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PROJECT QUILÁ: A CASE STUDY IN COMMUNITY-BASED REHABILITATION

by

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For my parents,
Norman and Lorraine Perlman

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Abstract

Project Quilá: A Case Study in Community-Based Rehabilitation

Daniel Perlman

Project Quilá is a rural rehabilitation center organized and run by disabled villagers in the foothills of the Sierra Madre in western Mexico. This dissertation explores the innovations in deprofessionalization, democratic decision making, and popular health education that form the conceptual foundation on which the project was organized. Life histories were employed to better understand how experiences of childhood disability, incontinence, isolation, social stigma, and encounters with institutional medicine, have shaped the project's ideology and day to day practice.

In their personal accounts, Quilá participants with childhood disabilities such as polio and cerebral palsy, described what it was like to grow up poor and disabled in rural Mexico. Participants with spinal cord injuries generally became disabled later in their lives, and spent months or years in self imposed isolation and developed a near complete dependence on family members for their daily needs. The lives of the majority of the participants interviewed changed dramatically upon their arrival at Quilá. As they moved through the project and saw that virtually all the rehabilitation workers and coordinators were people with disabilities often far more profound than their own, a process of rethinking possibilities began.

However, Quilá is both a model project and a very troubled therapeutic community. Violence and drug abuse have brutally tested its democratic structure and nearly led to its collapse. These difficulties are examined within the context of high unemployment, deteriorating yields from ejido lands, and the chronic disinterest of the government in the development of new sources of income, which has left many campesinos in the region with few

alternatives to participation in the drug trade. Participant observation and in-depth interviewing were carried out during two years of fieldwork in the village of Piaxtla in which the project is located.

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Prologue

It all started with a road. I was living outside of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, nearly twenty years ago. When I first arrived in Yogyakarta it was a city of bicycles. But the country was developing rapidly. First Japanese motorbikes, then cars dominated the streets. Then construction started on a road behind my house. Soon the stands of bamboo by the road came down to build a row of square concrete houses.

I had come to Java on a grant to study Indonesian. As the flow of traffic increased behind my house, I asked a friend for travel suggestions within archipelago. I said I wanted to spend my semester break as far from a road as possible. He said he had heard about a place called the Rampy Valley on the island of Sulawesi. The valley was absent from the guidebooks and most maps. I decided to go. The trip to central Sulawesi took two days by boat and then another three days by bus. Arriving at the district capital I was told that Rampy was an additional five day walk through the rain forest. I met a group of villagers who were starting out for the valley. On the morning of the fifth day we made a sharp turn on a mountain pass. Suddenly before us was the Rampy Valley. Terraced rice fields, thatched bamboo huts, and a river winding through it all.

I spent two weeks in the valley. As I visited its five villages I frequently said to the people that I was stunned by the natural beauty and by their way of life. People most often accepted the compliment and then changed the topic, asking if I had brought any medicine for an infected foot or for a fever. The fertile valley was largely self-sufficient. They still had an abundance of land and tropical forests. Wild boar, deer and anoa were plentiful. The only things that the people of the valley needed from the outside were kerosene,

salt, and effective health care. They were Protestant and had sought refuge in the regency capital for a number of years during the Muslim rebellions on the island. While living in the regency capital they had come to rely on western medicine for a number of health problems. Now back in Rampy, when they left the valley those that could afford it bought Cloroquine for malaria, but diarrhea, skin problems, and tuberculosis mostly went untreated.

Upon returning to Central Java I learned that a new village health care handbook had recently been translated into Indonesian. The book, which had been written for use by rural health workers in western Mexico, explained through simple language and drawings how to prevent, diagnose and treat many common illnesses. I bought five copies, prepared five medicine kits, and set off once again for the Rampy Valley.

I met the village chief of the first hamlet as I entered the valley. It was harvest time and he was on his way out to his rice fields. I told him that I'd like to talk with him. He said might have time later that week. Seeing my disappointment, he asked what I wanted. I showed him the books and medicine kits. He immediately turned back to the valley and spent the rest of the afternoon organizing a health committee. I passed the next four days sequestered in a house with the village chief and the four members of the committee. My knowledge of village health care was virtually nonexistent, being limited to a two year stint in the Peace Corps testing sputum samples for Tuberculosis in South Korea. I did, however, understand how to use the book and its several indexes. The people on the health committee all had children and all had hard-gained empirical knowledge of the local health problems. We combined our knowledge and together we studied the book and the use of the medicine kit. Each morning at dawn the village chief woke me up with a cup of coffee and the exhortation, "Lets study."

The books and medicines were equally well received in the other villages of the valley. At the end of my stay, as I walked the five days out to the regency capital, I saw my life unfold before me. I would be the Johnny Appleseed of village health care, leaving handbooks and health committees behind me as I traveled through isolated villages.

Primary Health Care in Rural Java

I began to work with the Association of Voluntary Health Agencies of Indonesia helping to revise and field test the translation of the handbook. We rarely came across the same enthusiasm I saw in Rampy. Instead, we often encountered suspicion and apparent disinterest in what we had to offer. These villages were less isolated and thus much more firmly placed within the government apparatus. In the Rampy Valley landlessness was not a problem. There was an abundance of land and access was open to all community members. In the villages we visited in Java this was not the case. Land was often held by an elite few. Power in the community was equally concentrated.

I started visiting other community health programs to see if the problems we were meeting were unusual. I first went to Banjarnegara, a mountainous regency in Central Java. In the 1970s the Indonesian government, with support from international development agencies and local religious organizations initiated a series of experiments with primary health care in the early 1970's in Banjarnegara. Articles soon appeared in several international health journals praising the efforts in Banjarnegara to create a corps of "grassroots workers" who would help the community "realize their potential for controlling the environment which affected their daily lives" (Hendrata 1978: 11; Rifkin 1985: 101). The organizers talked of reorienting the

health care system away from the cities and towards the villages. Each community was to be involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the program. Health workers *(kader kesehatan)* were to be selected by and responsible to the villages they served.

During my visit to Banjarnegara I found that virtually all the trial programs were no longer functioning. I later came upon a copy of an unpublished study of the Banjarnegara programs by a research unit jointly funded by the Gadjah Mada University Medical School, Yogyakarta, and the Free University of Amsterdam (HEDERA 1979a; HEDERA 1979b). The researchers found that in many villages the program had collapsed and that these efforts were "not in the foreseeable future likely to be a tangible reality for the rural poor" (HEDERA 1979a). In communities in which the programs had been in progress at least two years, as few as ten percent of the health workers were found to be active. (HEDERA 1979b: 148). Of those still active only six percent of the health workers approached the standards of performance set forth in the program guidelines. As for community participation, the survey revealed that forty percent of those surveyed did not even know that health workers were present in their village. Of those who did know, only twenty percent had any understanding of the essential elements of the program (Rienks and Iskandar 1983: 16).

The studies also revealed that village officials were given responsibility for key elements of the program, including the selection and daily management of the health workers. (Rienks and Iskandar 1983: 15). The village elites used the program to enhance their authority and closely monitored its implementation to prevent the development of alternative positions of power within the community (Rienks and Iskandar 1983: 15). The HEDERA studies avoided any discussion of how the larger social context

and recent political history of Central Java might have affected the Banjarnegara programs.

Power and Participation

The Indonesian state is hierarchical and highly centralized. After coming to power General Suharto swiftly consolidated his power through purges of the state bureaucracy and the violent suppression of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and popular peasant organizations.

The government chose national development as one of the core issues on which it to base its legitimacy. The theme reoccurred in the president's speeches and government pronouncements like a mantra. In the nightly television news he was referred to as the Father of Development *(Bapak Pembangunan).* Billboards appeared across the archipelago showing the president benignly looking upon a farmer, doctor, teacher, civil servant, soldier and a factory worker as they unrolled a superhighway, like a huge carpet, across a pastoral plain of coconut trees and rice fields. The caption read. "Roll On, Roll On, Wheel of Development."

Land reform had been abandoned , over six million households were landless, and the position of hired labor in agriculture was weakening. The fundamental issues affecting the health of much of the rural population were satisfactory employment and wages, land tenure, and equal access to government resources and services (White 1982). The rural population had been involved in the implementation rather than the formulation of community health efforts. Like most other policy decisions, these projects were initiated in Jakarta or the regency capitals with no consultation with people they were to serve. It is understandable why many of those in the

villages served by the Banjarnegara trails were uninterested in a program offering "simplified medicine" and run by the village landholding elites.

"Health by the People"

Development, of course, wasn't a concept created by President Suharto. In fact, Indonesia devoted itself to the task rather late in the game. The notion of "development" emerged after the second world war. The colonial system was breaking down and communism was "advancing" on several of the newly independent states.

International development agencies responded to the changing international situation with an evolving set of explanations of underdevelopment (Fergeson 1994; Escobar 1995). Scarcity, overpopulation, technological and cultural backwardness were all suggested as causes. More recently, with over 800 million people living in absolute poverty, international agencies began to emphasize the importance of helping people meet their basic needs. Primary health care, called "health by the people," became the suggested response to the unmet health needs of the urban and rural poor (Gish 1979: 203; Rifkin 1996; Morgan 1993; Macdonald 1993).

At the International Conference on Primary Health Care held in Alma Ata, USSR, in September 1978, the concept of community participation was given emphasis. Each community was to be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of health care activities affecting them. The cornerstone of this approach was the village health worker. Local health workers were to be selected by and accountable to the communities they served.

Many of these programs stressed the importance of building on the shared values and cooperative activities that were said to form the core of

rural village life; few of these communities, however, were homogeneous. Most were characterized by some form of social stratification based on class, gender, ethnic origin, caste or religion. In such settings local elites dominated village health committees. Community participation became a vehicle for village leaders to solidify their power and pursue their own interests within the larger social hierarchy (Ugalde 1985: 45; Morgan 1993; Werner 1993).

Though much of the literature on Primary Health Care has ignored or obscured the social relations underlying sickness and health, those authors writing from the perspective of the political economy of health have attempted a socially and "historically informed analysis of disease distribution and health services" (Packard 1989: 405; Green 1991; Morsy 1990). Capitalism, the political economists argue, "operates according to specific rules, such as the accumulation of capital and exploitation of wages laborers, that give it a certain predictable logic." These rules, in turn, greatly influence both the kinds of health problems affecting a population and the organization of services developed to address them (Morgan 1987: 133).

In many nations the belief has become entrenched that intervention at the individual level is the most effective means of improving the health status of the population. "The very concept of health has come to be equated with health care, and thus commodified - that is, individualized and purchasable. The medical model contains the implicit assumption that an adequate quantity of such interventions can, and will, lead to health in society - indeed, is the source of health" (Zurbrigg 1984: 131). This reasoning, of course, ignores the research of McKeown and others that suggest that improvements in Western health status came about long before most scientific medical discoveries (McKeown 1975).

The political economy of health has pursued its exploration of dependency and power relations at a variety of levels. At the community level a number of studies have explored the impact of unequal power relationships "in which the labor and life of one person is controlled in varying degrees by another" (Zurbrigg 1984: 203; Werner 1979; Packard 1979). At the global level, they have asked why improvements and health status have not occurred for much of the population of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Why, in other words, are underdeveloped countries underdeveloped? (Sanders 1984: 28).

