*, Maria Suarez)



... and I think of the challenge of Guatemalans, to try and provoke life in this the most repressive of all Latin American countries.

### A CHILDREN'S STORY

I walk the streets of Guatemala and see the boys of the shaking barefeet, sniffing glue, a brief respite from a life of cold cement beds and police beatings. The police catch street kids, pour glue on their heads, beat them up, sometimes murder them and dump their bodies in garbage dumps and abandoned fields.

Sniffing glue is a brief respite that speeds up their (almost) pre-ordained destruction. What do I do for respite?

### HOW TO SLEEP ON THE STREET

Street kids sleep in curled positions, the head of each person on the lap or against the stomach of the next. It is warmer this way.

### CHILDREN AND ANIMALS' RIGHTS

"Auctioneer Robert Woolley paid \$1000 outbidding 75 other pet lovers for "A Dog's Dream Birthday Party" at an auction this week ... "My dog's birthday is today. I had to buy it," Mr Woolley said, referring to Jeb, a year-old labrador and springer spaniel mix he adopted at a New Jersey animal shelter. Jeb's present includes three hours of piano music performed by the Hank Lane Orchestra, four hours of fitness training, a lavish grooming session complete with teeth-cleaning and terry-cloth bathrobe from Plaza Hotel". (*Globe and Mail*)

Guatemala, April 19, 1990

### KEEP THE CHANGE

I walk home along streets of dirt and stone. I stop to have a coffee and bun in a small garage-like eatery. When I try to pay the 20 cent bill, the woman at the cash register has no change for my one quetzal note, worth 25 cents. She has no money in the register. Was I really the only customer? The bun and coffee were worth a quarter of that, 6 cents. I told her to keep the change.

"Only at first glance is it paradoxical that people who rebel are those that suffer the least. Even outside the camps, struggles are rarely waged by lupenproletariat. People in rags do not revolt". (Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*)

### A MUM'S FIGHT FOR LIFE

Through the misty mountains of El Quiche, we go to visit CERJ, the Committee of Ethnic Communities - a civic organization that struggles for the rights of indigenous people in Guatemala. Many members of CERJ have been murdered by death squads and soldiers.

At the entrance of every town there are men and boys with old wooden shotguns, obliged by the army to do 'voluntary' civil defence service, "guarding against communists". Sometimes these 'volunteers' must kill their own brothers and sisters. If they refuse, they themselves are often tortured and killed by the soldiers.

I imagine a mum and her kids. She fights all her life to feed her children for them to have a life all together. When the boys are 17-years-old, full of their mum's life, full of their own life, the army comes, drags them away, teaches them to hate and to shoot and kill - kill life that their mums had given them.



### **A MAN TOLD US OF HIS FAMILY**

In Chalatenango, we speak with a man who didn't stop smiling. He talked of eight persons he knew who were disappeared some years ago. Then he told us that the eight persons were his brothers and sisters. There was no smile in his eyes.

### **A FAMILY RENDERED SILENT**

Maria is dead. Her husband Luis is mute. Her son Juan is in hiding. Under the alter of the National Security Doctrine, soldiers killed Maria because she joined CERJ and the Mutual Support Group -GAM. Juan wouldn't join the civil defence patrols and now hides. Luis tried to save his wife's life, was hit by stray bullets, and now he can't talk.

The unofficial religion of Guatemala is the NSD - the National Security Doctrine. Of course this is not a real religion, but it is true that disappearing and killing people in opposition is religiously practiced in Guatemala.

### **DISAPPEARING THE DEAD**

Some years ago, my friend Mike travelled to a graveyard in the province of Nebaj, Guatemala, where many headstones had the same death-dates, silent testimony of the hundreds of massacres that took place in the early and mid-1980s. Now, returning with a video camera, Mike finds that all the death dates had been blackened out. According to the military and the government the dead don't exist, and they never have.

### **GUINNESS BOOK OF RECORDS**

Guatemala is number one. It has more disappeared people than any other country in the whole world, though I haven't seen this written in the Guinness book of records.

### **THE DISCORDANCE**

In a bar in Guatemala City, I meet two sisters from Nicaragua, one with long blond hair who wears plenty of jewelry. The two told how they had fled the "communist" regime in Nicaragua, and now look to emigrate to Canada. The blond sister told me four times that she was "going to Canada to earn lots of money".

I leave the bar, thinking about two worlds, inside nations and between nations, inside bars and sleeping on the streets. I return to the hotel to transcribe testimonies of victims of human rights violations that I have interviewed and recorded today. I can't tie this tale of two worlds comfortably together with a succinct wrap-up phrase. I can't do this because the two worlds are already tied tightly together, and there is nothing succinct about the disparity and the discordance.

"There will always be a gulf between you and a (poor) person -you choose freely a condition (over which the poor have no choice) ...". "That is true", said Jean, "but I shall have done everything I could". (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*)

### **MAGIC POTIONS AND GOD IN THE PLAZA**

Mid-morning on a week-day, in a plaza in Guatemala City. A man in dark glasses sells a strange liquid in plastic green bottles. The dark-glasses-man tells the gathered men the liquid removes aches and pains and "is used in Europe and the U.S.". He describes those pains in a part of the head called "sin luz"- without light! A man steps forward and buys two bottles.

On the other side of the plaza, a man sitting on a small stool delights a crowd with a big, long snake that "will only bite a wife who cheats on her husband". The men look on. In another corner of the plaza, men gather around the evangelical



gospel workers who are singing of God, how to get closer to Him - bliss and ecstasy.

I wonder how many poor men in Guatemala will find work and a livelihood through God and magic potions.

### THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

We interview two student activists. Julio is a 17-year-old high school student with bird-like eyes that dart back and forth when he speaks. Recently, Julio's photo appeared in the newspapers. It was taken at a high school students' rally condemning recent government cut-backs in education spending. Now, his name is on a death list. Two nights before, he arrived home and saw two trucks without licence plates, with darkened windows, parked in front of his house. He turned and walked away.

Two weeks before, a school friend of his was pulled inside a similar truck by armed men in civilian clothes. The men showed Julio's friend photos of five people, including one of Julio. They told him to tell Julio that they were after him and that they would kill him if he continued to speak out. They then beat him up and, bruised and frightened, let him go.

Byron speaks with our group. He is a friend of Julio, and another whose photo is in the hands of the hired men. Byron is a student representative at the University of San Marcos. Last year eleven of his co-representatives were disappeared. Byron fled the country, moved from country to country, and then came back to Guatemala to denounce and speak against they who hire the killers.

### A SCENE FROM A MOVIE

I see Byron and Julio again. They now sleep in the other bed of our hotel room. Last night, after our meeting with them, they went to their homes and saw the dark trucks parked out-

side. It is like a movie - hired killers with guns and masks lurking outside somewhere while two men lie in hiding.

Everyone is afraid. Life in Guatemala is a prison of fears, both for the masked killers and those who they stalk.

### THE RIGHT TO GARBAGE

Our human rights delegation visits, video cameras and tape recorders, a huge dump in Guatemala City. What was once a Mayan valley inhabited by Quetzal birds is now a garbage dump. Starting at the top of the gorge the garbage has been making its way down the valley. At its most forward edge, the garbage must be close to 800 feet deep. The pepsi bottle from last night, the plastic bag and the orange peel all end up here in the dump. All that is not wanted ends up in the dump, out of sight and mind, but not out of use.

Thousands of people live in and by the dump, along with the vultures and rodents. Thousands of people decide if there is any use for the garbage. In rickety and patched shacks, they live, work, survive, and die here side by side, around and round, swirling and working, timeless, with the stench and the dust, with the vultures.

From 10 a.m. till 5 p.m. every day, except Sundays, the dump-trucks mechanically open their gaping rear ends. Before my eyes tons of garbage tumble out. Before my eyes thousands of people and vultures dig in. It is sub-human and very human in our inter-related world where rich is related to poor, where garbage from above means survival below. Barefooted people dig with bare hands, poles and sticks, placing whatever is of value into shoulderbags made of old rags and garbage.

Most garbage-land dwellers are indigenous Guatemalans, of all ages, right down to the three and four year-olds, who stand shoulder to shoulder with the vultures.



A man at the dump told me this story: one time, down in the epi-centre of this human hell, where fires always burn, a pregnant woman was found, surviving, clothes tattered, body battered. She was taken to hospital and bore a child. When the child was born she immediately grabbed and tried to kill the baby.

How do you denounce such a thing as a pregnant woman living in a dump or a three-year-old boy, no taller than a vulture, picking scraps of garbage for a living? How do you denounce the thousands of dazed and stench glazed eyes that know of little, and probably never will, but garbage?

#### **Panama, April, 28, 1990** **THE GARDEN OF PEACE**

In Panama, in late December, 1989, at a place called the Garden of Peace, the U.S. military dumped 123 Panamanian bodies, victims of the Just Cause invasion, into a common grave without identifying the cadavers. 'By mistake', the U.S. soldiers buried one of their own soldiers there as well. When they realized this, they dug up the pit, searched through the body bags, found the U.S. soldier, removed him and filled in the hole. The cadaver was flown home, his family advised, and the soldier was given a hero's burial.

Meanwhile, Panamanian cadavers rot in anonymity. They are 'other', to be treated "worse than dogs" a Panamanian woman told me.

#### **THE ASSOCIATION OF THE DEAD**

The family members of the murdered victims have formed a civic association. This is not an association of little league baseball players, nor of bird watchers. It is the Association of the Dead whose object is 'to dig up mass graves, try to identify cadavers, and give them decent burials'.

On April 28, 1990, there was only sadness and mourning at the Garden of Peace. The big pit was exhumed and all but eight of 123 cadavers were identified by family members and loved ones. The Garden of Peace is one of approximately 14 mass graves in Panama.

#### **Costa Rica, April, 1990** **OFFICIAL U.S. POLICY**

Some U.S. Congress-persons talked with Cesar, a Salvadoran who abandoned his unit in the Army that was responsible for carrying out death squad assassinations. These Congress-persons went to El Salvador to verify Cesar's allegations about clandestine jails where political prisoners are kept and tortured. Once in El Salvador, the Congress-persons were told that there were no clandestine jails and no political prisoners. But, with their insistence and Cesar's directions, they found some clandestine holding cells. And, as Cesar claimed, they found some tortured and terrorized humans inside.

The U.S. knows this, and they support the Salvadoran military.