In this investigation authors have drawn on the work of Immanuel Wallerstein, Andre Gunder Frank and other World Systems theorists (Frank 1969; Wallerstein 1974; Baran 1957; Rodney 1974). In The Modern World System Wallerstein proposed an alternative view of the dynamics of European expansion (Wallerstein 1974). With colonization, the relationship between the European center, or metropole, and the colonial population, or periphery, became grossly unequal. As the core societies industrialized and became economically diversified the periphery was reduced to poverty and economic over specialization. Instead of bringing development, European colonialism fostered underdevelopment and dependency (Frank 1969). In short, development and underdevelopment are not isolated and discrete phenomena. Rather, they are organically and functionally interrelated (Stavrianos 1981: 34). This is stressed in the following analysis:

> "Underdevelopment is not due to the survival of archaic institutions and the existence of capital shortage in regions that have remained isolated from the stream of world history. On the contrary, underdevelopment was and still is generated by the very same historical process which also generated economic development: the development of capitalism itself" (Frank 1966: 23).

It is therefore misleading to simply describe contemporary conditions in the Third World. These conditions, "whether they be the degree of malnutrition, the levels of agricultural production, or even the country's ecological endowment are not static factors, they are not givens. They are rather the results of an ongoing historical process" (Lappe 1987: 176). This argument is based on the assumption that capitalist development at the center entails extraction of surplus wealth from the periphery. The result is chronic underdevelopment (Morgan 1987: 130). This siphoning of surplus operates both within and between countries, with "metropolitan centers appropriating surplus from "satellite hinterlands" (Morgan 1987: 136). Social relations at the local, national and international level are greatly influenced by these interlocking patterns of dependency. Anthropologists using this approach have investigated the impact of multinational industry on health (Nash and Kirsh 1986; Wasserstrom 1979), the effects of social stratification on health (Davison 1983; Heggenhougen 1984; New 1986), and the relationship between capitalist development and nutrition (De Walt 1983). A more recent, sophisticated, and subtle use of the concept of dependency will be discussed in Chapter 9 of this dissertation.

Having seen the tremendous social and political obstacles the health worker programs faced in Java, I wanted to see how such a program might work in a less restrictive environment. Was the excitement and activity the books and medicine kits caused in the Rampy Valley unusual? Was the old Highlander School saying, "the people who have the problems have the answers," simply impractical in community health? I entered the University of California, San Francisco/University of California, Berkeley joint program in Medical Anthropology and was unable to follow the events in Rampy. But

with the opening of the Tenderloin Self-Help Center in San Francisco, another opportunity presented itself.

While in graduate school I wrote a short ethnography of a non-traditional mental health facility in the Tenderloin, San Francisco's "skid row." The Tenderloin is a mixed residential and commercial neighborhood largely made up of aging brick apartment buildings and residential hotels. The weekly meetings of the North of Market Planning Coalition were the closest thing the neighborhood had to a community government or town hall. The idea of a mental health center for those people who had "fallen through the cracks" of the city's mental health system was first discussed at one of these meetings. A group of service providers and homeless people began an intensive lobbying effort to convince the city of the importance of such a facility. The city, in 1984, issued a request for proposals (RFP) for an alternative mental health facility. Hospitality House, a privately run shelter and service center for homeless people, was the only bidder and received the contract.

The Tenderloin Self-Help Center opened in August 1986 in a storefront location in the heart of the Tenderloin. The center offered peer counseling and information on basic survival services such as public assistance, emergency shelters and medical care. Participants came to escape domestic violence, loneliness and isolation, or to learn how to fight an eviction, or were simply bored and needed a break from the streets.

The self-help center had the feel of the streets. It was perhaps the only service or agency for homeless people in San Francisco at the time that reflected the world of the people it was serving. As I entered the center for the first time a man looked up from the reception desk and said "full house."

I said I was there to see the outreach coordinator. He pointed upstairs. As I walked up to the mezzanine I looked down onto the drop-in center below. The space was full, frenetic and clouded with cigarette smoke. People were playing cards and monopoly around three or four tables. Others were standing or sitting in small groups talking. Two radios were going - each playing a different station. To my left were a number of strips of butcher paper covered with graffiti, much of it a commentary on what was happening at the center. Above the paper was a plaque stating, "Free Speech Wall - Created by a suggestion by Crown Prince Acadia." At the top of the stairs a tall young black man wearing a leather jacket, leather weight-lifting gloves, and a black baseball hat with "Too Tall" written on it, looked over my head and out to space and asked me who I wanted to speak with. My answer didn't seem to register. I finally found the outreach coordinator. He was on the phone. As I waited for him to finish a woman standing next to me looked up and said, "Overwhelmed, I'm just overwhelmed."

The Tenderloin Self-Help Center was run by a steering committee composed of homeless people, social service providers, and mental health consumers who were chosen every six months in community meetings. The executive director of Hospitality House, the contracting agency, had ultimate decision making power under the funding contract.

"The Fragile and the Predators"

Within weeks of its opening the center was embroiled in a dispute over its mission. The counseling staff saw the center's purpose as serving the "fragile mentally ill," whom they believed were being pushed out by the "predators" who used the drop-in-center. The counseling staff lobbied to either end the drop-in component or drastically reduce its hours. This

naturally brought them into conflict with the drop-in center staff. They saw the drop-in center as a "community living room" where homeless people could meet friends, play cards, or just sit quietly in a safe place. In their view it offered the emotional and psychological support that the more structured activities were meant to provide.

As tensions grew so did the bickering and violence. Debate at community meetings became increasingly personal and vindictive. One meeting ended with a fist fight. Another ended when a chair was thrown through the plate glass window. After witnessing the incident, the Prince of Acadia, who was dressed in red velvet, yellow scarves, a blue whistle and a gold foil crown, dejectedly said, "They've broken into mini little fiefdoms, each with their own little flags, and their own crew of saboteurs."

Diane Feinstein, then mayor of San Francisco, refused to release the final $200,000 of the first year's budget. Though the funding was eventually restored the executive director of Hospitality House took advantage of the crisis and declared the center "unsafe." He fired the director and the drop-in-coordinator. The drop-in center was made a sub department of counseling which immediately decided that drop-in hours would be greatly restricted and that the space would be increasingly used for groups and training. The executive director then announced that the steering committee was an advisory body and did not have the authority to set policy or make binding decisions.

"Simply the Messenger"

After years of working with villagers in East and Southeast Asia, I felt I had developed some degree of humility and an understanding of the ways in which an outsider can and can not be effective. I was therefore astonished at

how quickly I took to the role of being the "competent one" at the Self-Help Center. Within weeks I was elected to the steering committee and was soon very much involved in the struggles over community control. These activities reached a peak during the turbulent days after the firing of the first director. I reasoned that it was my responsibility to protect the center's fragile democracy, as the participants were still unable to defend themselves in the battles with Hospitality House. My awakening came a few weeks later. I had been asked by several participants to present a proposal to the steering committee for them. I modified the proposal as I felt it had no chance of passing as written. Upon arriving at the center the following morning the first words I heard were, "who the hell asked you to change our proposal! We can damn well think for ourselves. You were simply the messenger!"

The Second Year

After four months of chaos a new director was chosen. In the process of "depoliticizing" the center he fired all but the most service oriented staff members. The "predators" were also forced out from the center. "You've sometimes got to pull a few weeds to make the pasture grow greener," the new director explained. The steering committee became dispirited and rarely met for lack of a quorum. The community meetings also declined and were attended by no more than a handful of people who were mostly there to get off the streets. Prince Acadia's free speech wall was taken down and the space used for program announcements. Those volunteers and staff that were allowed to stay on appeared to appreciate the changes. Many felt that they now had a chance to improve the quality of services and to "finally do what this place is about, helping people get a job, get a life, and get the hell out of here."

Participation: Obstacles and Realities

One of the most fundamental problems facing community-based organizations is the apparent fragility of participatory democratic systems. While some manage to survive and even thrive, most disintegrate or are absorbed by larger, more traditional agencies (Riger 1984). Much of what we know about such organizational transformation comes from accounts of Feminist Movement Organizations that experimented with direct, face-to-face, non-hierarchical forms of governance in the late 60s and early 70s.

Persistent and destructive ideological clashes within the organization have been pointed to as a common threat to the survival of self-help and social movement organizations (Riger 1984). The most fundamental ideological conflict at the Tenderloin Self-Help Center was the debate over the meaning of the concept of self-help. At the initial meetings in which the broad outlines of the center were developed, the term self-help was understood as "people helping one another by exercising control over their lives and mental health services." The first center director strongly supported this vision.

The executive director of Hospitality House, however, saw self-help as a process of "pulling one's self up by the bootstraps." The focus was on the individual. He stressed the acquisition of motivation and skills that would allow one to compete in the job market. Community participation was simply a means of acquiring feedback about the appropriateness of services. "While they do know about their lives," said the Hospitality House executive director, "they do not have a lot of experience in administration, policy, operations, service delivery, ethics and therapeutic intervention. That is our department."

Time, Inequality, and Emotion

> "Our organizations and our alternative institutions die from internal bleeding long before they succumb to external pressure." (Weisstein and Booth 1975: 3).

These ideological conflicts were exacerbated by several reoccurring problems of participatory groups. Three of these, time, emotion, and inequality, have been analyzed by Mansbridge in her work on participatory democratic organizations. With the number of people involved in a direct, face to face, egalitarian governance process, decision-making can be painfully slow and the intensity and amount of emotions generated can become overwhelming. Ingrained inequalities in expertise, verbal skill, self-confidence and time spent in the organization can lead certain individuals to gain a "vital, threshold power" over the group decision making process. (Mansbridge 1973: 362).

At the Tenderloin Self-Help Center important decisions became personalized, evoked strong feelings, and dominated the emotional lives of many at the center. Inequalities in education and verbal skills allowed some members to gain power over the decision making process. The counseling staff had little trouble with the simple parliamentary procedures used in the meetings. On the other hand, the drop-in center staff and most of the participants had less experience in group decision making processes and at times became frustrated as they were ruled out of order or were unable to push their ideas through.

External Constraints

Much of the analysis of the systemic obstacles facing participatory organizations is rooted in the work of Weber and Michels and the argument that as non-hierarchical groups gain a base in society they inevitably become more bureaucratic and abandon their oppositional stance (Weber 1986; Michels 1949). This transformation is caused by the "technical superiority of bureaucracy vis-vis other modes of organization" and the struggle to obtain the needed resources to sustain the organization (Piven and Cloward 1979; Riger 1984; Rothschild-Whitt 1976.)

Morgen, in her study of a feminist health clinic, departed from the work of Weber and Michels and assumed neither the inevitability nor the superiority of bureaucracy (Morgen 1986). Instead, she explained the weakening of the alternative structure and goals of the clinic in terms of the larger political-economy. Central to her argument was an analysis of the role the State in weakening and absorbing challenges presented by grassroots health activism. Through the selective funding of activities the state used its economic leverage to shape the ideology and structure of the feminist health clinic. "A familiar picture of organizational change accompanies the decision to secure state funding; the erosion of collective decision-making, an immersion in service delivery to the exclusion of other activities, and a dependence on continued funding which decreases the political autonomy of the organization" (Morgen 1986: 201). Morgen also found that the developing dependency on external funding created an atmosphere of financial insecurity, in which "advocacy and political activism, two of the seeds from which the clinic had germinated had become transformed into 'risks'" (Morgen 1986: 206).