"In the solitude of my cell I reached the conclusion that when I refuse to accept this absurdity I suffer the most". (Omar Rivabella, *Requiem to a Woman's Soul*)

#### **Costa Rica, May 1990** **LEISURE TIME**

I sit in the centre plaza of San Jose, sipping hot coffee on a cool night, watching the people come and go. A clown makes the children laugh, and the Jesus prosletizers sing to God. I wish all people had leisure time.



### OFFICIAL U.S. POLICY

While preparing a report on our trip to Guatemala, I read in the newspaper: "We no longer tolerate these (human rights) violations in Guatemala as there are no more Soviet overtures in the region". (Quote from a U.S. Official).

The U.S. is and has economically and militarily supported governments and economic elites that violate human rights. The people that suffer elsewhere by their decisions do not count.

### EQUANIMITY

"Some people do face death with equanimity".

In Central America, some people use guns and hand grenades, so that women won't have to spend all their lives cooking at 'campfires', in little cardboard shacks; so that men won't have to spend their days pushing hand-held plows through dry, eroded pieces of land; so that barefoot children won't end up sleeping on cement, sniffing glue; so that ...

It is horrible that some people decide to fight back with weapons and bombs. As long as these conditions exist, some people will.

"Poetry isn't revolution but a way of knowing why it must come". (Adrienne Rich)

### LOVE

In Central America, for many people I work with whose dearest loved ones have been disappeared, there is no more love.

"There is nothing more unbearable than losing a person we love". (Milan Kundera, *Laughter and Forgetting*)

### A BROKEN FAMILY

Six years ago, Rosario's brother Carlos was killed and buried in a clandestine grave in Guatemala because he spoke out against the human rights violations. Then Carlos' wife and one-year-old daughter were killed because they were looking for his body. Shortly after their assassinations, my friend Rosario fled Guatemala after the front wall of her home was machine-gunned by death squads. At the time of the attack she was lying pregnant on the floor, out of sight, holding her first daughter. Her second daughter would be born in another couple of months, in exile. In Guatemala, it is a crime to look for the dead and the disappeared.

### LAUGHTER AND TORTURE

I was telling a Guatemalan friend about our recent trip to Guatemala and our interview with Mario, who works with the GAM. Mario spoke with us and told us of their recent work. Mario laughed a lot, with his sombre eyes and thick horned rim glasses. My friend told me that not long ago Mario had been captured and tortured during 40 hours because he works with the GAM.

### THE STATE OF OUR CHILDREN

UNICEF has written a report, like the thousands of reports written every year, about the children who die young: "40,000 children die in the "developing" world every day. ... Social spending on health and education has gone down in the world's poorest 37 nations".

### THE INVISIBLE HAND

In Central America and elsewhere, governments are implementing International Monetary Fund and World Bank programs to cut spending, pay debts and open their markets. In Central America and elsewhere, governments are export-



ing inexpensive commodities and agricultural goods to the "developed" world. In Central America and elsewhere, the governments are having problems paying the interest of their international debts, and are importing military hardware.

No investor in the world market system would ever leave her or his own children to the invisible hand of the market system.

**Costa Rica, June, 1990**

#### **A PARTY**

Today, I danced with a young woman whose husband was one of the eleven student leaders who was disappeared last summer in Guatemala. Their child was only two months old at the time. She had not danced since she fled Guatemala last year.

"To remember is to go and meet your shadows".  
(Cuzcatlan, Manlio Argueta)

**Costa Rica, June 3, 1990**

#### **THE PRIORITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

From Honduras we receive information that hired assassins, paid by wealthy land-owners, killed a union worker who had been promoting workers' rights. The right to property prevails over the right of farmers to survive. The clandestine laws prevail.

**Costa Rica, June 6, 1990**

#### **THE RELATIVITY OF PEACE AND FREEDOM**

Rogelio came today to CODEHUCA and gave me his testimony. Rogelio is one of hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans who fled the violence and massive army repression in the early eighties. He lived for years in refugee

camps in Honduras. Last year, along with thousands of others, he decided to return to El Salvador.

Two weeks ago he was captured by soldiers, held 'incomunicado' for three days, and tortured. After telling me his history, he told me why he fled from El Salvador two days before, why he needed to claim refugee status.

"They have a freezer room, a silent and cold torture - leaves no signs - it just freezes you. They had big coats and gloves and hats on ... They have a small pool, that is pretty deep ... They blindfolded me and tied my hands behind my back. They threw me in, they turned on the electrical current that ran through the water. I felt like I was being fried, as I struggled to keep my head above water. Finally they pulled me out. Once I was out and standing, shakily, they threw me back in for another five or ten minutes - electrical charges and drowning at the same time. I kept on praying to god, though ... They took me naked and wet, back to the little cell that has blood splotches on the walls. They tied me to a metal chair. They attached wires to my arms and legs. They gave me a whole series of little electrical shocks ("toquecitos") ... They are experts at brutality and not leaving signs. All of this was done without leaving signs. They have medical advisors".

I saw no scars on Rogelio's body. But the scars will forever be visible in his eyes. There - a faraway look - you can see a little bit into his heart and soul.

"Myself I long for love and light but must it come so cruel and oh so bright". (Leonard Cohen)

There is also guilt in Rogelio's eyes - that he is now free from torture while family and many friends in El Salvador still live in danger.



Guatemala, June 7, 1990

### THIRD WORLD TRAVELLERS

A conversation overheard on a flight to Guatemala: "I have heard that if you travel by train in Guatemala you should take a cushion because the seats are hard". "Yes, I have heard that too".

I have returned to Guatemala to participate in a two day workshop on the "Administration of Justice". I walk the streets of Guatemala City. I walk around figures huddled on the cement wrapped in old blankets, sinking to sleep on the cement. They could use a couple of cushions.

### THE SYSTEM AND THE TERMS OF TRADE

It is said that Guatemala is living through an economic crisis. The facts and statistics used to prove that the crisis exists are cold and hard, like cement beds.

There is no crisis.

The international and national economy is working as it always does. It works so that many Guatemalans are paid little or nothing to produce and export bananas, wood, sugar, cotton and artisanry to first world markets. A Latin American businessman said: "Certainly in the last two decades poverty and unemployment have increased in Latin America. Also, nature is being destroyed. But, no one can doubt that the efficiency of business production has greatly increased". (*Pasos*, Costa Rica).

"There is only one thing that is free: prices. In our countries, Adam Smith needs Mussolini. Freedom of investments, freedom of prices, free exchange rates; the freer the business, the more imprisoned are the people. The prosperity of a few is everyone else's curse. Who knows of wealth that is innocent? In times of crisis, don't the liberals become conserva-

tive, the conservatives fascist? In whose interests do the assassins of people and countries carry out their tasks?" (Eduardo Galeano, *Days and Nights of Love and War*).

### THE DEATH PENALTY

In the Organization of the American States, men representing all the Americas call for an end to the death penalty. These same men make deals with the International Monetary Fund and Multi-National Companies. In their countries police and military forces repress, disappear and murder people who protest the economic and legal systems that keep the majority in poverty.

### NERVES

Hans is a friend from Germany. For months he has been in Guatemala investigating freedom of the press, and why journalists are targets of repression. He never smoked before he came here. He now smokes all the time. "This is a nerve-racking place to be", he said.

### A GUATEMALAN FAMILY

I met Rita in Guatemala. I brought her a letter from her sister who lives in exile. I recorded my conversation with Rita. She and her sister worry because their mother is in danger of being assassinated for being a member of the Mutual Support Group, GAM. GAM is a group of civilians that spend their time and efforts looking for the thousands of disappeared people and denouncing the Guatemalan government that sanctions the disappearances.

A member of the GAM said, at a workshop on the Administration of Justice, "all of us here today are potential disappeared".



Rita's mother joined the GAM in 1986 because her husband was disappeared by the death squads. A month later Rita also joined GAM to look for her husband who had also been disappeared. Rita was left with a baby child, and a hole in her heart and soul, like the hole left in the heart and soul of her mother. In Guatemala, hundreds of thousands of people have holes in their hearts and souls. The mum and Rita never found their husbands.

Rita told me that a couple of years ago she had married for a second time. Three weeks ago, in May, her second husband was disappeared. He worked with Guatemalan refugees and had become an "enemy of the state". I was sitting there, listening to her tell me this tale. I found it hard to say anything. She is 27 years old and has two babies. I wonder how she is going to tell them what happened to their fathers.

### **IMAGINING DISAPPEARANCES**

In the book *Imagining Argentina* two survivors of Nazi extermination camps were asked how they had survived: "We survived because we are not what you saw in the photo".

### **HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH REPRESSION?**

Was it not enough for the death squads (hired by wealthy landowners who export coffee, sugar, cotton and wood) to kill Rita's first husband, and so many members of her family, and her second husband? No, it will never be enough to silence the mothers and wives, husbands and lovers, of the disappeared. "Enough" will only be when no one is left to speak out against the injustices, and that will never be.

Rita stops talking. I turn my tape recorder off. The interview is over. But her story is not. The stories of hundreds of thousands more are not over. She and the hundreds of thousands will live their lives missing their loved ones, full of dignity, sorrow and rage, fighting for justice.

"You can't stop running water. You can't stop the fire that burns inside". The Neville Brothers.

### **VIOLENCE**

Sara, a North American, speaks to a woman from Guatemala, whose husband was recently murdered - a woman who has known military repression and economic violence all her life. "I wish violence were never used to bring about change", said Sara. But "sometimes it is necessary", replied the woman.

**Costa Rica, June, 1990**

### **TOURISM AND THE TERMS OF TRADE**

An irate woman in the line-up to board a plane complains about being ripped off by poor exchange rates on her holiday. I listen to her, as many in the line-up are obliged to do. I wonder if she is irate by the fact that the domination of the U.S. dollar is 'ripping off' the poor in Latin America, and that she can travel to these exotic 'inexpensive' places because the local currencies have little "comparative value".

**June, 1990**

### **PLANE FLIGHTS**

While flying to Canada, I overhear an english-speaking woman complaining to her friend that her maid, back in Canada, is "from somewhere in Latin America" and that the "maid is having a hard time learning English". Why can't she clean her own floors?

**Toronto, June, 1990**

### **MAN'S WORLD**

At a party, an old family friend in the film business says: "Hey, I saw your old friend so-and-so. He is out west in



Whistler - he just made a great 'T and A' film". "'T and A', what is that?", I ask. "Tits and Ass".

#### OFFICIAL U.S. POLICY

I sit in a Charles Street cafe reading the "Moakley Report", a U.S. Congressional Report that sets out how repressive and murderous the El Salvadoran army is. The U.S. government has long known this, ever since they began, decades ago, to train and support them. It is not a "mistake" that the U.S. is making, supporting this murderous government. They do it knowingly. I wonder why groups in Central and North America bother denouncing all these abuse if the U.S. has already known? Whether these atrocities are investigated and denounced or not, the U.S. will lie and deny if it is in their self interest.