"Gathering Has a Power"

A number of studies of the Community Action Agencies of the 1960s, where "maximum feasible participation" was emphasized, reported that participants developed skills and feelings of efficacy that later prove effective in dealing with other aspects of their lives. Levens found that members of a Welfare Recipients League were more likely to perceive themselves as capable of exerting control over the problems that impinge upon them in their local environment (Levens 1968). Haggstrom has suggested that participants in organizations engaged in community conflict experience enhanced feelings of self-worth and decreased feelings of powerlessness (Haggstrom 1964). Piven and Cloward found that "participants who ordinarily considered themselves helpless came to believe that they have some capacity to alter their lot" (Piven and Cloward 1977: 4). Macoby in his study of community participation in the development of a neighborhood recreation program, found that people who join even a sports or social club are more likely thereafter to be politically active (Macoby 1958).

A number of studies by feminist social scientists have explored the effects of participation and collective action on the political understandings of the participants. (Bookman and Morgen 1988; Sacks and Remy 1984; Susser 1982; Vanneman 1987). These reports suggest that the process of participation in community-based struggles can dramatically deepen working-class women's awareness of their class and gender positions in society (Bookman and Morgen 1988: 13). Meanings of gender and class can change over the course of organizing efforts and can lead to increasingly sophisticated understandings of the social relations of power in the community (Bookman and Morgen 1988: 12).

It was often argued that participation in the Tenderloin Self-Help Center's decision making process would facilitate the acquisition of skills and feelings of efficacy that would prove useful in other situations. A clergyman who was active at the center disagreed. "Misha might feel empowered speaking at the steering committee meeting and pounding on the table, but is this translatable into other parts of her life? Is her work on the steering committee really helping her with her personal relationships, her son, her manic depressive swings?" However, virtually everyone interviewed who was involved in the original lobbying and development of the center felt that this earlier experience was in fact transformative. As one participant in the process observed,

> "A lot of homeless people and mental health consumers used to gather at the Ardi Hotel and talk about our dreams for the center. At times there were a lot of people and this created a lot of energy and action. These days people scream at each other on the steering committee and call it empowerment. That's, bullshit. Empowerment was what we got from getting the city to open the center. My God, we actually got our center! Its something I carry with me. Gathering has a power."

Project Quilá

I learned about Project Quilá from Samuel Eddings, the author of the village health-care handbook that I had taken to the Rampy Valley. Samuel was a high school biology teacher when he first went to Sinaloa's Sierra Madre Occidental to draw birds in 1964 during his vacation. He stayed on to found Project Rio Verde, the villager-run health care network for which he wrote the handbook.

By the time I returned from Indonesia to attend graduate school Samuel was living most of the year in Palo Alto, California. I worked for him as a

volunteer a few days each month. His book had changed my life and I saw him as a mentor.

Project Quilá is a rural rehabilitation center run by disabled villagers in the foothills of the Sierra Madre in western Mexico. It grew out of Project Rio Verde in the early 1980s. From Samuel's writing and our discussions it appeared that Project Quilá had somehow managed to successfully navigate the shoals upon which many community-based health care programs had come to their end. In his latest book, a handbook on community-based rehabilitation, Samuel described Quilá as being unusual in that disabled campesinos were not only administratively in control of the program, but also provided the orthopedic and rehabilitation services.

From my work in Indonesia I knew that the need for community-based rehabilitation was enormous. The vast majority of the world's disabled children live in rural areas of developing countries where few rehabilitation services are available. Those services that do exist tend to be professionally oriented, expensive, and located in the cities, which leaves most children with disabilities without physical therapy and orthopedic aids. Since its inception, Project Quilá has worked to develop and disseminate low-cost methods and technologies for disabled people in rural areas.

In 1991 the project received a large grant with the condition that an in-depth evaluation be done during the three year funding period. When Samuel asked me if I would be interested, I didn't think twice. It was my chance to literally learn from those who wrote the book. At a meeting with the funding agency's representatives it was decided that if the people at Project Quilá agreed, I would go to Quilá to do my doctoral dissertation research, and that my dissertation would serve as the evaluation report.

My research plan reflected my experiences in Indonesia and the Tenderloin Self-Help Center. I was interested in Quilá's innovations in deprofessionalization, democratic decision making, and the use of outside professionals. I wanted to study these themes through multi-level ethnographic research that would shed light on both the project's internal dynamics as well as the larger historical, economic, and political forces which shaped this small but influential rehabilitation center. I did not have initial hypotheses to be proven. Instead I approached this study with a number of general research questions to be addressed.

- What obstacles had the Quilá staff faced during ten years of experimentation in participatory democratic decision making processes?

- The people at Project Quilá believed that much of the work of licensed practitioners (doctors, therapists, orthopedists, orthotists, prosthetists and rehabilitation engineers) could be done by villagers and family members. What were the strengths and limitations of this approach, and how did it play out in day to day practice? What forms of training and apprenticeship had the project developed to teach such specialized knowledge and skills to villagers with little formal education?

- Who were the people who come to Quilá; why had they come; why had they stayed or left; and what did their experience there mean to them?

- Much of the research and popular writing on disabled people stresses their "heroism and courage" and emphasizes obstacles overcome or goals achieved. But for many with chronic disabilities, especially in the Third World, life is a continuing struggle with pain, poverty, incontinence, isolation and social stigma (Morris 1989; Zola 1982; Murphy 1987). Did these struggles and the participants' self-perceived possibilities and limitations in

any way influence the project's organization, ideology, and the nature of the services provided?

- Project Quilá had recently accepted several grants from large international funding agencies. Would this lead to the weakening of the project's alternative ideology or the erosión of the non-traditional and oppositional aspects of the program? What levels of self-sufficiency are realistic for a program serving low income families?

- The history of WHO's Primary Health Care efforts had shown that power individuals and bureaucracies have been willing to spend a great deal of energy to close or control community-based programs. Had Project Quilá faced similar opposition, and if so, how was it handled?

Methodology

I lived in the village of Piaxtla, Sinaloa, where Project Quilá is located, and participated in the daily life of the project from early August 1991 to mid November 1993. During this period of participant observation I attended all meetings, worked in the project workshops, and helped with patient care. I kept a daily field diary to record interactions and observations from each day's fieldwork. I also carried out two hundred and fifty two in-depth interviews and life histories. After returning to Berkeley, I visited Piaxtla four times a year for the next three and a half years (January 1994 to June 1997) to do follow-up interviews and observations, and visit friends. These two and three week visits proved to be invaluable and allowed me to view the project over a six year time period. The names of the people whose lives are described in this dissertation have been changed, as has the name of the rehabilitation project and the village in which it is located.

Interviews

The first set of interviews I did with the project participants were open ended. I often simply asked if they would tell me about their lives. In a number of interviews this was the only question I needed to ask. As the research continued and I began to recognize reoccurring themes, I made the interviews more focused. However, the participants were still given the opportunity to bring up additional areas they saw as relevant, important or problematic. I interviewed present and past project staff and recipients, community members of the village of Piaxtla, and foreign and Mexican rehabilitation specialists and physicians.

Analysis

The major analytical approach was thematic and qualitative. I looked for reoccurring themes as I read and reread my field notes and interview transcriptions. This led to the refinement, abandonment, or redevelopment of research questions and to the next series of interviews and observations. I continued this process until a category that I had tentatively labeled appeared to remain stable with additional data. At this point I inquired more deeply into this category. During the follow-up interviews carried out during the final three and a half years of research, tentative conclusions constructed through this thematic and qualitative analysis were referred back to a number of the participants in the study for their response and refinement.

Selection of the Interviews Presented

The accounts in this dissertation present, in personal terms, themes that were isolated and refined through the process of analysis described above. These narratives are representative of the experiences of the people that were

interviewed or observed. When there was a large variation in such experiences, I present several accounts reflecting these differences.

The Context

After a few short weeks at Quilá it became clear that it was both a model rehabilitation center and a very troubled program. I realized that the project had a darker side that I needed to document as well as its innovations. Quilá's governance structure was at times an example of a mature participatory democracy. At other times it seemed to be autocratic and arbitrary. The craftspeople could be attentive and produce low cost and high quality braces, prosthetic legs, and wheelchairs. On occasion they also provided recipients with substandard service and orthopedic equipment.

There were also fewer children coming to Quilá for rehabilitation services. In the last decade sister programs, like Mas Validos in Culiacán, have grown out of Quilá, and are now serving disabled children in nearby cities. In addition, the increased effectiveness of vaccination programs has dramatically reduced the incidence of polio in the Sierra Madre Occidental. Furthermore, Piaxtla, the community in which Quilá is located, lies in the heart of one of Mexico's major drug growing regions. Seventeen people were killed within or nearby the village through drug-trade-related violence during my first year of fieldwork. Project Quilá housed a number of young men with spinal cord injuries from gunshot and knife wounds. Substance abuse and acts of violence carried out by these young men alienated the project from the community. Quilá gained a reputation as an "unsafe" place to leave children. This precipitated a bitter power struggle between the project founders and the young men.

The Mexican government has supported large scale commercial agriculture with credit, irrigation, price subsidies, and research facilities while ignoring the *ejidos* and the rain fed agriculture on which most of the population subsists. Increasingly, one finds that in ejidos such as Piaxtla's, "el maiz no paga," that is, it no longer pays to plant corn. Other than Project Quilá, sources of legal income are virtually nonexistent in the village. Many of Piaxtla's campesinos are left with few alternatives other than to look for work in the city or in the United States, or to participate in the drug trade. At the time of the major marijuana harvest Piaxtla's beer dispensary is busy and alcohol related violence increases. The situation has deteriorated in recent years with the proliferation of automatic weapons. The relationship between the decline of maize based agriculture in Piaxtla, land tenure, unemployment, the drug trade, patterns of masculinity in the Sierra Madre Occidental, alcohol and violence are extremely complex. This dissertation deals with these themes as they relate to Project Quilá and to the village of Piaxtla.

Presentation

I have attempted to tell Project Quilá's story through the lives of its participants. The personal narratives that follow were taken from transcriptions of the taped interviews I did during the six years of this study. As many of the interviews were unstructured and open ended, people often returned to the same theme, sometimes with a different perspective. At times I have combined material from separate interviews by the same person. Early on I received the admonition "don't be literal" from one of my academic advisors, for this could hinder an appreciation of the emotional texture and general import of these accounts. I have followed this advice and have not included ellipses where repetitive or tangential phrases have been

edited or content from different interviews by the same person has been combined.

I had expected that the tape recorder would interfere with the interview process. Some people never did come to feel comfortable being taped. For most the turning on of the tape recorder, the quiet of the room, and my sincere attention seemed to prepare the stage for the session that followed. Even the least introspective of the interviewees became thoughtful, reflective, and animated as they recounted their stories.

Organization of the Dissertation

Growing up disabled and poor in rural Sinaloa requires the utmost use of one's wits and personal resources. Families break apart under the strains of poverty or after the death of a parent. Family survival requires that everyone contribute. A child who walks with crutches or rides in a wheelchair may be perceived as a drain on scarce family resources. The personal accounts in chapter one describe the childhoods of three of the founders of Project Quilá. By following their lives one also follows the development of the program.

Samuel Eddings, a high school biology teacher from Palo Alto, California, first came to live in Piaxtla in 1966. He hoped to start "a small personal program providing medical and related aid" to the inhabitants of Piaxtla as well as to the villages and ranchos that lie deeper in the Sierra Madre Occidental. At its peak in the early 1980s, the program's loosely structured network of health workers served a population of roughly ten thousand people living in the four hundred square mile area known as *Las Barrancas*. Chapter two presents the history of this health program.

Quilá participants with spinal cord injuries generally became disabled later in their lives. As their families searched for a "cure", they embarked

upon an "medical pilgrimage," selling land and livestock and falling in debt to pay for unproductive operations recommended by surgeons in the major cities. Many spent months or years in self imposed isolation and developed a near complete dependence on family members for their daily needs. The accounts in chapter three present a variety of individual experiences of spinal cord injury. Using the work of Victor Turner, Robert Murphy, and Jessica Sheer, chapter four proposes that disabled people, being of undefined status, "neither ill nor well," might be viewed as being in a state suggestive of the liminal phases of rites of passages.

The majority of the people interviewed experienced a dramatic life change upon their arrival at Quilá. After being told by doctors and family members that they would soon be well, many learned at Quilá that it was unlikely that they would walk again. This profound disappointment, however, was very often followed by a reevaluation of their situation. Moving through the project and seeing that virtually all the rehabilitation workers and coordinators were people with disabilities often far more significant than their own, allowed them to begin a process of rethinking the possibilities for their lives. Chapter five presents personal accounts of the rehabilitation process and the Quilá apprenticeship program.

The division between the staff and the young men who volunteered at the project nearly led to the collapse of the program. To understand this conflict adequately one needs to place it in the context of the decline of maiz-based agriculture in Piaxtla, regional unemployment, the drug trade, patterns of masculinity in the Sierra Madre Occidental, and the relationship between alcohol availability, abuse and violence. Chapters six through nine explore these themes through both personal accounts and a discussion of the larger historical context in which these accounts took place. The final chapter

Cast of Characters

Adolfo: Adolfo was shot during a nighttime robbery and came to Quilá for rehabilitation soon after. He ran the wheelchair shop for several years.

Andrés: There seemed to be nothing Andrés could not fix. The people of Piaxtla brought their shoes, stereos, bicycles, and watches to him for repair. Andrés grew up in El Caballo, a rancho high in the Sierras, and contracted polio as a child. He was one of the steadiest people at the project.

Camilo: Camilo born in a rancho in the Sierras. Camilo's family was from Piaxtla's social periphery. They were tolerated but mistrusted. Camilo began working at the clinic packaging medicines for Samuel. With time he became the clinic coordinator. Later, Samuel asked him to join the staff of project Quilá.

Chupón: Rogelio was from Guatemala. He was disabled by a gunshot wound. He came to Quilá after being thrown out of the refugee camp in Quintana Roo. He often wore camouflage fatigues and had painted his wheelchair to match. A pacifier hung from a string around his neck. This amulet was the source of his nickname, Chupón.

Claudio: Claudio was raised by his grandmother on a rancho in the Sierras. Claudio was the lay physical therapist at Quilá.

Elena: Elena came to Quilá for physical rehabilitation after her accident and then stayed on for training in orthopedic evaluation. She learned quickly and was soon one of the most influential people at the project.

Jenaro: Jenaro had juvenile arthritis. After months of treatment at the clinic he became involved in the work and eventually became one of leaders of the program. Together with Valentín, Jenaro led the struggle in the 1980's to recover Piaxtla's ejido lands. He still has recurrent attacks of arthritis and often walks with visible effort.

Lucila: When I first arrived in Piaxtla I lived with Lucila and her husband Chema. Throughout my time in the pueblo I continued to have my meals at her house. Lucila was in her late sixties and had a strong handsome face. Norma was her daughter; Jenaro her son-in-law.

Moisés: Juan grew up in a village near Piaxtla. He contracted polio as a child and came to Quilá for rehabilitation as a teenager. He learned brace making from Andrés. Juan is Elena's husband and the father of Yoali.

Ruben: Ruben was my Spanish teacher. He was quadriplegic as a result of a fall from the bleachers at a baseball game. He spent most of his days at Quilá under the mango trees, lying on his gurney, partly covered by crisp white sheet.

Socorro: Socorro had an accident at the age of fifteen which dramatically changed the course of her life. She did the bookkeeping at Quilá and assisted Andrés in the prosthetics shop. Socorro was married to Efrain, the project's driver.

Introduction:
San Jerónimo de Piaxtla

The earth, bleached by the sun, is light and sandy. The shrubs on the hills have withered. From a distance they look gray, spidery, and partially transparent. Only the river, deep blue in the afternoon sun, offers a refuge from this dehydrating world. The village of Piaxtla, relaxing in the heat, is tranquil. Seen from the hills above, the church bell tower and the high adobe walls of Don Goyo's house stand out from the dust-covered trees and red tile roofs of the village. Don Goyo, his face shaded by a stained wide-brimmed felt hat, sits on a bench by his doorway. With its solid square elegance his house is the largest dwelling in Piaxtla. The hallway behind him arches up over his frail body and opens onto a courtyard of guava trees. The trees are barren except for a profusion of small white blossoms.

At the far end of the courtyard lies a blacksmith shop. Though Goyo was one of the wealthiest men in Piaxtla and had land, cattle, orchards, and a store that sold everything from mule whips to penicillin, it was only with old age that he gave up his primary vocation as a blacksmith. His son, who himself is now in his sixties, is in the shop pounding one end of a glowing bar into a half circle on an anvil fastened to a solid oak stump. His assistant then knocks wedge shaped dents into it with a hatchet-like tool. They set the half formed horseshoe aside for the moment and pull another bar from the hearth.

Across from the shop a bathroom and wash area now stand where Goyo had his stables. The stables were once filled with mules that he used to carry goods into the Sierras. Piaxtla was and continues to be the primary link between the municipality of San Ignacio and the hundreds of ranchos in the mountains above. Goyo stored the merchandise in a large room stories high.

Now the room is empty except for a broken bed and a worn cupboard filled with mismatched plates, bowls, and cups. When Goyo's tienda was at its prime, high piles of burlap bags full of corn, sugar, coffee, flour, and beans were stored there. One wall was covered from floor to ceiling with shelves of clothing.

A wooden staircase leads to an upper loft that overlooks the village, the river, and the austere beauty of the Sierra Madre Occidental. Two dogs lie on the street directly below. The wide dirt street is lined by large adobe houses built by the five families that ruled the alluvial river plain for generations. Their descendants have intermarried so now the family names Manjarrez, Vega, Bastidas, Mercado and Rios have become virtually interchangeable. The high walls that surround their houses and corrals are slowly decaying. In many places the whitewash and plaster have worn off exposing the dark brown adobe blocks underneath. Rats and iguanas breed between the rotting wood ceilings and the red tile roofs of their once grand homes.

Across the street from Goyo's a few men sit under the shade of a small pinguina tree in front of the village clinic. Three of them have their chairs tilted against the adobe wall and are fanning themselves with their cowboy hats as they listen to Valentín tell of the time he got drunk in Culiacán then stole a grandfather clock from a furniture store. His t-shirt is rolled up to his chest baring the olive skin of his pot belly. When Valentín senses the time is right, he brings his story to an end and delivers the punch line. The men laugh. "Hijo de la chingada..." says Jenaro, the village health worker, who has been standing at the clinic entrance. A girl comes up to Jenaro and hands him a scrap of paper with the name of a medication. He turns and goes into the clinic, still shaking his head and grinning. He has had arthritis since the age of eight and walks with visible effort. The men start talking about Carlos

Salinas Gotari, the president of the republic. Valentín says that he has seen him a couple of times. "He's a small little piker like Mario," he says, and nods to the old man sitting directly in front of him. Mario hasn't shaved for a week and his appearance is disheveled. The men laugh at the thought of Mario as president.

One of the younger men walks over to a ditch he has been working on for the last couple of hours. He is soon joined by a teenage brother. The sun still has much of its midday strength. Every few minutes they switch off picking at the compacted earth. The two are Jenaro's brothers-in-law. They are replacing the plastic water pipe that runs from the main village line to their house. The family has been without water for two days. The other men remain seated under the pinguina and watch. Valentín calls out to Eligio, the elder of the brothers, and points to a roll of cheap plastic pipe by the tree. "Why are you using this *pinche tubo de la chingada?*" he asks. "You need tubing that will last, that a pick-up can roll over."

Jenaro comes out and notices that the ditch is starting to turn off towards Goyo's front door. He tells Eligio that he's making extra work for himself and ought to run the ditch straight to the main line. Eligio stops for a moment, looks at the ditch, then goes back to work. It's uncertain what he thinks of Jenaro's advice. A few minutes later an older man comes up and tells Eligio that the pump is out. "There's no water today, so why bother." Eligio continues digging for a few minutes more. Then as if suddenly seeing the man's logic, he quits, leaving a foot-deep ditch stretching halfway across the street.

Next door, in front of the government cooperative, store a man and his son load up a burro. They balance the load as they tie it down, placing a large sack on each side of the packsaddle and another on top. Maggie is inside, in

the cool of the store, behind a small desk. The heat has aggravated her arthritis. The cortisone she has taken in response has rounded her face and left her fingers distended. She counts out a woman's change and pushes it across the desk with the back of her swollen hand, navigating around stacks of Marlboros, Alas, and Boots cigarettes. Alas* are the cheapest and sell the best.

A wooden fruit and vegetable bin stands perpendicular to her desk. Red onions, bruised tomatoes, bananas, potatoes, discolored oranges, and mangos fill its six bins. The whitewashed store used to be the clinic pharmacy when the village health program was at its peak. A large pile of *maseca,* corn flour for tortillas, stands against the front wall. Wooden shelves line the other three walls. The shelves are divided into sections containing red and white cans of Carnation evaporated milk, glass jars of Gerber baby food, votive candles, Colgate Palmolive Suavitel liquid laundry soap, Kellogg's Cornflakes, Nabisco Salt Crackers, large green and white tins of Nestle's baby formula, and white plastic buckets of lard with a sketch of a pink pig in a white undershirt with a rakish smile on his face. His arms are crossed and his two hand-like hooves rest on the circle that frames the logo. "Manteca de Cerdo"* is written in an arc above. Rayovac batteries and packs of Knorr concentrated tomato soup hang from shelf supports. A door in the back leads to a storeroom where corn, beans and other staples are kept. Nearby sits a vertical red freezer with the Coca Cola logo scrawled across the front. Small packs of Doritos, Fritos, Ruffles, and Cheetos hang from a rack nailed into the adobe wall above the freezer.

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* wings
* pork lard

Maggie leans over the side of her wheelchair to see out the door, then calls to Celia, her assistant. She asks her to see if there are any Pampers in the storeroom. Her sweet voice and gentle lisp are barely audible out front as the gas truck is passing by. Its flat-bed is full of rusted propane tanks with worn red tops. *"Precio $63. No pague mas!"* "Sixty three pesos. Don't pay more!" advises a sign hanging from the back. The truck moves slowly down the street until it meets Eligio's ditch. It then backs up past Rosa Salcido's house, the final building on the block. Rosa's house is run down and lower than the other structures, and its green paint is peeling. Diagonally across from Rosa's is the plazuela. The truck turns up one side of the plazuela, then turns down on the other dirt street that runs the length of the village.