#### A ROYAL VISIT

The newspapers in Toronto prepare us for a royal visit by the Queen of England. According to Forbes Magazine, she is the richest woman in the world - a fortune of \$10 billion. The total foreign trade of Nicaragua is about \$300 million. In Toronto, she will inaugurate a project to help the poor and dine with the elite.

There is little news in the papers about the poor in Central America or other developing countries. There is nothing about the militaries and police of these 'democracies' repressing the protests of the poor and hungry, helping the wealthy landowners to export foods and exotic fruits to the north. When the Queen and the elite dine, no one will wonder about where the coffee, sugar and exotic fruits came from.

#### ANIMAL RIGHTS

I bike along behind a Toronto animal ambulance, its red light flashing. I am reminded of a comment a Panamanian woman made, who was looking for the body of her father-in-law killed during the U.S. invasion of Panama: "They treated our dead worse than dogs".

#### Costa Rica, June, 1990

#### PEASHOOTERS AND INVASIONS

A Panamanian friend sleeps on my floor. He fought against the U.S. when they invaded. But, as he said, the Panamanian Army did not really fight back. It was not even a fight, he said. It was a civilian and military massacre. The U.S. attacked with the most advanced of military equipment and the Panamanian Army fought back with M-16 machine-guns, "made in the U.S.A.". The U.S. trained, equipped and financed the army that they then went and obliterated.

My friend said that shooting his M-16 against an Apache attack helicopter was "like fighting with a pea-shooter".

#### MAKE-WORK PROJECT

The military industry makes and sells guns to the enemies at a huge profit. Then they make and sell superior weaponry to the U.S. army and make an even bigger profit.

#### MEMORIES

With my Guatemalan friend Guillermo, I went to see the movie *The Music Box*. The movie was about a trial, 40 years later, of a man accused of committing war crimes during the Second World War. The director said: "The motive of the film is to awaken memory. Human beings forget. We must not forget if we don't want to repeat".



After the movie, Guillermo talked to me of Guatemala, a forgotten country where many horrible crimes are committed against the Guatemalan people. One night he was sitting at the table of his girlfriend's father, a major in the Guatemalan army. The father told Mario that one day the army was chasing some "subversives". (In Guatemala, the army and police refer all people who oppose the government as "subversives" or "communists".) The "subversives" ran and hid in a cave. Rather than go in after them, the army blew up the entrance of the cave and shut it off forever.

During the first months of Guillermo's exile in England he often woke up sweating because of nightmares. He would touch the four walls of his apartment to make sure that he was safe, far from Guatemala, before he would calm down. He felt guilty because he was so far away and safe from the suffering and pain of his loved ones.

One time in England, Guillermo met an old friend, the son of a wealthy land-owning family that export products to North American markets. Over coffee, the friend said: "Guillermo, I know of our differing views on issues of social justice and politics. Here we can talk of all that and still be friends. But if we were back in Guatemala and you were part of a political movement to get land for all the poor people and this affected any of the land of my family, then I'd be the first person to put a bullet in your head".

"The struggle of humans against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting". (Milan Kundera, *Laughter and Forgetting*)

**Costa Rica, June 1990**

#### **IMPUNITY**

I attend an international conference on "Impunity in Latin America". It focuses on how the military, police and wealthy

sectors of Guatemala and Honduras violate human rights without legal recourse for the victims.

As the conference begins, a representative of the CUC (Farmer's Unity Committee) from Guatemala stands and speaks: 'Yesterday, as I was leaving to come here, two members of CUC were disappeared and then killed'. A member of CODEH (Committee for the Defense of Human Rights in Honduras) stands and speaks: 'Yesterday, as I was leaving to come here, a lawyer who works with CODEH, was killed'.

The powerful sectors of Honduras and Guatemala wanted to give the assembled human rights workers some recent cases to discuss.

**Panama, July 21, 1990**

#### **LIFE IS THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF**

In Panama, I attend the exhumation of a mass grave where Panamanians were dumped by the U.S. military after last year's Just Cause invasion. Last night I dreamt of disappeared people. All the bodies were faceless. That is a function of the system of disappearances.

**July 25, 1990**

#### **HOPE CEMETERY**

It is 6 a.m. and already I wish the day were over. In a bus on the way from Panama City to Colon, I accompany Panamanians who will dig up a mass grave, search through the body bags, and see if their loved one is there. Hide and seek.

In the cemetery, people gather around the 'back-ho' that digs into the ground. Hundreds of Panamanians crowd around, peering into the hole. Expectant loved ones and family members stand back, huddled together. A man jumps in the hole and signals the back-ho driver to lower the shovel. He



grabs two black handles sticking out of the dirt, hooks them on the teeth of the shovel, and signals the driver. Everyone watches as the shovel dangles the body bags up into the air, one and two bags at a time.

Now, the forensic doctors call the loved ones and family members forward, one by one, to try and identify the decomposed bodies.

### **CLUES - RED SHORTS**

Sixteen body bags are hauled from the pit laid side by side. Five more were exhumed last February. The smell of death and decay overwhelms. The expectant families are called to look at the decayed green and grey mass in the body bags that may or may not be their lost loved ones. It is next to impossible to identify anything - perhaps a gold tooth, or an old pair of shorts are identifiable amongst the green and grey. Despite the unlikelihood of identifying anyone, the families line up one by one - a ghastly, a ghostly procession.

The body of a six-year-old boy is found by his aunt. She tells us that he and his mother had been shot by U.S. soldiers while they were driving in Colon. The aunt recognized his body because of his red shorts.

### **PEACE AND HOPE**

Four months ago, in the Garden of Peace Cemetery, the first mass grave was exhumed. Today, in the Hope Cemetery, the second grave is exhumed. There is neither hope nor peace for the family members and loved ones.

**July 27, 1990**

**LIFE IS THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF**  
I awoke from a dream in which I smelt again the bombed out

apartment buildings and the green and grey cadavers. I hadn't known that I could smell in my dreams.

### **NORMALCY**

A friend says 'it would be a good thing to infuse some normalcy into your life'. I'm not so sure anymore what normal is. For a lot of people in Central America, and elsewhere, a lot of horrible things are normal, a lot of normal things are horrible.

### **VIDEO TAPES**

Investigating the invasion of Panama, I watch a video of the attack on the now disappeared neighbourhood of Chorrillos. The (U.S. Defence Department) footage was shot from a U.S. Air Force fighter plane flying over-head, from a naval ship attacking from the harbour, from ground troops firing rockets and mortar shells. No dead Panamanians appeared in the video. And many Panamanians died.

I was there with the air force flying above Chorrillos, looking into the computer controlled view-finder TV screen. There, the target finder honed in on a building far below. There, the radar locks in. There, a flick of a switch and the radar-programmed missile streaked down. Boom. There, lots of smoke and the building crumbled. And where are the Panamanians?

I was there with the ground troops on a hill overlooking the burning neighbourhood of Chorrillos. A U.S. soldier stands at the edge of the picture, looking at the bright orange flames: "Burn baby burn". Another soldier: "Obviously there are some die-hards down there! Why don't they give themselves up .... Goddamn, they just don't give up, do they?". And where are the Panamanians?



"What horrified me the most was the bitter and futile struggle of the doomed to breathe for just one second more". (Simone de Beauvoir, *Forces of Circumstance*).

"It happened, therefore it can happen again. This is the core of what we have to say". (Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*).

**August 26, 1990**

### **THE ONE TRUE MIRACLE**

My sister gives birth to a baby today. Hazen will have a life of love and security, will have a life not governed by the clandestine laws of poverty, and war, and common graves.

### **HUMAN'S COLOURS**

A war is coming on, in the Middle East, in the shifting sands, over vast pools of oil. Red blood will flow over black oil. The war will be fought in the name of International Law, the same law that was never respected in Nicaragua, Panama, Guatemala, ...

**El Salvador, September, 1990**

I sit in the cafeteria of the "Jesuit" University of Central America. I drink a coffee. Last year, 75 metres from where I sit, hired assassins killed six Jesuit Priests and two women. It is a peaceful place to drink a coffee - a beautiful view of the volcanos that overlook San Salvador.

### **THE STORIES SEEN IN HIS EYES**

In the dark courtyard of a small hotel I meet Amilcar, a 19-year-old Salvadoran man who deserted the army and now works as the lone underpaid employee at the hotel. If he is caught by the army, he will be severely punished.

With the army he was once in the mountains for two months, marching and fighting,

"without seeing civilization - no cars, no cities, wearing dirty, wet boots, torn clothing, scratched everywhere, sick, diseased. ... All we saw were snakes and animals. We never had enough food to eat. ... After two months we were heading out, back to the barracks. We were happy - showers, baths, new clothes, food, lots of food, but on the way we were ambushed. We got caught by the enemy in an ambush ... I was the radio man. My lieutenant told me to call a code that was not on my list. I refused because this was against my orders. He fired his gun at my feet. I shot him in the leg. ... In the ambush a couple of my friends were killed. ... When we got back to the barracks, the army punished me. They shaved my head and eyebrows. They beat me. They put me in a standing-only cell for three days - water only."

Amilcar's eyes burn, talking in the dark of the courtyard.

"I hate the army, the machismo. Many soldiers kill their own superiors and the army always blame the enemy. ... Before I was recruited, I worked with my family in Morazan. I was the oldest child, and my father left us and my mother to fend for ourselves. They still live there".

The next night he came again to continue with his tale.

"When I was in Morazan, living at home, I had a butcher's licence and I was able to help out a lot at home, because my mother was all alone. It was a good job. ... My dad went 'wet-back' to the U.S. ... I have friends who fight with the enemy, the FMLN, guys that I grew up with. I used to go home on time-off, and they would show up at my house. They'd put their guns in the corner, we'd shake hands and we'd talk like in the old days when we were young... I hate the U.S. They do everything for themselves and



they control everything here. All the best things from El Salvador - coffee, sugar, industrial goods - go to the U.S. We're left with the shit here".

I tell Amilcar he talks like someone who would fight with the FMLN. He doesn't respond. The FMLN is associated with the war. Amilcar hates the war. He hates the army, the FMLN, the U.S.

### **DOWNTOWN SAN SALVADOR ON A SUNDAY**

In the city centre I buy a newspaper from a smiling poor woman. The paper cost 1.25 colons (which is 20 cents). She shouts after me, as I was walking away: "Hey gringo, you forgot your change. Here, take .25 colons (which is 4 cents) more". I took the money, and she said "sorry about that".