In the *plazuela,** a warm breeze rustles the Laurel trees and catches the smoke from Jandina's taco stand. A couple of young men drink beer on a bench in front of the white metal stand. Jandina listens to their conversation as she scrapes the meat for their tacos from the grill. Their battered ford pick-up is parked nearby. Its cab meets the bed as each slopes in toward the other. The front door is open and the um pah pah of *musica ranchera* comes from the tape deck running off of the car battery. All through town music comes from houses, shops, and other pick-ups. As one walks through Piaxtla it is a little like turning through the radio dial.

Down from the plazuela, Doña Petra, Don Goyo's daughter, hacks at the rose bushes in front of the vacant house next door. Her brow glistens with sweat as she slashes at the unkempt plants with a machete. "Pests and vermin," she calls to her husband Ramón. Her voice is drowned out by two drug eradication helicopters returning from the Sierras. Ramón probably

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* A small *plaza*, or square.

wouldn't have answered anyway. Although he recently had a stroke, he has always drunk heavily, and people say that he "hasn't been right" for years. He makes his way through his days doing errands for Petra or talking with friends. The color of his complexion, his rumpled brown pants, and his stained undershirt match the worn whites of his eyes.

After the helicopters pass Petra puts down the machete and rests for a moment. She wipes the sweat off her flushed face with a handkerchief. Petra is a survivor. She takes in boarders and makes dresses and school uniforms. She asks Ramón if he's hungry. He shakes his head and goes into the house returning with a warm can of Tecate. He heads across the street and sits down behind the church on a white plastic chair.

The Franciscans built the church three centuries ago. Its thick adobe walls and hand hewn beams reflect the simplicity of pueblo Catholicism. The church is the domain of about a dozen faithful women who maintain the yearly ritual cycle. Their daughters, *comadres,* grandchildren, and a sprinkling of men join them for mass and religious holidays. On these occasions the priest drives in from San Ignacio and christens the children under the black ivory crucifix brought from Spain . Only funerals bring out the men in number and, even then, they stand in the back stiffly, hats in hand, or converse with one another outside the large wooden doors.

To the north, on the opposite end of town, lies the *espendio,* or beer dispensary. It is housed in a squat building from which the huge Juan Vega sells beer through a square opening in an unlocked metal gate. In the afternoons small groups of men gather in front to drink. A few young men, probably from the Sierras, now sit under a ragged ceiba tree. One of the men is playing with a pistol. Three gold crucifixes hang from his neck. He pulls out a box of bullets from his shirt pocket to show a teenager sitting next to

him, but makes no effort to load the gun. A few older men are across the street leaning against Lencha's house. Lencha lived here for several years before the espendio opened, though the her choice of location was fortuitous. Her house also serves as Piaxtla's one-woman brothel when she is short of cash.

A low hill borders the village to the west. People call it simply "la loma." Its ridge is lined with small cement structures that run parallel to the two wide streets below. The people living on *la loma* are poorer than the families of the village center. Many are from the Sierras or are young and are just starting a family. The poorest people in Piaxtla live farther out on the margins of town. Their one and two room houses are made of crumbling adobe block and tarpaper. Like the people on the hill, they lack the inner patios and walled-in spaces of the wealthy. Their lives are more public. Each house is surrounded by a yard populated by their children, a few chickens that seldom lay and a wary dog. They are not served by the water system. The women do their wash by the river and bring drinking water back on their heads.

Piaxtla is intersected by several alleyways, or *callejones,* which start as trails at *la loma.* They widen as they pass through the center of town. Tall adobe walls line the alleys at this point. Weeds and wild plants sprout from the sides and from the river rock cobbling. The alleys become trails again as they continue east and zigzag down to the river. One of *callejones* has been paved with concrete and adapted for wheelchairs. It starts a few doors down from Goyo's and leads to Project Quilá, which is set on a plot of land overlooking the river.

The project staff and recipients have parked their wheelchairs and gurneys in an irregularly shaped circle under a giant fig tree. Late the previous night two participants, Manuel and Chupón, woke up Hector, an older man who had come to project three weeks earlier, and threatened him with a kitchen knife. When he struggled to defend himself he was cut on the nose and the arm. A meeting has been called to discuss the incident.

Elena asks for people to quiet down so that they can begin. She is a large woman and has the self-confidence that sometimes comes with physical bulk. Her red "Bike Aid" sleeveless t-shirt complements the clear brown skin of her broad shoulders. Elena came to Quilá for physical rehabilitation after her accident, then stayed on for training in orthopedic evaluation. She asks again for people to stop talking, only more loudly this time, and finally gets the attention of the group. Yoali, her two year old daughter, sits on the footrest of Elena's wheelchair playing with a small stuffed kangaroo.

Elena asks Hector to explain what happened. Holding the armrests of his wheelchair for support, he stands up on one leg and rests the stump of the other on the seat. The stump is covered with gauze, as he is being treated for pressure sores. Hector came to Quilá for an artificial limb. His leg has been amputated because of complications from diabetes. "You can sit down if you'd like," Elena tells him, but he says he prefers standing so that his voice can carry. He speaks in a hoarse whisper. A general practitioner in Mazatlán told him that he has throat cancer which frightened him even more than the loss of his leg. Hector is a retired school teacher, so probably would does more comfortable addressing the group standing anyway.

"About two o'clock in the morning I was woken up with a knife in my face. It was Chupón and Manuel. They wanted thirty pesos, and said they'd kill me if I didn't give it to them. I grabbed my electric fan and tried to knock

away the knife. In the process they got me here on the nose and on my arm." He points to a deep red mark on his nose and several scratches on his arm. "But why me? I hardly know them?" he asks in his rasping whisper.

The two men roll in just as he is about to finish . They have obviously been drinking. Manuel stops at the edge of the circle. Chupón continues on around the back of the tree, then rolls right into the circle. The sleeves of his black t-shirt are cut off, revealing the muscled biceps of a weight lifter. He is wearing camouflage fatigues and has painted his wheelchair to match. He has a rough craggy face, silver lined front teeth, and long curly hair. A pacifier hangs from a string around his neck. It is sort of an amulet, and the source of his nickname, Chupón, pacifier in Spanish. His given name is Rogelio.

After Chupón's dramatic entrance Hector immediately sits down and is soon forgotten. When asked to explain his actions Chupón says, "we all have faults. Why is it always me you come down on? How many meetings did you hold when Andrés and Socorro got drunk in the workshop?"

Socorro spoke up immediately. Her red hair, indigo blouse, and raven black wheelchair reflect a spit shine of color coordination. She moves a little farther into the circle and says that, while having a few beers in the shop was wrong, it was hardly comparable to waking Hector up with a knife in his face.

"It started out as a joke," said Chupón defensively. "People like him have looked down on me all my life. But that's not the point. A lot of shit happens here, but its always me you scapegoat. The hypocrites that run this place want to throw me and the others out because we tell the truth about what's happening here."

There is silence. A girl carrying a red plastic bowl full of green mangos for sale now starts to pass the participants one by one. Her little sister follows

with a bag of salt and a bottle of salsa. Camilo rolls out a donated hospital wheelchair onto which he has placed an ice chest full of cokes. He leaves it in front of Ruben's gurney. Ruben is responsible for soft drink sales at the project.

"Quilá is in a crisis. This used to be a project for children, now they are afraid to come," said Samuel in fluent Spanish that nonetheless carries his North American accent.

Jenaro arrives from the clinic with Valentín. He sits down and plays for a moment with an empty plastic bottle of Viva Villa tequila that one of the young men had found. "There used to be children everywhere, even in the shops," said Jenaro. "They won't come back until we do something about these problems. What happened last night is only a symptom of a much deeper problem. Chupón and Manuel feel excluded, unwanted, by the staff. Until they are given responsibility and made to feel that they are part of the project, these incidents will continue."

"Lunch," Lupe calls from the kitchen. The meal, which was delayed for an hour, is now being served.

Rosita points to the playground, containing brightly painted swings, carrousel, and jungle gym, which have been made from logs, plywood, and old tires, then says, "it used to be beautiful, watching all kinds of kids, those who had physical problems, those who didn't, all playing here together. Now the parents won't let their children come because of things like what happened last night."

Lupe comes out of the kitchen, looks at Chupón, and says, "where's my kitchen knife." There is silence. Yoali is still sitting on the footrest of Elena's wheelchair playing with the stuffed kangaroo. As she takes off a detachable

arm, the scratch of its velcro connectors seems to be made louder by the silence.

Chupón shifts in his wheelchair and pulls a long kitchen knife out from under his cushion and flips it down into the earth. It lands perfectly and the handle vibrates for a few seconds.

Because about half the people have already gone to the kitchen for lunch, Samuel suggests that they also quit for lunch and reconvene at four. Enrique says that before they go he has something that he needs to discuss with the group. He plays with his cigarette for a moment before continuing. He has on black high top tennis shoes, Levi's and a Nike t-shirt. Like Manuel and Chupón he has long hair, which he has combed back behind his ears. "I'm leaving for Badraguito tomorrow morning to visit my family , so I need a hundred pesos to cover my expenses."

Socorro asks Enrique how much he already owes the project. He answers fifty pesos, but she corrects him, saying that it is more like seventy five. She says that he should talk to his father. There is silence for a time. Finally Elena asks what the group thinks. Still more silence. A small pile of detachable kangaroo parts lies below Elena's footrest. Lying on his gurney, partly covered with a sheet, Ruben has been drifting off to sleep. Now he pushes himself up with his elbows and says that some of the people with salaries owe several hundred thousand pesos, so why not Enrique?

A high pitched squeal comes from outside the circle. One of the dogs has a baby pig by the ear. The garden gate is open, so the pigs are eating the tomato plants. Ruben, Enrique, and several of the men begin urging the dogs on, whooping "cooochi, cooochi!" The project's seven dogs go after the pigs. Left leg bent, Claudio races towards the garden using his right leg and crutches. The right leg helps him balance, but it is his powerful arms,

through the crutches that hurl him along. The meeting comes to an end, and it seems to be taken for granted that Enrique will get his loan.

The men go back to the shops to lock up. *Musica tropical* starts from a tape recorder in the kitchen. In the wheelchair shop, Enrique, hanging over the side of his wheelchair, maneuvers around the electric soldering machine and the acetylene gas tank in time with the music. He scoops up wire and trash with the ease and dexterity of a baseball player fielding a ground ball, then tosses the trash into the garbage barrel. Bicycle tires, rims, and a broken guitar hang on the rough brick wall behind him. The prosthetics shop is in the far corner of the open building. One wall of the shop is lined with artificial feet stacked from three to five high on wooden shelves. Prosthetic legs hang from the other wall. Andrés is cleaning up the workbench as its seems that the afternoon meeting will run until closing time. He's wearing a black baseball cap, a faded blue sport shirt, and Levis 501s with a measuring tape attached to the pocket. Leaving his crutches against the wall, Andrés places his stomach against the work bench for support. He reaches up to the metal ventilation hood to turn off the fan. As he does so his legs project straight out back from his waist, as if they were the stiff legs of a doll bent back behind its body.

Andrés's workbench is cluttered with vices and tools different sizes, a set of scales, and a pile of cassette tapes. One of the vices holds a plaster of Paris casting of a patient's stump. This is the first step in the process of making her an artificial leg.

Above the casting a poster is taped to the ventilation hood. It shows the backs of three naked women, from the shoulder blades down to just below the knees. All three women have tropical scenes painted on their bodies --

flowers and bananas on the first, a picture of a lion on the second, and two brightly colored parrots on the third.

The plaster of paris stump on Andrés's bench was made from a mold taken from a young woman named Juana Peña. Her limb was amputated at the very spot that the photographer chose to crop the women's legs on the poster. Juana is now eating lunch with Ruben under the giant fig tree. She has a small plate of roasted liver over which she has squeezed lime juice. She feeds both herself and Ruben with the same bent fork.

As Elena returns home, Yoali pushing from behind, her neighbors are out watering the street in front of their houses. The dry season is at its peak. At midday the sun is almost white. But in the midst of this arid landscape, the guava trees are in full bloom. At dawn the trees hum with bees.

Out in the ejido lands fathers and sons clear twig-dry stands of thorn forest for planting. The rich harvests of the alluvial flood plain and the mineral wealth of the mountains once attracted the ranchers and miners that brought an end to the indigenous culture of the valley. Now the land and mines are exhausted and the culture is mestizo. It is hard to get back from the land what one put into it. The soil is depleted. Floods and draught ravaged three of the last four harvests. Still, most of those who have land farm it. The poorer families supplement their diets with crayfish, armadillos, and vegetables and fruit from small family plots. Cash is obtained by cutting firewood and hauling it on burro-back to Piaxtla, or by working for the wealthier families, preparing their fields, tending their orchards, and caring for their cattle. But the crayfish and armadillos are getting harder to find, and one can't buy a satellite reception dish with money made from hauling firewood. The production of marijuana and opium puts food on the tables of

the poor and pick-up trucks in front of the houses of the rich. "La vida es verde," as they say.

A number of the men and their sons are now returning home for lunch on the labyrinth of trails that run through the craggy hills and ravines of the village ejido. The long dry season has left the thorn trees twisted and devoid of life as if they had been petrified by a sudden catastrophe, like the bodies at Pompeii. Some still reach up defiantly like stick dancers holding their arms up and heads back. Others are matted down with the gray remains of the vines that once covered them, as if the two had died together in this embrace. Buzzards circle above, riding the wind which is nearly soundless as it passes through the barren thorn forests.

Even in this desolate setting one can find faint patches of green. The bruised green of the cacti now stands out against the gray, as do the delicate fern-like leaves of the vinolama trees with their long thorns the color of tiger's teeth. Then there is the darker green of the several varieties of fig trees that grow in the oasis-like ravines. The deep roots of the giant higueras tap into the underground moisture hidden below the dry stream beds. Their bark is split by large black cracks so that it resembles shattered pieces of linoleum. The roots of the cambichinis hang down from their branches like pillars, while the tescalamas above cling to the rock cliffs with their claw-like roots. The higueras, cambichinis and tescalamas all produce small figs which people gather during periods when there is a lack of food. And finally there is the domesticated green of the mango groves by the river. Their wine-colored fruit now hangs from the branches on long stems which resemble the red prayer threads used by Buddhist monks in Southeast Asia.

Below the orchards, small groups of women cross the sand and rock riverbed with large plastic pails of water on their heads, their children

straggling behind. From a distance they look like nomads noiselessly crossing a desert. On the far side of the river stands a pyramid-shaped hill, barren except for a few light sprigs of vinolama. A scarred ridge stretches to the left. Behind stands a series of high steep ridges that mark the beginning of the Sierra Madre Occidental.

Childhood
Chapter One

Growing up disabled and poor in rural Sinaloa requires the utmost use of one's wits and personal resources. Families break apart under the strains of poverty or after the death of a parent. The children are often sent to live with an uncle, a grandmother, or a distant relative. Family survival requires that everyone contribute. Children take on chores at an early age. A child who walks with crutches or rides in a wheelchair may be perceived as a drain on scarce family resources. This is especially true when one or both of the new guardians are not related to the child by blood. As a result, some of these children are virtually abandoned and left to fend for themselves. Jenaro's account of his childhood in this chapter covers a number of these themes. Though Camilo was not disabled, his account of his poverty, family, and childhood in the Sierra Madre Occidental reflects similar themes. These childhood histories were selected not only for their value in providing personalized data that is representative of the general, but also because these two men literally "grew up" with the village health programs and eventually became the leaders of Project Rio Verde and Project Quilá. By following their lives one also follows the history and development of the programs.

The bus pulled to a halt in San Ignacio. The driver pointed to a side street and told me the Piaxtla bus would leave from "El Tamarindo." I didn't understand, but nodded, and stepped down to the sidewalk. Palm trees, ragged in the dust and heat, lined the street before me. I walked up the alley as directed, past a row of white, green and blue houses. Several of the doorways were open and I glanced into living rooms with high ceilings and solid wood furniture.

At the end of the block, I came to a second, more neglected intersection with a sign "Piaxtla" and an arrow pointing up a dirt road. The sign was attached to two twisted metal supports that appeared to have been backed into several times. Across the street there was a small *tienda* shaded by a tamarind tree. I walked over and stepped up into the store. An older woman was sitting by a wooden table. A metal cash box rested on the table along with several bunches of bananas. I asked if this was where one caught the Piaxtla bus. She nodded and said, "Siéntete. Viene a las cuatro."

I put my bags down in the corner, then sat by a rack of small packs of potato chips. The tienda seemed to carry only those things that one would buy while waiting for the bus, like cigarettes, bananas, sweet rolls, candy, and soft drinks. An old Frigidare next to me was filled with bottles of coca-cola, sprite, and orange Fanta. Three women sat across from me on a wooden bench. The one directly in front of me sat quietly with a toddler on her lap. The boy's little face was a miniature of his mother's. Two heavier women sat next to her. At their feet were several flimsy plastic bags from La Ley, a supermarket chain in the state's larger cities.

An older man came in and greeted the women. He was looking for a ride and asked if anyone from Piaxtla was in town. The woman by the table told him that Benigno was in the cantina "Jalapa." A few minutes later a pick-up sped by headed in the direction of the arrow on the Piaxtla sign. The man who had come in was sitting in the back with several young men who were holding their cowboy hats to their heads. The women on the bench called out through the barred window behind them, but it was too late.

I went to the door and stepped down into the street. A blast of dry, hot air enveloped me. Directly in front of the tienda was a wall on which the municipal government had painted "Respetamos la comisión de los derechos

humanos del municipio del San Ignacio"* San Ignacio was the municipal capital, a graceful old town of stately homes and government buildings. It had a bank, a large church, the municipal presidency, an army barracks, and of course, the commission on human rights.

There were about a dozen people waiting when the bus finally arrived. "PIAXTLA" was written in large, red, block letters in the destination window. A decal of the playboy bunny had been pasted below. The bus was coming from the coastal city of Mazatlán and was almost full. As I climbed up I noticed a small shrine for the Virgin of Guadalupe to the left of the driver's seat. Three Christmas tree lights flickered below the image of the Virgin. An artificial rose had been placed at the base of the shrine. The two rear view mirrors were framed in sheep skin. The passenger compartment had new turquoise curtains and dark blue corduroy seat covers.

To make room for me, woman gathered her two young children into her lap. The corduroy seat cover was covered with crumbs. The woman was dressed for the city in a blue skirt and gray shirt. Several of the older women were in black. Many of the men wore white cowboy hats that blocked my view to the front.

The luggage racks were filled with cardboard boxes, bags, and a few the white plastic tubs of lard with the sketch of the smiling pig in the undershirt. The driver and his assistant were loading bales of hay into the back. Eavesdropping on a conversation behind me, I learned that the driver's name was Kiko. He slammed the back doors shut and entered the bus from the front. He wore a black long-sleeved shirt, polished gray cowboy boots, and a gold wedding band. He placed a wicker stool by his seat for a pretty teenage girl who sat down beside him.

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* "We respect the human rights commission of San Igancio."

Kiko revved the engine and started up the road, which soon turned into a thick dust track. We passed the San Ignacio cemetery. Its tabachin trees were in full bloom. The red brush-like flowers hung over the white tombs. The road ran along the edge of a wide valley and offered a vista of ravines and mesas. Then it wound through a number of low hills. The dead brush on one of the hillsides looked like tufts of gray cotton. On another, it resembled smoke hanging close to the rising slope. We then entered a long stretch of thorn tree forest.

A telegraph line followed the road closely. Dead vines draped down, curtain-like, from both the telegraph poles and the adjacent line. After about half an hour, we passed under a giant fig tree, and stopped in a village of about twenty adobe houses. I asked the woman next to me where we were; she said we were in Platanar. The bus had stopped by a roadside stand. Inside, a woman was making *raspadas*, shaving ice off a large block, then pouring red syrup over the shavings. One of the men leaving the bus called back to his wife to ask, *"¿dos de fresa y una de limón?"* * She nodded her head and he continued down the isle, then out to the stand. The drivers' assistant unloaded cases of Pepsi Cola from the back. From his gestures I gathered that he was mute.

The afternoon sun made its way into the bus through the gap in the curtains by our window. Sweat poured down my forehead. The toddler next to me began to cry. His mother called out an order for one to the woman selling raspadas. Finally Kiko climbed on board, and we started down the road again. The teenage girl, who was sitting next to him, had gotten off at Platanar and had been replaced by another on the wicker stool. The wind

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* "two strawberry [raspadas], and one lime." A raspada is like a snow cone, made from shaved ice and flavored syrup.

coming through the windows cooled the sweat on my body, and the raspada seemed to quiet the little boy next to me.

We passed a number of places where the thorn forest had been cleared, and the brush had been gathered into piles to dry for burning. We then approached a turnoff marked "Campanillas," and a steep hill that had already been cleared and burned. A layer of gray ash, like dirty snow, covered the hill. A burro was standing by a burnt-out stump in the clearing. Chameleon-like, its gray stomach, brown coat, and black mane blended with the sand, ash, and charred trees. A *cardone* , a tall straight cactus, had been systematically spared. A few slim uasima trees also remained. Dry brown leaves hung from their singed black branches.

We came to a straight-away, then continued up a rise overlooking the red tile roofs of Piaxtla. Kiko stopped to let off two young men, then pressed heavily on the horn as the bus sped down a steep curve and into the village. We stopped in front of several houses on the second of the two wide streets, turned left at the church, then drove down the main street past the plaza, the government cooperative store, and the clinic, then came then to a sudden halt in front of a ditch that ran three quarters of the way across the road. I heard the driver say something of which I could only make out the word *cabron** and the name Eligio. He then opened the door and the remaining passengers started reaching for their bags and boxes. I figured this was the end of the line, grabbed my bags, and got off.

A small man with a white stubble beard was sitting in front of the clinic. I asked for Jenaro Osuna. The man told that he was in Campanillas. I then asked for directions to Project Quilá. He pointed down the alley and told me to turn left at the bottom.

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* Roughly translated "the bastard."