I sit in Rosario Church where I had listened to Padre Segundo Montes give one of his last services. Murdering him was the only way the wealthy and powerful could think of stopping his ideas.

On the street, two boys look in the window of a store where Nike and Reeboks are sold. They have desire in their eyes and no money in their pockets.

### **PLANE FLIGHTS**

In the air-conditioned airport terminal just outside of San Salvador, I look out across the sweltering fields to the sea. Farmers live and work on those fields all year long, all life long, for pittance pay, producing export goods like cotton, that will be flown to the north and clothe the people that can afford to buy it. The farmers will never fly away and they never will wear new cotton shirts.

In the airport, I again hear Amilcar say 'that all the best things produced in El Salvador are exported to the U.S.' I sit

sipping free samples of El Salvador's finest export coffee - "For Export", it says, in english. Many people are trying to get out of El Salvador. Many more are dying, staying in. Amilcar may try to go 'wet-back' someday to the U.S.

### **HAPPINESS**

Perhaps one day, with a few earned dollars, and a lot of peace, the light will come back in Amilcar's eyes. He had said to me: "I don't know what happiness is. It is all gone. Sometimes when I drink a lot of those (pointing to some beer bottles) I feel happiness."

### **Costa Rica, September, 1990**

#### **THE STORIES TOLD THROUGH HIS EYES**

In the Central Plaza of San Jose I sit with Francisco, having a coffee, talking of my trip to El Salvador, his home that he can't go back to. We talk of El Salvador. Francisco has a faraway look in his eyes, as he talks about what happened to him back home, and how he had to flee El Salvador:

"I was in my grandparents' hut standing with my grandfather when someone saw that the military were coming to our door. Grandmother called for my cousin to shut the door. As she was doing this a soldier shot her dead, right through the door. They barged in as she lay there on the floor. My grandfather said 'let us pray'. My grandmother screamed at them 'why did you kill her, she didn't do anything? We haven't done anything'. She ran into the bedroom. My grandfather was holding my youngest cousin and the soldiers began to hack at both of them with machetes. They hacked both of them to death. I remember so clearly seeing the blades cut into them. My grandmother came running out and hit a soldier with a broom. He spun around and cut her dead right there. She fell on a bed in the front room there, and



the soldiers discovered my other cousin hiding under the bed. They killed her instantly."

"I saw all of this. It wasn't till later that I found myself cowering alone in the corner, with their blood on my clothes. I realized that I was alive, and I began to wonder why...."

A silence is all around us, in the cool San Jose evening. After a short while the light slowly comes back to Francisco's eyes. Again, it is 1990, and he has returned from that time in the 1980s when his whole life had been torn apart. He returns from a place that he carries around inside him.

"People's suffering and the fact that it is so abominable -one should do everything to abolish it. To tell you the truth, nothing else seems to me to be of any importance". (Simone de Beauvoir, *The Woman Destroyed*)

#### **A MOVIE ABOUT WHOSE FAULT IT IS**

*Fat Man, Little Boy* is a movie about how the atomic bomb was created by scientists before and during the Second World War. After the two bombs were used on Japanese cities, the character Dr Oppenheimer said: "We are only scientists - it isn't our fault".

In many countries in Central America, the soldiers and police say: 'we are only soldiers and police - it isn't our fault'.

#### **COMPASSION**

"Defining a human being starts and ends with compassion". This was said by Father Jon Sobrino, from El Salvador, the one Jesuit priest who was not massacred on November 16, 1989.

#### **MAN'S WORLD**

A friend of mine was walking along the street to work in San Jose when a man rode up to her on his bicycle and grabbed her hard between her legs from behind. He rode away, laughing.

#### **HUMAN COLOURS**

"Indigenous persons of a certain ethnic group had decided to hang, in each tree, clothing representing the assassinated and the disappeared. In an extensive area of their jungle almost all the trees had a piece of traditional clothing - splendid colours and designs - representing death". (*El Dia Latinoamericano*)

#### **THE SWORD IS MIGHTIER THAN THE PEN**

"Santos Calixto, a 28-year-old parish health promoter, in Morazan El Salvador, was dragged out of his home and brutally beaten by soldiers when they discovered he owned a copy of the book *Where there is no doctor*. The soldiers said the book, which gives instructions on how to care for children suffering from diarrhoea, and how to disinfect cuts and set broken bones, was subversive". (Salvadoran Newsletter)

#### **Belize City, Belize, September, 1990**

#### **A MEETING OF TWO CANADIANS, OR, THE ORANGE BOWL BLUES**

Yesterday morning, I met a Canadian in a tiny bar called the Orange Bowl, in hot Belize City. I get paid to report on the victims of human rights violations and Bob (he told me this was his name) gets paid to violate human rights! The choices we make!

"What are you doing down here in these parts?" Bob begins.



"Oh, I work in human rights", I respond, quite entranced by the baseball game on the TV. Toronto was in a pennant race with Boston.

"Oh, then you and I, we are quite different".

"How so?"

"Well, I am a conservative and you must be a liberal".

"Liberal", I countered - "Oh no, I am much worse than that", watching the baseball game. "You know, Khrushhev, Stalin, Jimmy Carter, Ortega, Mother Teresa, Trudeau, Castro, ...". I smiled, pleased with my little retort. He was not smiling.

The conversation went back and forth, and Bob was getting more and more heated. He wanted to talk about Nicaragua. We did for a short while and found that we had very different views. Finally I asked what he did. He was silent a while. "I am a Contra", he said. Boom. The baseball game was no longer of interest. I held on to my beer. I was actually a little afraid, and glad to be as big as he was, though I am sure he could kick the shit out of me.

Bob comes from Winnipeg. He had joined the U.S. airforce during the Vietnam war and he was now employed by the CIA, working with the Contras. We talked a bit more. Bob reminded me that they, the Contras, "had thumped the Sandinistas". This I knew was true. There were almost 30,000 dead Nicaraguans, from the ten years of U.S. aggression, to prove Bob's claim. He talked to me as if I were a young idealistic Canadian who had gone astray, and I listened to him as a Canadian who had helped to murder a lot of Nicaraguans.

**Costa Rica, October, 1990**

#### **THE MEDIA IS THE MESSAGE**

The front page news, in all the local newspapers, covers the accidental speedboat death of the husband of a Princess in Europe. The newspapers go into great detail about how it oc-

curred and how much the Princess suffered. There is no question she suffered because of this unfortunate accident.

In Central and South America 100,000 people have been disappeared. These are not newsworthy deaths.

#### **MAN'S WORLD**

One night a friend of mine was lying asleep in her bed when she was woken by the sound of a rapist hovering over her bed with a knife. Only by her courage and his clumsiness, was she able to flee naked into the night, scarred forever. Many societies condone rape. It is not considered to be a "human rights" abuse.

#### **U.S. DOLLARS FRUITFULLY SPENT**

"Central America, that once was considered the most important place in the world for the U.S., no longer is a priority for the U.S., now that the phantom of "communism" has disappeared from the region. ... The thousands of millions of dollars spent by the U.S., when some 70,000 Salvadorans, 80,000 Guatemalans and 40,000 Nicaraguans died in combat, have given fruit ...". (Interview with Jeanne Kirkpatrick, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, La Republica)

**Toronto, November, 1990**

#### **THE MEDIA IS THE MESSAGE**

In Toronto, the financial centre of Canada, I drink a coffee, trying to find anything written about Central America. Jeanne Kirkpatrick is right. Central America is no longer important for the U.S. and the press doesn't cover it. It is no longer important to anyone, except the millions of people that live there. There is little real democracy. The military and economic elites still hold most of the power throughout much



of the region. Most of the people suffer from the wounds of the 1980s. The 1990s look no better.

Now, what is important, we are told by our governments and the press, is the Middle East. We send our soldiers to the slaughter and to slaughter. I think of the mass grave exhumations in Panama. I think of the cadavers that no one could identify. How many times more mass graves will be dug in the Middle East?

### **THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY AND OF WEALTH**

I write to some friends who work on development and human rights issues in Central America, and elsewhere in the "Third World". I am critical. I don't know if I am cynical, worn out, or what? I write that I don't think it is proper to go to the Third World to 'help the poor', which means changing the under-lying structures and causes of poverty, and stay in \$100 a night hotels. I write that wealth is related to poverty, and I don't think that we can continue to demand to live in such a wealthy fashion, when the same system that produces wealth also produces poverty. I don't like what I write. It sounds so bitter. I send the letter.

### **SIPPING A CUP OF HOT POVERTY**

I sip coffee in Toronto, wondering how little the farmer in Latin America got paid to produce the coffee, so that I may drink hot coffee in the North. I think of the chain of production, trade and consumption, and I think of the human rights violations.

### **THE PROBLEM OF WEALTH**

While sipping coffee at conferences, First World experts talk of helping the poor in the Third World. All the experts talk of the Problem of Poverty. Everywhere experts meet in

expensive hotels and talk of the Problem of Poverty. There is little talk about the Problem of Wealth.

"If I give food, I am called a Saint. When I ask why the hungry have no food, I am called a communist".  
(Don Helder Camara, Brazilian Catholic Priest).

**Costa Rica, November, 1990**

### **THE SHORT LIFE OF A GLUE SNIFFER**

At CODEHUCA, follow-up work is done on the case of Nahaman Carmana, a Guatemalan boy who was murdered by policemen on the streets of Guatemala City. According to the investigation:

"On March 8, Carmana was sniffing glue when police surrounded him and poured glue on his head. When the boy resisted a police agent threw him to the ground and began to kick him in the stomach. Some hours later Nahaman was taken to the hospital. Ten hours later he died".

**December 3, 1990**

### **ANOTHER GUATEMALAN MASSACRE**

Yesterday, Guatemalan citizens, predominantly indigenous Mayans, were protesting in front of the local military barracks, demanding the release of illegally captured citizens. The U.S.- backed military responded by opening fire with machine guns. Fourteen died within seconds and many more were wounded.

**December 7, 1990**

I feel empty, sitting in a cafe. Just days ago, we sent urgent actions to Europe and North America concerning the Guatemalan massacre trying to encourage people to express outrage at this atrocity, trying to get the 'international community' to pressure the government and oligarchy in



Guatemala. Meanwhile the U.S. and the Allies are planning for a huge massacre in Kuwait and Iraq. I wonder if there is any use denouncing 14 dead Indians in Guatemala. Soon there will be 14,000 or 14,000,000 in the Middle East.