I came to a large gate and the sign "Proyecto Quilá, Centro de Rehabilitación." A screened-in shop was to my right; the shop was locked. It was late afternoon and the project seemed to be almost empty. I saw a few men passing a liter bottle of beer over by a set of swings made from tree trunks, rope and tires. They looked up at me, then resumed their conversation. From behind I heard someone say, "You must be Daniel." I turned around and saw a young man coming from the kitchen. His shirt was unbuttoned. The action of pushing his wheelchair rhythmically flexed the muscles of his smooth, unblemished chest. His hair was cut short in front but left long to curl down in the back. He had a large head and looked like a desperado version of a Ken doll. He introduced himself as Adolofo, said *"nuestra casa es tu casa"* with absolutely no enthusiasm, and continued on toward the group of men by the swings. I walked over and stood by them for awhile. Finally, a young man in a wheelchair painted in camouflage colors asked me how my trip was. I started to answer in my labored Spanish, but before I could get very far he lost interest, turned to Adolofo, and asked if dinner was ready yet.

I walked around the project for a few minutes, feeling alone and awkward, then asked someone where Lucila Bastidas lived. I had heard that she took in boarders. I was told she could be found down the road from the project, so I walked down the small street toward a light green house. The rutted track served as the back alley to the large houses on the main street. On one side it was lined with worn adobe walls from which the plaster and paint had long worn off. Large metal doors led into the Manjarrez, Vega, and Rios family corrals. There were a few cows sleeping on the ground by one of the doors, and the road was strong with the moist, acrid smell of cow dung.

When I arrived at Lucila Ramirez's house, she was sitting in her inside patio in a rocking chair that she held still with her feet. Her head was bent forward. A parrot in a rusted cage in the corner called "perico...perico." A girl was standing behind Lucila looking through her curly gray hair for lice. She found one, looked at it for a moment, surgically, professionally, then crushed it between her thumbnail and the nail of her index finger.

Lucila got up and we introduced ourselves. She was in her late sixties and had a strong handsome face. She asked if I was hungry. I said I hadn't eaten since leaving Culiacán, the state capital, that morning. She told me to sit down at a large wooden dining table at the end of the porch. She went into the adjoining kitchen and asked if refried beans and tortillas would be all right. I answered yes. She struck a match, lit a gas burner under a large pot, then lit another burner next to it, where she reheated tortillas left over from lunch. Behind her was a *pretil,* a wood-burning stove made from adobe, and a dome-shaped oven. The girl, who Lucila had introduced as Marta, a niece who helped out in the kitchen, pulled a glass from a row that was hanging from wooden pegs above a large clay water jar. She filled the glass with water from the amphora and put it in front of me. Flies swarmed around the kitchen table. As I swung a cloth napkin at the circling mass, Lucila looked over from the stove and said, "Lots of flies. The rains will come early this year."

In the evening I walked back to the project. The sky was deep orange along the horizon. Further above it turned to rose and then to blue. A slip of a new moon hung above the high ridges. The outline of the full lunar perimeter shone dimly and appeared as if it were cradled in the thin crescent, like a beach ball resting in a hammock. When I arrived at the project, several men were sitting in the yard by the parallel bars talking quietly. One of them,

who I later learned was named Manuel, was resting his head on one of the wooden bars. Adolofo was telling Chupón, the young man in the camouflage-painted wheelchair, about the time Lupita, the project cook, was pissed off at the men and made onion enchiladas. "The enchiladas were stuffed with red onions, and had onions grated over them. That was it for lunch. That and water."

Music played from the house across the yard that served as the men's dormitory. An advertisement came on, so I asked if there was radio reception Piaxtla. Adolofo said no. He had taped the show in Culiacán. Manuel lifted his head up from the parallel bar and asked me if I had anything for a fever. I said I'd go speak to Jenaro, but he said not to bother. Another man wheeled up on a gurney made from a sheet of plywood, two bicycle tires and a smaller third tire behind. He rolled it like a wheelchair, pushing the handrims attached to the two bicycle tires.

Chupón asked me if I had ever smoked marijuana.

"When I was in high school," I answered.

"You think its harmful?"

"Its probably not great for your lungs."

He then said something that I didn't understand. The others laughed. He asked me about my Spanish lessons, which were to start the next day. It had been decided that Ruben, Elena, and Socorro would be my tutors.

On the way back to Lucila's I passed a cobblestone alley that ran down from the plazuela. "You..." someone called out in English from the street above. The alley was dark and I could only make out a silhouette or two. Then came a rock. It fell slowly and rolled past my feet. A few giggles. I stopped and asked, "Quien es?"* More giggles. I started to walk again. Then

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* "Who is it"

another rock. It had not been thrown very hard and bounced against my leg painlessly. "Quien es?," I asked louder. A few more giggles. As I continued, more rocks landed around my feet. When I entered Lucila's house, one last rock bounced down the alley and rolled to a stop on the rutted road.

I spent my first months in Piaxtla studying Spanish and getting acquainted with the project and the pueblo. My first formal interview was with Jenaro. He was one of the most competent health workers trained by Project Rio Verde, the village health care program started in Piaxtla by Samuel Eddings in the late 1960's. Jenaro also worked for a time at Project Quilá, which had grown out of Project Rio Verde. After leaving Quilá, Jenaro returned to the Project Rio Verde clinic. In recent years the clinic had declined. He was now the only full-time health worker.

We met at the clinic in the late afternoon. He suggested that we conduct the interview in the dental room, where we would be less likely to be disturbed. The clinic had been the home of Luz Maria Manjarrez. The room had a high ceiling, thick adobe walls, and was cool and quiet. A dental chair sat in the middle. The chair was brought down from Palo Alto at the height of Project Rio Verde. The seat was covered with clear plastic to protect the upholstery. The plastic had yellowed over the years. The apparatus' three gauges had been removed, but the electric drills and brushes remained. An ancient sterilizer sat on a workbench placed against the far wall. Hardwood shelves had been built above the workbench. The shelves were lined with mildewing North American medical texts and Physician's Desk References from the sixties.

Jenaro brought in two chairs from the consultation room. He sat down and asked me what I wanted to know. I asked him if he wouldn't mind talking about his childhood.

"My mother died when I was four years old. I have only a fragment of a memory of her lying in the coffin. Everything was cloudy, dreamlike. Other than that, I remember nothing of what she was like. My brother was three at the time, and my sister was seven months old.

"My brother and I went to live with my great uncle. He lived with his wife and her sister in a rancho called La Vinata, outside of Campanillas. He had taken my mother in years earlier when her father was killed for his land. We called him padre Beto. His full name was Herberto Zúniga. He worked hard and was a good man. He had a large vegetable garden and an orchard of mango, banana, and guava trees. He lived with his wife Crecencia, and her sister, Carolina. Herberto and Crecencia met later in life and had no children of their own. They loved us. They loved us a lot. My sister grew up separately from us, as she was so small.

"Padre Beto and Crecencía were poor. He didn't know how to read or write and was exploited time and again by the *caciques.*[*] My brother and I inherited twenty cows when my mother died. In the months before the harvest, we'd run out of food and money, so padre Beto would run up a large bill buying sugar, beans, coffee, and soap on credit at the large stores in San Ignacio. They always swindled him by charging him exorbitant rates of interest. He couldn't pay it, so he had to sell one cow after another.

"One planting season he got a loan from the rural development bank. There were floods that year and he lost everything. The representative from Campanillas explained to the bank that the entire crop had failed. The bank erased the pueblo's debt. Beto didn't know about this and the representative told him that he'd have to repay the money he borrowed. Each year the

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[*] Jenaro is referring to the powerful men in the village.

tienda owners and the bank representative would come to take cows to pay the store bills, the bank debt, or to pay for some bogus tax or banking fee.

"There were times when all we had to eat was milk with tortillas in it, broken up like noodles. But we had a good life. I remember playing in the stream, looking for lost cows, or walking through the cornfields with my brother. Padre Beto was sincere and took good care of us."

"Can you talk a little about your arthritis, how it began, what your family did, things like that," I asked.

"It began with a thorn. One afternoon, when I was eight years old, I was chasing a calf and tripped and fell on a thorn bush. A thorn went deep into my right knee. It became swollen and I was unable to stretch my leg. The black tip could still be seen there in my knee. I had no pain in any other part of my body. I could move my hands, my arms, and my other leg. The doctor in San Ignacio gave me sedatives and penicillin. I spent several months in bed. Then suddenly the pain went away. I was able to stretch my leg and even to run, but my knee was left partly deformed.

"I was able to return to school, which was about two kilometers from home. My brother and I would get home from school at about noon. There was a stretch of very hot sand by the stream that we had to cross. There were no trees, so the stream bed dried out every spring. We didn't have sandals. We went about barefoot. I'd run across the sand, then stop in the shade in a small patch of damp earth to cool my feet. It always felt as if they would blister. After a few minutes in the shade, I'd continue on my way home and my feet would be fine.

"With time my ankle became swollen, then my knee. I thought this was from the hot sand and all the running and playing that we did. I was hit by waves of pain. I couldn't bear it and began to cry. They gave me a pain killer

that calmed me, placed compresses on my body made of herbs like *cocolmeca,* and had me drink broth made from *huaca* and other medicinal plants. Then suddenly, once again, these aches left me, and I was able to walk. And this was how it went. The pain would hit me. Then, after a few bad day, it would disappear. After a while my whole body became affected–my spine, all my joints, and my waist.

"My father came for me when I was ten. It was planting season and he wanted me to help him in the fields. He was living by the coast in a pueblo called Loma de Tecuyo de Elota. I stayed with him for two seasons, but I started having problems with my step-mother. She'd cook for her own children and give me leftovers from the day before. If they ate refried beans, I ate boiled beans. If they ate meat, she gave me the broth. Her children wore shoes and I wore *huraches.* Things just weren't equal."

"Didn't your father say something?"

"My step-mother was younger, much younger, than my father. He was seventy and she was thirty-five. He cared for me a lot, but she was stronger and made the decisions. That's how it was. When I lived with my great uncle, my father often visited me, and was always asking about me. He did what he could; he tried.

"My step-brothers were fond of me and followed me around a lot. Once when I was cutting firewood, one of my step-brothers came over and started to watch me. I told him to move back, but he didn't want to. A piece of wood flew off and hit him, so he began to cry. My step-mother thought that I was mistreating him. She didn't realize that he wouldn't move, and that I had tried to protect him. The señora became very angry and said a lot of nasty things.

"I got angry too and wouldn't enter the house. I refused breakfast and lunch. When my father returned I told him what happened. I guess this was the last straw. He borrowed forty pesos, took me to Culiacán, where he left me with his father. From that time on he never asked if I was being treated well, if I was eating, or if I had adequate clothing. He stayed in Loma de Tecuyo de Elota and I stayed in Culiacán.

"My grandfather, my father's father, was married to my great aunt. That is, after my grandmother's death, my grandfather married her sister. My great aunt was a diabetic and had varicose veins and abscesses on her arms and legs. She sold charcoal, oil, soap, and other necessities out of the house. I couldn't pay for my food, so I washed and ironed the clothes, swept, went to the market, and did all the chores. They treated me like a servant."

"They treated you like a servant?" I asked.

"Yes, like a servant."

"Why?"

"I had to earn the food I ate."

"Is it unusual for a grandchild to be expected to work like this?"

"Yes, it is unusual. But I had never met my grandfather before I landed there. Even my father hardly knew him. So there wasn't much affection or closeness. And my father was the son of the other sister, so my great aunt didn't care much for me.