**Panama, December, 1990**

### **SCAPEGOATS**

In Panama, I investigate the human rights situation one year after the U.S. invasion. Even this massacre, of perhaps 1000 people, is beginning to look small compared to what the near future seems to hold in the Middle East.

The international press says the whole world is against 'Saddam'. Last year the whole world was against 'Noriega'. During the 1980s it was 'Ortega' and the Sandinistas. Before that it was 'The Ayatollah', and all along, and still today it is 'Fidel'. As the Neville Brothers sing: "Any old scape-goat will do".

**Panama, December 13**

### **TIRO DE GRACIA**

The local paper informs that yesterday in Guatemala three members of CERJ (Committee of Ethnic Communities) were executed. Each was executed, shot from close range in the back of the head. I remember visiting their offices in April. I wonder if either of the victims is someone I met ...

### **INVASIONS AND THE INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND**

5000 Panamanians workers march through downtown Panama City protesting lost jobs. The invasion brought death, destruction, unemployment, and of course, democracy and freedom. Tonight, the march ends in violence. Riot troops fire on us with pellet guns and tear-gas.

Up until 1987, Panama, like Costa Rica, had one of the highest standard of living in Latin America and one of the lowest levels of repression. After two years of U.S.-imposed sanctions and the Just Cause invasion, living standards in Panama are as low as they were in the early 1970s.

Today, the ghosts of the victims linger, unattended to. And repression continues. Life goes on in another U.S. supported democracy in Central America.

**December 20, 1990**

### **THE BLACK MARCH**

Thousands of people march to mark the first anniversary of the 'Just Cause' invasion. Wearing black shirts in the scorching Panamanian sun, they mourn the victims. As we walk through the remains of Chorrillos, machine-guns explode in our ears, bullets fly overhead. Some marchers freeze, some hit the ground, and others take off running in all directions. The police, watching the march, apologize for having fired their machine-guns. Those who remain walk on, defiant and scared.

**Costa Rica, December, 1990**

### **"TOO PETTY" TO KILL FOR**

The New York Times reports a U.S. Intelligence officer as saying: "We can't let him (Saddam Hussein) manoeuvre us into a position where the stakes seem too petty to fight over, which is what he seems determined to do".

"We don't need to exhume cadavers, we need to exhume consciousness". (Isabel Corro, in a book about the U.S. invasion of Panama, *The Truth About the Invasion*).



## **ECONOMIC DETERMINISTS**

CNN interviewed a 19-year-old U.S. soldier, who said that before the war he had just bought his first car. He was angry that the prices of oil were being tampered with. He said he was willing to fight for the economy. I thought it was marxists and communists who were economic determinists.

## **WEAPONS SALES**

The press has reported that members of the Nicaraguan army sold some ground-to-air missiles to the Salvadorean rebel army. The local and international press is scandalized. The spokesperson for the White House takes time out from the Iraq war preparations to denounce this grotesque violation of international law.

**Panama, January 6, 1991**

## **IMPARTIALITY AND ...**

ABC, a top U.S. TV station, sends a team to Panama to do a report on Panama one year after the invasion. The TV crew tell me how they want to be objective and I am frightened at how ignorant they are about Panama. Last year, American television presented the U.S. government point of view, selling the 'just cause' to the Northamerican public.

## **... IMPUNITY**

"Everytime that I talk about the invasion, I become very sad and depressed. ... In one way or another we all were thinking that one day an invasion by the U.S. was a possibility. But we never thought that the invasion would be so big, so brutal and so savage - carried out with so much technology. ... Rather, the thing that most has left its impact on me is not so much the invasion itself - but rather the impunity with which the U.S. carried out this invasion. Almost no one in the world, no people and no government, has raised more than a small complaint.

That this can happen in the 20th century, when everyone knows what happened and when no one says anything ... this is what most affected me".  
(Interview with a Panamanian doctor)

**January 9, 1991**

## **THE RULE OF LAW**

Five U.S. Congress-persons are in Panama investigating the laundering of drug money through numerous international banks based in Panama City. After a press conference, they announce that they are calling off the rest of their Latin American trip. An air-force jet is waiting to wing them back to Washington so that the U.S. Congress can vote on and give their approval for the U.S. army to start bombing in Iraq and Kuwait. The January 15 United Nations deadline approaches, after which date "any measures" can be taken to get Iraq out of Kuwait, and in no way does the civilized world want the massacre to be illegal.

The victims in Panama and Iraq couldn't care less if invasions are legal or illegal.

**January, 1991**

## **PINOCHET TURNED THE RIVERS RED**

In a small town in Chile, down river from Santiago, the townspeople and their priest could not tell their tale for 17 years. In 1973, the CIA and ITT helped General Pinochet overthrow the government of Salvador Allende. Salvador Allende, killed during the Coup, had been elected by his people, but democracy is important in Latin America only when it gives power to governments interested in free markets and foreign investments.

After Pinochet got hold of the power, bodies began to show up everywhere, and float down rivers. Some bodies would float to this small pueblo, 60 kilometres away. The townspeople



and the priest fished them out, buried them in a large anonymous grave and said a silent prayer. All told, they fished 118 bodies from the river. They could not go to the police or the army to report the floating bodies because it was members of the police and the army that were throwing those bodies in the river.

Now, Pinochet has fallen from power, or sort of, and justice is being done, or sort of, and so the people and the priest have told their macabre tale.

### JUSTICE

Justice is being able to exhume mass graves so that family members and former lovers of the murdered 'enemies of the state' can finally find their dead and give them proper burials. Will the people in Panama have to wait 16 years before all the mass graves can be opened?

January 14, 1991

### CHRONICLE OF AN ANNOUNCED WAR

"I know you've heard its over now, and war must surely come". (Leonard Cohen)

Even if the mother of all air wars does not break out tomorrow, has not the inhumanity of our humanity already been proven? Has it not been proven by the energy and almost glee with which our governments, press and people have counted down to the January 15 United Nations deadline? Has it not been proven by how often we have been told about the necessity of this "noble" war? Has it not been proven by how we have numbed ourselves to the inevitability of attacking and killing.

The protesters have been silenced by the press and frozen by their impotence in front of the great war machine.

### THE ECONOMY OF WAR

Three U.S. companies have been working overtime for months now to supply the Pentagon's "urgent request" for 16,099 body bags. (New York Times)

January 15, 1991

We sit glued to the TV to watch the start of the war. It is a sports event/game show atmosphere with amazing bits of information. A representative of the magazine "Science and Technology Today", being interviewed by CNN, reports that "this war will bring some amazing new areas of investigation".

Watching and watching ... another beer please! This is better than Panama. Panama was a secret attack. This one is on TV.

January 19

### SPORTS ANALYSIS

The carpet bombing has begun. A U.S. pilot is interviewed after one of the 1000 bombing raids of that day: "I felt like you feel just before a huge football game. You want to go to the bathroom 50 or 60 times, but when the game begins, you feel fine. ... There were the most fabulous fireworks. It was exactly like in the movies".(New York Times)

"I did not create the world.

But I create it again,

by my presence,

at every instant ...

It is easy to pay with the blood of others ...

Other people's blood is the same as ours".

(Simone de Beauvoir, *The Blood of Others*)



**LIFE IS THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF**  
I dreamt last night that I was playing guitar and all the strings became unravelled.

### **NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

Vice-President Quayle goes on the record: "We cannot rule out the use of nuclear weapons." The civilized world invented them, has most of them, and the U.S. is the only country ever to have used them on other people. If need be, we will decide to use nuclear weapons. If so, this will be defended as moral and correct by our governments. News commentaries and editorials will support it.

### **SILENCE**

B. told me tonight about what  
F. has talked to me about what  
R. could barely talk about and what  
many women and girls never talk about -  
male sexual violence against women and girls.

### **SPORTS ANALYSIS**

The newspapers announce that at least 40,000 Allied bombing raids flown so far. The media coverage is similar to how sports writers count Gretzky assists and Jordan baskets in a sports season.

### **LETTER FROM A FRIEND**

"Your letter found me in a state of anger towards many people around me ... I'm angry that the whole issue has become a subject of conversation ... I try to keep speaking out about it all. I also try to stay away from depression".

### **Nicaragua, February 20, 1991 COMMANDER 3-80 IS DEAD**

Colonel Bermudez, former Contra leader and once a high ranking official with Somoza's army, was shot down dead in front of the Hotel Inter-Continental in Managua. Bermudez fought with Somoza's army, supported by the U.S., that had one of the worst human rights records in the Americas. After the Sandinistas came to power in 1979, he fled and, with the support of the CIA, helped to create the Contras. The Contras had one of the worst human rights records in all the Americas. His 'nom de guerre' was "Commander 3-80", named after his gun which, ironically, was the type of gun used to kill him.

### **February 21, 1991**

### **KAFKAESQUE SEARCHES**

I work with the Association of Mothers of the Disappeared, an organization whose members are mothers of children disappeared by the Contras during the 1980s. Most of the day I speak with two mothers about how to go about looking for and exhuming clandestine graves, where their lost loved ones might be buried. What these mothers want is to give their children a decent burial. Some mothers have discovered their children and loved ones by locating arms and legs sticking out of the ground from shallow graves created by the Contras.

### **THE ECONOMIC SYSTEM**

My boss and I had an interview with a man from Luxembourg who represents a number of European countries looking into setting up a human rights institution in Central America. Their plan is to focus on educating the judiciary, police and army about political and civil rights.

'Why?', we ask with due respect. 'Do you think the soldiers don't know when they are violating human rights, when



they are torturing someone?'. 'Why not support work being done educating the population that they have economic and social rights - that they have a right to a minimum standard of living? - that they don't have to live in poverty?'

In the silence that followed, we knew that the workings of the international economic system was a taboo subject. He concluded:

'thank-you for coming to give me your thoughts', and stepped into the car that was taking him to the airport.

**Costa Rica, March 1991**

### **THE NEVER ENDING POEM**

I'm thinking of writing an epic poem. It will start out like this: 'I went to some exhumations in Nicaragua, Panama and Latin America, to help look for and dig up some of the 100,000 disappeared persons ...'

Ever since the U.S. decided that the Soviet Union was the evil empire, much of Latin America has become a common grave for disappeared people, people like you and me, who are called communists, subversives and any other 'ists'.

### **THE ROLE OF THE PRESS**

The newspapers report that Panamanian President Endara is a director of an international bank that has laundered drug money and that he has a personal fortune of 17 million dollars. This has been known for a long time, but it was not expedient to publish it during the invasion.

### **AUNT JEAN WILL SOLVE THE WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

"Aunt Jean said it all when she went to a hockey game with her son. After watching the game for a while, she commented: "Oh dearie, wouldn't it be easier if they had two

pucks - one each?'" (Letter from my mom, commenting on the war in Iraq)

### **THE WAR WAS A FOOTBALL GAME**

"One Apache Attack helicopter pilot described the scene as a "turkey shoot. By 6 a.m. nothing was left to shoot except smoking hulks. There was nothing left to be gained by continuing the offensive", said Lt. Gen Gary E. Luck, the 18th Corps Commander. "It is 66-0, with ten seconds left in the game. You don't need to go out and score a field goal". (*Miami Herald*)

### **A 7 MONTH OLD BABY'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE WAR**

"Qais Shehab Imad was born on August 2, 1990 ... He died Saturday, at the age of 7 months, due to diarrhoea, vomiting and associated fevers that are, according to Doctors, related to economic sanctions against Iraq, and related to the bombing of the country's socio-economic infra-structure". (*La Nacion*)

### **MAN'S WORLD**

My friend S. was walking down the sidewalk today in broad day light. A man walked by, grabbed her breasts and bottom, and walked on.

### **RESPONSE TO MAN'S WORLD**

"Women of the Americas have begun to invent strategies to defy fear. They do it through peaceful means, while constructing a clearly female symbolism with white handkerchiefs, arpilleras and unclenched hands, all of which means: our hands are clean, we haven't killed or tortured anyone". (Marjorie Agosin)



## RESPONSE TO MAN'S WORLD

"The brief time we spent together isn't important. The intensity is what counts. The world we glimpsed, the fear we shared, and I don't mind telling you that my hands are perpetually frozen, and they'll gladly reach out to you for warmth. Let's take one thing at a time, sister. Let's see if we can create, or are merely witnesses". (Marta Traba, *Mother and Shadows*)

### March 6, 1991

The war is over. The U.S.-Allied forces are no longer trying to beat the yesterday's record of how many bombing runs they can achieve in one day.

### THE DARK AGES

We learn in the news: 'Cholera has broken out in Peru, and is moving through South America ... Thus far, X number of persons have died'. Yesterday, we stopped counting how many bombing runs in one day were achieved by the U.S. and the Allies. Today we start counting how many people die from cholera every day.

I first learned about cholera in grade school studying the Dark Ages. Now I know that the 'Dark Ages' is a relative term, and the poor, world-wide, live in the dark ages. Cholera moves in poverty, and attacks the poor. The news does not talk of where cholera comes from, because then we would have to talk of poverty, which means also talking of wealth.

### Honduras, March, 1991

#### BANANA SPLITS AND DEFORESTATION

Honduras has long been referred to as a 'banana republic'. Now I know why. Flying over the city of San Pedro de Sula, I

see a long winding river that is the only source of water in this part of Honduras. On both sides of the river, for as far as the land is flat, there are huge banana plantations and elaborate irrigation systems owned by multi-national companies on the most fertile lands in Honduras.

Away from the river and irrigation systems, the land rises into dry hills and mountains. There, farmers live a subsistence life, chopping down forests and planting basic crops like corn and coffee on small plots until the land turns to dust and they move on.

### Costa Rica, March, 1991

#### TRUTH IS RELATIVE

In Chile, as in Nicaragua and Panama and elsewhere, there are many disappeared people. The legacy of Pinochet's 16 years of government is thousands of disappeared people and thousands of distraught mothers and lovers.

Retired General Cesar Mendoza was asked, in an interview, how he feels about these mothers: "Truth is relative. ... Listen, these Mamas who are so concerned, why didn't they concern themselves with bringing up their children better so ... they wouldn't get involved in what came later".

### MASS GRAVES AND ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY

After the discovery of a large mass grave in Chile, former President General Pinochet was questioned as to its existence: "Pero, que economia mas grande", he answered. That is to say that digging mass graves saved Pinochet's government more money than digging a lot of small ones for the people they murdered.



**Mexico, March 1991**

### **FUTILITY**

I wander through the plaza of Cuernavaca. Many people while the lovely day away. Over to one side, two people are talking loudly for all to hear, and no one is listening, except me. They tell their fellow citizens about the disappearances and police repression in Mexico.

It seems so futile - so few people dare to speak out about state violence in Mexico. It seems so futile - when someone does speak out, no one listens. It seems so futile - they who do speak out have so little power and money to change things. It seems so futile - but these are two beautiful people, who won't let lies and silence cover the anonymous graves of the disappeared.

"You may and must fight all your life against undeserved privilege, but remember that it is a fight without end". (Primo Levi)

**Tepoztlan, Mexico, March, 1991**

### **MANICURED LAWNS**

Tepoztlan is a small town tucked between high mountains, guarded by a centuries-old pyramid built by indigenous American peoples, long gone.

I sit on the balcony of a North American's house in the middle of Tepoztlan, below the mountains walls and an ancient pyramid. Looking out over the swimming pool and meticulously manicured lawn, I watch as a Mexican groundskeeper appears. He scoops up some doggy-doo and disappears behind a shed. Order is restored.

### **A RAT PLAGUE**

"The Minister of Health stated that public health in Haiti is a catastrophe. He explained that the State

University Hospital has been invaded by a rat plague; that it has a debt of \$160,000; that its four ambulances are broken; and that often it is not possible to feed the patients. Under pressure of the demand, sometimes two adults and four children sleep in the same bed".

I read this in the plane flying to Costa Rica. We are served hot meals and fresh coffee. What is not consumed will be thrown out.

**April 4, 1991, Costa Rica**

### **MAN'S WORLD**

My friend wrote about the 'clandestine laws' - the laws of poverty, violence and repression that govern the lives of so many. Two mornings ago, at 6:30 a.m. she was running at the university. A man ran up behind her. He clamped one arm hard around her neck. With his other hand, he tore down her jogging pants. He grabbed at her vagina between her legs. She managed to fight him off.

She is free now, but not really. She will always run and live in man's world.

**April, 1991**

### **KEEPING COUNT**

The newspapers keep daily tallies of cholera spreading through the barrios of poverty in Latin America. In Peru, close to 2,500 have died.

### **LIFE IS THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF**

I dreamt last night of long, long lines of Iraqi people, giving hours and hours of testimonies about the horror of the U.S.-Allied bombing. Panama revisited.



## **TIRING CYNICISM**

A person very dear to me is tired of my cynicism. So am I.

## **MAN'S WORLD**

A friend was walking down a Costa Rican beach, hand in hand with her good friend. They enjoyed the ocean, the sand in their feet, the presence of one another. They kissed and then he tried to force her to have sex with him. She struggled and cried. He was raping her with power, force and male prerogative. Her soul exploded while her words reasoned and pleaded - no, no, no. Finally someone came by, and he stopped. Men don't like to get caught.

## **2000:1 KILL RATIO - US AND THEM**

In the war against Iraq, for every one of our soldiers killed we killed approximately 2,000 of them.

## **Costa Rica, May 1991**

### **THE DISCORDANCE**

I present a video of human rights abuses in El Salvador to a group of middle and upper class women in Costa Rica. I am accompanied by a woman whose husband was murdered by death squads three years ago for working in a human rights commission. She herself had been captured and tortured for human rights work and accused of being a communist and subversive.

The women watching the video ask the woman I am with if the opposition in El Salvador were communists and subversives.

## **OF KINGS, QUEENS AND CHOLERA**

La Nacion, a local newspaper, reports that King Juan Carlos of Spain and his Queen Sofia of Greece are travelling

through Costa Rica. We are told much less about the cholera which is spreading from Peru into other South American countries, and up towards Central America. At a black tie reception *La Nacion* reports that "King Juan Carlos was the only person who combined a tuxedo with a blue shirt".

## **TIES AND CHOLERA**

In an interview with the *Tico Times*, Costa Rican Dr Leonardo Mata said "Nobody who wears a tie ever gets cholera".

## **Nicaragua, May, 1991**

### **THE NEW NICARAGUA**

I haven't visited Nicaragua for quite a while now. I miss not being able to check to check in with my 'Nicaraguan' family. A friend who has just been with them tells me that for two days the family had not been able to buy food, due to inflation and scarcity. I'm sitting here writing, trying to think this through - that friends of mine are going hungry ...

## **A HEADACHE THE SIZE OF A WAR**

Gonzalo, a friend from Nicaragua, visited San Jose. It was the first time he had been outside of Nicaragua. At 21, he had already shot at and been shot at by the U.S.-contras. He had gone hungry. He had spent half his life fighting for an ideal, a fair country, fighting a war that Nicaragua did not want.

For three days he walked around San Jose with a splitting headache. He went to cafes, movies, parks and icecream stores, seeing for the first time how much the U.S. policy towards Nicaragua had ravaged his country and people.



Costa Rica. May 1991

### THE CONTINUING POEM ABOUT DISAPPEARANCES

A Guatemalan woman recently was in San Jose, at a conference on workers' rights. She was in her mid-twenties and very active with her local union. I met her at the home of a Guatemalan friend of mine. Today, we received word at CODEHUCA that a few days after returning to Guatemala, she was disappeared.

### EARTHQUAKES AND PRIORITIES

An earthquake on the east coast of Costa Rica and Panama has ravaged homes and destroyed the region's infrastructure. In Costa Rica, 70 persons have died. The national and international community has responded immediately with financial aid, the sending of foodstuffs, emergency helicopter and bridge building support.

I wonder why people respond with such immediacy and warmth to a natural disaster and yet not to human-caused suffering, like poverty, war, cholera and violence against women. The more implicated the human community is in the creation of suffering and death, the less involved humans will be in the solution.

### THIRD WORLD DEATHS AND FIRST WORLD PROFITS

"In March 1988 alone there were 25 wars going on, all in the Third World, and all fought with weapons purchased from the First and Second worlds. Four-fifths of the over 3 million casualties in these wars have been civilian". (*Out of the Cold*, Robert McNamara, former defense secretary of the U.S.)

Civilian deaths in the Third World help the First World economy.

May, 1991

### SAVING THE BRAZILIAN RAIN-FOREST

Last week, on a yacht at the mouth of an Amazonian river, there was a high level meeting to discuss how to save the rain forest and preserve the planet's oxygen. Prince Charles attended, along with a lot of Brazilian officials in suits and ties. The forests and rivers of the region are inhabited by indigenous persons, living there long before European kings and queens began to send explorers and conquerors to 'discover' the 'new' world. Not one indigenous person was invited to attend the meeting on the yacht.

### NEWS AND HUMAN PRIORITIES

Horrendous tidal waves hit Bangladesh. Tens of thousands of humans have lost their lives. I hurry out to get a newspaper. On the front page there is a major article about Ricky Henderson, a professional baseball player in the U.S. who earns millions of dollars per year to play baseball. Henderson told the interviewer that he was "the greatest". In the bottom corner of the newspaper there was a short article about the disaster in Bangladesh.

### REVENGE

"I won't be a murderer. I won't do to them what they've done to my people". (Alice Walker, *The Temple of my Familiar*)

### THE INVISIBLE HAND

"The sale of children is becoming very popular. The scandal (in the Dominican Republic) broke open when the police brought 23 people to trial for the alleged sale of 49 children for prices up to \$1,700 each child. The children were sold to foreign couples ... from Europe and the U.S. Most children came from



rural families that hardly had any money". (La Republica)

### Honduras, May 1991

#### A PLOT OF LAND THE SIZE OF A GRAVE

I sit at my computer in CODEHUCA writing about another massacre, this time of farmers in Honduras. The details seem so familiar and repetitive: five poor landless farmers are shot down in cold blood by gunmen hired by the rich landowner who is a former army official.

The farmers had been awarded occupation rights to the land through an Agrarian Reform Law decision. Once they had set up their lean-tos and begun to work, the army official, claiming to be the real owner, came with his hired killers. Sr Huerte, the 60-year-old leader of the farmers, stepped forth to talk with them. An ensuing silence was split by gunfire. Sr Huerte and four other farmers were killed in cold blood.

Eduardo Galeano, a Uruguayan, has written that throughout much of Latin America farmers survive and die on plots of land "the size of a grave".

Thus ended massacre number umpteen in the history of Honduras. I try to picture Sr Huerte, as I write about him: a wiry old man with a sun and wind-wizened face; strong arms and a beat-up old cowboy hat; old, torn and many times washed clothes; big, very big hands; and a kind and open face.

The fact is I don't know what Sr Huerte looked like. Sitting here at the computers of CODEHUCA, I was just trying to put a face to this person I had been writing about, this person who was murdered because he wanted to have a small piece of land to work and live on.

### Nicaragua, May 1991

#### INADVERTENT GAZES

Ofelia went to Nicaragua to continue some work with the mothers of the disappeared that CODEHUCA was involved with. She wrote:

"With the mothers,  
I learned of sadness and hope.  
The sadness was obvious,  
in the gazes,  
lost in memory,  
that some mothers inadvertently let escape,  
as they held up photos of their disappeared children".

#### MAN'S WORLD

Ana told me of her abortion. In Costa Rica, Ana had a horrible time locating a doctor who would perform the operation. The weeks were passing by. When she finally found a doctor to discuss it, he lectured her on the evils of having abortions. Alone, distraught and very alone, she went to Nicaragua, where there is a women-organized and operated clinic, where they gave her body back to her. Ana finished telling this saying 'and I know that I am one of the lucky ones'.

### May, 1991

#### DRIVING ALONG THE PANAMERICAN HIGHWAY

Driving on the Panamerican highway to El Salvador, from Costa Rica, passing through Nicaragua and Honduras. We are going to the annual meeting of numerous Central American human rights commissions. I have my notebook - I jot notes about things I see and think about on the way.

In northern Nicaragua, we spend a night in a small hotel in Somoto. The rain stops. It is quiet, quieter than it has been for ten years. Last year at this time the quiet of Somoto was always filled by the sound of the Contras attacking.



The Honduran-Nicaraguan border is a scene from a tale written by Kafka, passing through seven different offices to get permission to cross the border. On the Nicaragua side, the buildings are bombed skeletons, reminder of the war that has ended for now.

In southern Honduras the small mud huts have thatched roofs and dirt floors - no electricity or water. The fields and road sides grow dry and dusty plants. Cholera comes to Central America from the south, entering the places of poverty that lack the basic necessities of life, like electricity and water.

Women and girls wait with two or three containers each, for the water trucks that rarely come.

#### **LEISURE TIME**

Over many bridges, we drive. In the muddy rivers below thousands of women and girls wash old and worn clothes, scrubbing them out on the rocks. I wonder what is leisure time, for the people of the rivers of the Panamerican Highway?

#### **QUAINT ROCK FENCES**

Up the steep mountain-sides, hundreds of long, sturdy stone fences string out. I wonder how little the campesinos were paid to do this work?

#### **SNAPSHOTS**

All along the Panamerican, through Honduras into El Salvador, drunk men stumble along or lie in the dirt. Most small villages seem to have this obligatory sentinel, a miserable sign of the hopelessness, war and poverty.

Miserable, like the piles of garbage that line the highway, leaping over the edges of cliffs. Miles and piles of garbage ... Cholera looks on with obvious glee. The First World exports toxic waste products to financially strapped Third World nations, adding to their garbage. Debt for toxic-waste swaps, keeping the north green and clean, killing the poor in the south.

#### **SANITARY SYSTEMS**

... more snapshots, like the middle age farmer woman urinating, seven yards off the Panamerican Highway. Driving by, I see her squatting in plain view, by a small rock, in the dirt. Her daughter stands waiting. She looks like a traveller who can't wait to get to the next gas station. She is no traveller. This is her home. This is the sanitary system for millions of Central Americans, who have little access to potable water and toilets, where cholera look on with anticipation.

#### **OF LIFE AND SURVIVAL**

... driving by those piles and miles of garbage. Tall black vultures, men and small boys pick through, scratching out survival. This is the most desperate of images - the poor living off garbage dumps - the garbage is their life and livelihood.

#### **CHILDREN OF THE HIGHWAY**

Thousands of young children play happily in the dirt, and in poverty. It has been said a million times - children are the hope of future. Driving along, it is so clear - there is no future for these children, but that they will become worn and tired adults, living in poverty. Girls and boys - adults by the age of four or five - carrying baby brothers and sisters on their backs - going back and forth from the river carrying



buckets of water. They are adults before they even have a chance to be children.

### **THE WOMEN WHO CARRY FORESTS ON THEIR BACKS**

I drive by a woman who looks about 60-years-old, and is probably 40, carrying a 6 or 7-foot long tree trunk over her shoulder to her hut to boil water and cook food all day so that she and her family can survive until tomorrow when she will go and look for forests to carry on her back to survive.

### **SEARCH FOR THE GUILTY SHOE**

I told a Salvadoran friend of mine about my 'nike shoe theory', that I look at people's shoes to get an idea of how they live.

She told me this story:

"For months and months I went around staring at people's feet, looking for a certain pair of boots. When the army had captured me in El Salvador, they had me blindfolded the whole time. All I remember seeing, through the crack between my nose and the blindfold, were the boots of the man who was torturing me".

I thought of her shoe story, and about my 'nike shoe theory', when I drove by the old woman on the highway who was carrying the forest on her back. She was wearing plastic flip-flops.

### **"WE HAVE A LOT IN COMMON"**

Throughout Honduras and El Salvador huge billboards advertise cigarettes. The people of the Panamerican, hauling water and firewood on their backs, see pictures of white, bikini-clad beach girls prancing in front of tanned, muscular boys. "Mucho tenemos en comun" reads the caption -

'We have a lot in common'. On the Panamerican, I wonder who has what in common with whom?

### **YOU CAN'T PAINT OVER POVERTY AND DESPAIR**

In San Salvador, a little boy comes up to my car window at a red light to beg. Four or five years old with tattered clothes and a dirty face, someone tried to paint a clown's face on him. He is the saddest clown I have ever seen. You can't paint over poverty and despair.

### **HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS**

At a dusty gas station in Honduras, a small boy wheels up to my car window on a rickety old wheelchair. He smiles and is inquisitive, seeking money. His tiny deformed legs are tucked underneath him. He obviously has a congenital disease and has never received any treatment for it. For the poor in Honduras, there is no health care system, just as there is no sanitary system for the poor in El Salvador.

I guess that this boy will be here in 20 years, rolling up to car windows.

### **SEGUNDO MONTES COMMUNITY**

High in the Morazan mountains a small Salvadoran town is named after a massacred Jesuit Priest. These Salvadorans have spent up to ten years in Honduran refugee camps. Now, many of them have come home, to start over. It is hard to start over when you carry such a horrendous past with you.

I visit this town called Segundo Montes. It is a very hard place to visit. Much of Morazan is closed off from the outside world - soldiers control five army roadblocks and use force and violence to control the movement of people in and out of the region. On the day I drove through, four busloads of



Salvadoran law students and professors were detained by the soldiers, who shot rounds of machine-gun bullets over their heads.

I was able to get past the five roadblocks. North American immunity from the army we arm, finance and train? White immunity?

### "DEAR BELOVED SOLDIERS..."

At one of the military roadblocks, I must enter the local barracks to get the Lieutenant's permission to travel on to. Waiting, I read a poster on the wall that has the picture of a Colonel Monterosa. Beneath the photo, one of his inspirational quotes: "Beloved soldiers, we will do all to save our companion campesinos from the slavery of communist terrorism".

When the army illegally captures the campesinos of Segundo Montes, or captures anyone, and when they torture them, they call them communists and terrorists.

The great fear that the military has of the returned refugee communities is that they are educated and organized. Democracy and education threaten the army.

### EL MOZOTE

I arrive at the community. I hear Rufina Amaya speaks. She is the only survivor of a massacre (December 10-11, 1981) when the army killed close to 1000 people in the small town of El Mozote, that no longer exists. The army killed the people and disappeared the town. During the massacre, Rufina watched, from hiding, as the soldiers herded her four children along with all the other children and townspeople, and executed them. Rufina mentions that Colonel Monterosa had been in charge of the massacre ... I remember his inspirational speech: "Beloved soldiers ...".

Rufina, and Salvadorans from other decimated communities, have returned from the poverty of exile, to try and start their lives again, without their loved ones, whose ghosts still linger around this area they once called home, that they want to call home again.

El Salvador, June 1, 1991

### LIFE IS THE STUFF THAT DREAMS ARE MADE OF

I dreamt last night that I was flying slowly above this high bridge that was broken in half. As I flew above, I watched all these people, on foot, bicycle, and in cars, moving slow and fast towards the edge of the bridge. Some of them realized at the last minute about the pending disaster, and scrambled for the side of the bridge to try and grasp on to the rail. The rest never realized what was happening. Whether they figured out what was happening or not, I saw them all go over the edge to their deaths.

### THE PANAMERICAN HIGHWAY

We are back on the road to Costa Rica from El Salvador, passing through Honduras and Nicaragua. The rainy season has come to northern Nicaragua. Men and boys plow brown fields with their oxen. They work and work to produce enough food to survive during the dry months. For the poor of Nicaragua and Central America, there is no irrigation system. The irrigation systems are on the big farms that produce 'cash crops' to export to first world markets.

### MEETING OF TWO WORLDS

The government of Spain, and numerous Latin American governments, plan major celebrations in 1992 to celebrate the 'discovery' of the Americas. They have decided to call their celebrations the 'Meeting of Two Worlds'. There will be no meeting of two worlds. The Americas is one world. All they have to do is to look at their societies to find where the



original indigenous peoples are living. There was no meeting 500 years ago. One world conquered another.

**Costa Rica, June 1991**

### **THE LIFE OF A REFUGEE - HAPPY, SCARED, AND FRIGHTENED**

Last year Rogelio came to CODEHUCA to give his testimony of illegal detention and torture in El Salvador. Last night, Rogelio came to my home to say that he was happy - happy that his refugee status had been accepted, that he was off to Canada, and that he would see his wife and four children for the first time in a year. Rogelio came to my home to say he was frightened - frightened to be going so far from his family, loved ones, and country.

And, he came to say to me that he was scared - scared because one week ago his father told him during a telephone call that he had been on his way to work in his fields when he was assaulted by three men. The men told him that he and his family would pay for what his children were doing, which is working with the poor. Then the three men beat Rogelio's father unconscious and left him there in the field.

### **VIDEO TAPES AND LIES**

In February, 1991, former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark travelled to Iraq during the air-bombing to get first-hand coverage of the damage that the U.S.-Allied forces were causing but not reporting on. When he came back to the U.S., no major T.V. station aired Ramsey Clark's uncensored video (*There is no place to hide*) of what was occurring in Iraq.

### **"MEETING OF TWO WORLDS"**

In Panama, 500 years after the Europeans arrived, 18 months after the U.S. invasion that "restored democracy",

55 people die of Sarampion, a disease that feeds off of conditions of poverty. We receive another bit of information: - these 55 people were all indigenous persons.

**Costa Rica, June 1991**

### **CHANGE TAKES A LONG TIME**

My work as a lawyer with CODEHUCA winds down. Or rather, the contract winds down, because there is still lots of work, because the human rights violations are still occurring, because the world still talks about the problem of poverty and not the problem of wealth, because the arms merchants in the first world are still making a good living off Central American suffering, because, as my friend Samantha said, "just because".

I am sad and tired. The situation in Central America has not improved. It is unjust and violent. There is still a huge demand for human rights workers, and the new world order has just begun.

### **CLANDESTINE LAWS**

In the name of democracy and freedom, the U.S. dominates the Americas, and much of the international political agenda, through the use of economic and military power. In Central America and across the planet, people who suffer human rights violations are victims of abuses of economic and military power.

"I believe the U.S. must liberate itself from its love of violence and its love of wealth - which are closely integrated. We are a plutocracy in the truest sense of the word - a government of wealth". (Former Attorney-General Ramsey Clark, *The Progressive*, April 1991)



## AND THE BEAT GOES ON

July 8, 1991

My contract is over. In the mountains of Costa Rica, I think of how I couldn't change the world. Today's paper, La Nacion, arrives - Martin Ayala has been assassinated in El Salvador. I stare out the window of a cabin in the woods. I stare at the photo - the remains of the murdered Martin Ayala:

barefeet tied together  
arms tied behind his back  
lying twisted in a pile of garbage  
torture signs on his body.

The story reads that his wife, still alive, was tortured and mutilated as well. It mentions, in passing, that Martin Ayala worked with the poor.

## DESPITE EVERYTHING - 'A PESAR DE TODO' - THE TALE MUST BE TOLD

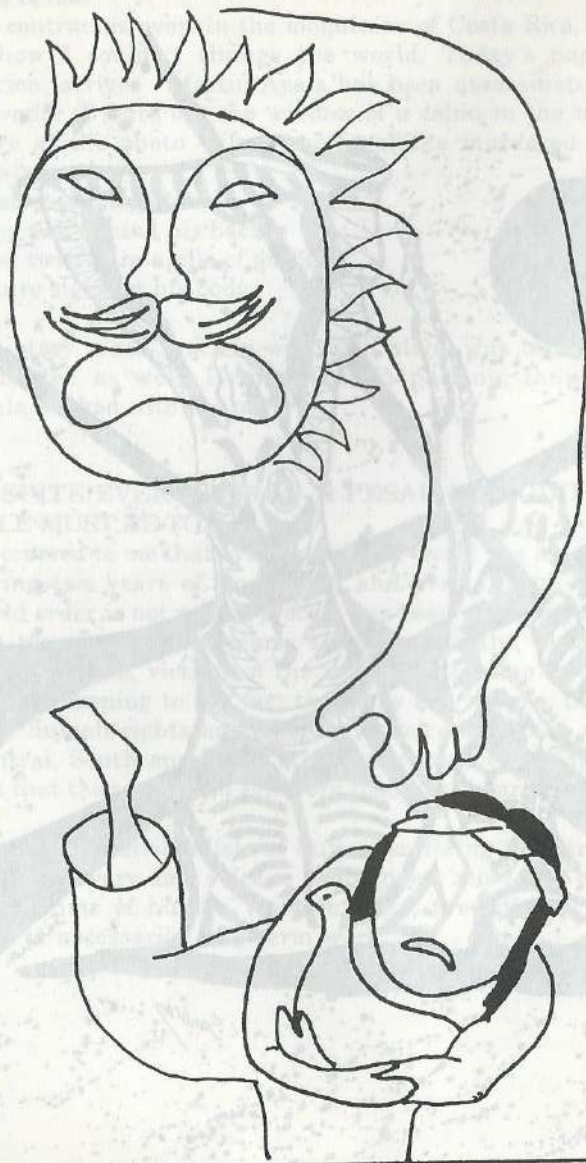
It occurred to me that even though the world has not changed during two years of work here, and even though the new world order is not new, a process has been occurring over the last twenty or thirty years. Victims of all the various systems of abuse, victims of the many clandestine laws, have been awakening to the fact that they are victims, that they have human rights and that they don't have to be victims. Central, South and North Americans are awakening to the fact that they must and can work together towards change.

Despite the terrible lists of human suffering that are being compiled every day, voice is being given, more and more, to the victims of human violence, past, present and future. This is necessarily long term work.





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### THERE ALWAYS HAS BEEN ...

I have been told so many times that "there always has been war, poverty, rape ... and there always will be!" This argument is most often used by non-victims and by the oppressors themselves. For the victims, there is nothing abstract nor philosophical about hunger, rape, or death by violence. They suffer from this, and they will always fight and struggle against this.

### HUMAN COLOURS

Colours can be so lovely,  
unless the green and grey  
signify bodies dug from a mass grave,  
unless the red is rivers of blood,  
unless the orange is the flash of the 2000th Allied  
bomb dropped on Iraq in one day,  
unless black is all that disappeared people will ever  
see.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

"Farewell Angelina I must go where it is quiet because the sky is on fire". (Bob Dylan)

"We built this cage, civilization, because we could think and now we have to think because we are caught in our cage". (Birdy)



## Afterword, September 1, 1992 San Jose, Costa Rica

As I wrote at the outset, this is not an uplifting book. I have been back with CODEHUCA since January, 1992. The systems and structures of violence and injustice are, in my opinion, still very much in place in Central America.

As I also said, the focus in this book has been less on the efforts of the people and non-government organizations in Central America, and more on the systems and structures that create and perpetuate so much suffering. I believe that if these systems and structures (military, economic, patriarchal and the nation state system itself) are not transformed, the injustices and human rights abuses will continue, despite the best efforts of the people and organizations.

"Hope lies in the courage and strength of the people". This quote, so obviously applicable to many people in Central America, applies equally to people around the planet, in the first world or the third, who are struggling to put an end to the unjust economic, political, military, racial and gender systems that so govern our lives.

With respect to Central America, there is much that can be done in the 'north'. I include here a list of the human rights organizations affiliated with CODEHUCA throughout the region, and I encourage the reader to get in touch with them to see how you can support their work.

I also include the name of a book that is the most comprehensive 'what-to-do, how-to-do' book I have read concerning human rights and justice issues in Latin America and the Caribbean. I suggest that any interested person get a hold of this book and do your own reading and research as to how you might become more involved in dealing with these issues:

*Latin America and Caribbean*, Fenton\Heffron, can be ordered from Orbis Books, P.O. Box 308, Maryknoll, New York, 10545-0308, t-914-941-7590, fax-914-945-0670.

The one comment I would make with respect to 'what-to-do' is that the answer will depend on who each person is and what are their particular interests. That is why I strongly suggest getting a resource book, like the one cited above, to be read carefully and thought about.

### About this book, please send comments to the author:

1- A.P. 189-1002, SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA.  
T- WORK - (506) 245970. FAX - (506) 342935.  
T- HOME - (506) 259593.

2- 37 Ridge Dr., Toronto, Canada, M4T 1B6

Feel free to copy and distribute this book.

### Human Rights Commissions affiliated with CODEHUCA:

- 1- Human Rights Commission of Belize, 95 New Road, P.O. box 617, Belize City, Belize
- 2- Comision Costarricense de Derechos Humanos, A.P. 379-1011, San Jose, Costa Rica
- 3- Comision de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador, Urb. La Esperanza, pas. No.119, San Salvador, El Salvador
- 4- Comision de Derechos Humanos de Guatemala, A.P. 5-582, 06500 Mexico, DF, Mexico
- 5- Comite para la Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras, A.P. 1256, Tegucigalpa, Honduras
- 6- Centro Nicaraguense de Derechos Humanos, de la Texaco Montoya, 1 1/2 Cu. S., Managua, Nicaragua
- 7- Centro de Capacitacion Social, Calle 66ae, Carrasquilla, Panama, Panama
- 8- Comision Nacional de Derechos Humanos de Panama, A.P. 6-567, El Dorado, Panama, Panama



### the weight of nothing

"Tell me the weight of a snowflake,"  
a coal-mouse asked a wild dove.

"Nothing more than nothing",  
was the answer.

"In that case I must tell you a marvelous story" the coal-mouse said. "I sat on the branch of a fir tree, close to its trunk, when it began to snow, not heavily, not in a raging blizzard, no, just like in a dream, without any violence. Since I didn't have anything else to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the next snowflake dropped onto the branch, nothing onto the branch - nothing more than nothing, as you say - the branch broke off."

Having said that the coal-mouse flew away.

The dove, since Noah's time an authority on the matter, thought about the story for a while, and finally said to herself "perhaps there is only one person's voice lacking for peace and justice to come about in the world."