"She cooked for people in the neighborhood. There was always something appetizing being prepared in the kitchen. But like at my father's house, I had to eat leftovers from the day before. They didn't let me go out with friends or go to the *fiestas* on the eves of the saint's days, or give me money for the carnival rides and booths. I had to work for my food, and got nothing more. I never had money in my pocket. People saw what was

happening and gave me twenty centavos, fifty centavos, or a peso to do errands for them. This is how I put myself through primary school.

"As I didn't start school until I was ten, I was already a teenager by the time I finished sixth grade. I wanted to continue on to trade school, so I started looking for a job to pay the expenses. My aunt found me work in a small restaurant near the social security hospital. I worked as a busboy and waited tables. The woman who owned the restaurant liked me. She paid me generously and fed me well. I enjoyed this attention and worked hard in return. I bought my first set of new clothing and a pair new boots. Until that time I had always worn hand-me-downs given to me by relatives.

"The rains were especially heavy that year. One evening the streets flooded and sheets of water flowed into the restaurant. I took off my boots to mop up the water. When I finally cleaned up the mess, it was late and there weren't a lot of people, so we closed up and I went home. My feet felt heavy and my body ached. The next morning I felt feverish, but I went to work. This went on for a couple of days. I could hardly walk and it became harder and harder for me to work. Finally, I just wasn't able to take it any longer, so I stopped going. This upset my great aunt. She said that I was lazy, and didn't want to work. "Who do you think is going to maintain you," she asked.

"When I lived with my father, during the planting season we'd go out to the fields early in the morning. I'd get up at four and feed the mules, put on their reigns and bridles, and get everything ready. From the age of eight I went with relatives to the coast during harvest season to pick tomatoes. I enjoyed hard work. It felt good. But now my legs and feet were swollen and my spine ached. The pain this time was greater and throughout my body."

"Who took care of you?"

"This was one of my biggest problems, for I didn't have anyone to take care of me. The fevers continued all through September, October, November, and December. When winter came I couldn't get up, couldn't even get out of bed. They fed me, and all that, but they were hard on me. I was a burden on the family and couldn't help out as I had before.

"I remember one night in January. It was cold and my blanket fell to one side. I wasn't able to move. My fingers were stiff, I couldn't stretch my legs, I couldn't do anything. I asked my great aunt to get up and put it back over me, because I wasn't able to roll over. She said I was a pain in the ass and told me to let her sleep. She didn't pick up the cover, so I stayed like that until morning.

"Finally, my grandfather rented a car for five hundred pesos and took me back to Campanillas. I was useless to them. I was bedridden and could no longer go on errands. I was causing problems for them and they were unable to take care of me. They thought I was going to die; their reaction was "que le vaya bien."

"They took me to my grandmother's house in Campanillas. She had a difficult life and had children with several different men. So I was no relation to her new husband, the man she was living with at the time. This was a rough time for me. I spent months there secluded in a back room. Through all of May, June, and July, I wasn't able to get up; I wasn't able to do anything. They had to carry me to the woods to go to the toilet. I was very thin and easy to carry in their arms. I couldn't sleep at night, but the worst thing wasn't the pain. It was the fact that day after day I just had to lie there in bed, unable to do anything, unable to prove myself.

"The people in the pueblo kept a vigil over me. Every night they came to the house to sit with me for a little while. They thought that I was going to

die. When people visited me, they gave me five pesos, ten pesos, even a hundred pesos, which I saved under my pillow to buy Mejoral with codeine. At one point I took a hundred tablets in eight days just to cope with the discomfort. Lying there, I thought about a lot of things. Not about death. I thought about having a house, cattle, mules, that I was going to have a family, a wife and children, and that I was going to get ahead, show who I was, and serve the people.

"My grandmother's husband hunted deer in the forest above Campanillas. Once he killed two and hung them up to skin them. My grandmother knew how to roast deer. The meat would come out succulent and delicious. I asked her to cook up a piece for me. Her husband heard this, and yelled from the yard, "Don't give the son of a bitch anything. Not even a glass of water! He doesn't die and he doesn't get better." The more he put me down, the more resistant I became.

"He was annoyed because I was a burden. I'd cry at night from pain. Every few hours he'd have to get up, support me with pillows, and change my position. He hardly slept. He'd work in the corn fields, come home, and have nothing to eat. The best food they had they gave to me. If the chicken laid an egg, I ate it. And all they ate was tortillas and beans. I slept on the cot. They slept on the floor. I wasn't related to him by blood. He had no obligation to take care of me. I wasn't his child.

"Underlying all of this was their poverty. They were peons. If they weren't caring for the cattle of one landlord, they were working in the fields of another. They were old. They had never had anything. They had lost their rights, their land. My grandmother's husband was a servant. He lived in borrowed houses and had never had a house of his own. He would get

more for the meat if he gave me none. He had no other way to make a living.

"If I have ten liters of corn and three or four children to feed, and someone comes and asks to borrow a little corn, five liters, I'm not going to be able to do it. I'm going to look after my family. I'll give him something to eat, but I can't help him feed his family. Poverty makes you selfish. Irritable. I'm no longer angry with the people who treated me poorly. Their pain went deeper than mine.

"I heard that here in Piaxtla there were gringo doctors with very good medicines. By that time, I had no faith in doctors, because they had already taken me to several, who were unable to do anything for me. I didn't think I would die, but I also didn't think that someone could cure me. This was at the end of 1969. At that time Piaxtla was still very isolated. My brother went by horseback to talk to the gringos about my problem. They sent a pick-up truck up to Campanillas to get me and brought me to the clinic, which was just a room in a house on the edge of the village.

"The doctors examined me right there on the pick-up truck. My fingers were dislocated and I was a mess. They spoke in English, so I didn't understand a word they were saying. They gave me medicine, about a liter of tablets, and said that I should take three with every meal. They also gave me crutches, a flute, and games to help pass the time. They told me to return in a couple of weeks, then drove me back home. I took the medicine, but started to hear this loud ringing in my ears, so they cut down the dosage.

"I began to improve a bit. At first I was only able to get up for about a minute and stand using the crutches, then "fwap!," I'd fall back down again. Then I was able to do this for longer, and finally I was able to walk a little with

the use of the crutches. My grandmother was pleased by this and we started to have more hope.

"My brother took me to see a *curandera* in El Naranjo. He borrowed a mule and we went by way of Tule. The trail went into the hills and passed through a notch in the mountain. We then came to a forest of mahutos and other short trees; it was there that we got lost. My bones ached, sitting up on the mule, so I started to cry. We eventually found the road and made it to the rancho.

"Doña Cuca, the curandera, was in her seventies. Her body was bent over with arthritis. She walked more or less like me. She lived with her two sisters, doña Tula and doña Maria. Doña Maria was very kind. Doña Tula, no. She treated her sisters poorly . She scolded them, and yelled at them. She lived by herself and rarely came out.

"It was beautiful there. Doña Cuca's house sat high up on a hill on a small step of land. The house was surrounded by gardens. A large stand of bamboo shaded her house. A stone canal brought water from the spring above and then splintered out through the garden. The water was clear and beautiful. The gardens were filled with herbs, flowers, and curative plants. There was a room that they called the recinto. It was a small room with stairs in the corner and a cross above. This was where they prayed.

"She prepared herbs every night, bathed me in their waters, massaged me, and gave me different teas to drink. I celebrated Christmas with them. We prayed in the recinto. They sang beautifully. They baked bread that we had with chicken. On New Years eve we had goat. There was no alcohol, nothing of that nature.

"People came to visit and would stay two or three days. Doña Cuca never charged. She only asked that people bring her food when they came. When

my brother visited he'd bring ten liters of corn, a little sugar, coffee, and flour, but it wasn't much. Other people brought more and from that we ate, the two of us.

"Doña Cuca and I became good friends. She cared for me, this old woman, and I felt better. At times we'd have to go a day without eating. There was nothing to eat. Someone would finally come to be treated and leave food for us. I don't know how she did it. I don't know how she got by. She had arthritis like me. We had the same problem. Her toes jumped out in different directions just like mine. We sometimes cried out from the same pains. She showed me photos and looked for ways to entertain me. I felt at ease. She treated me with affection, a sincere love you could say, and charged me nothing.

"When I was ready to leave they took me to the recinto. We closed our eyes and Doña Cuca knelt and began to pray for me. She said, "I see seven gold tassels. These will insure that you will always have work. You will always be able to support yourself.". This made a strong impression on me. But I thought, how am I going to work? Time passed and I forgot all about this. But since that time I have never lacked work.

It was getting dark as Jenaro and I walked out of the clinic. Mario, Valentín, and several other men were still sitting in front. Valentín was teasing Mario about having a chest of coins buried beneath his bed and suggested that they get a metal detector and dig up the money. "I know where the money would go, right into your pocket," said Mario.

I asked Jenaro if he was going to eat at Lucila's and he said yes. Jenaro's wife Norma was Lucila's youngest daughter. When we arrived, Samuel was sitting at the table eating. He was flanked by two teenagers, Polo and Thomas.

Polo was about sixteen. Thomas was younger and had a scarf wrapped around his head like a pirate. His crutches were leaning against the wall behind him.

When Samuel saw Jenaro he announced, "the doctor has arrived!"

"When did you get in?" asked Jenaro.

"Early this afternoon. Polo picked me up at the airport," Samuel said, as he ripped off a piece of tortilla and scooped up a mouthful of refried beans. His gaunt face was filled out by a white beard and unruly eyebrows that flared out like pilot's wings. Samuel was wearing one of the plaid shirts he often bought at the Palo Alto flea market. Gray curly hair pushed out at the neckline. It was hot in the dining room and the thin cotton shirt stuck to his sides with sweat.

We sat down and Norma served us refried beans and tortillas. She was tall, competent, and had inherited Lucila's looks and temper. Lucila took a large slice of white cheese from the refrigerator and laid it before us. Jenaro cut off a piece and crumbled it into his beans. He then took out a jalepeña pepper from the open can in front of him and placed it on the edge of his bowl.

"The foundation approved your loan for the pharmacy," Samuel said after Polo and Thomas left. When she heard Samuel mention the pharmacy, Norma came in from the kitchen and sat down. Jenaro wanted to open a pharmacy in Piaxtla, so had asked for funds from an account set aside for private initiatives by people who had worked for Project Quilá.

"For how much?" asked Jenaro

"Four thousand five hundred pesos."

"That's not a lot," said Jenaro. "I'll need at least 30,000 pesos to buy the medicines and get started."

"I understand," said Samuel. "But I have some problems with the idea. The WHO* is pushing a plan in which health workers will support themselves from the sale of medicines. What you're talking about is pretty much the same thing. The idea is ripe for abuse.

"But Jenaro...with Jenaro's experience..." I started to say.

"But he has family pressures," said Samuel. "What if Norma needs to send money to the kids studying in Culiacán? Is he going to talk someone out of buying a decongestant and tell them to try inhaling steam instead?"

"I can get the money. A friend is willing to make the loan," said Jenaro. "Only the interest is high."

Samuel mentioned that the Asoka foundation gave grants to people living in poor countries who were doing good work. Jenaro said he'd think about it. They agreed to talk more the next day. Samuel got up and said goodnight; he walked down the porch in his stiff gait that resembled a child walking on stilts. Norma cleared the table. I started to help her, but she motioned for me to sit down.

Jenaro and I talked for awhile. "The hundred dollars a month that they send me from Palo Alto to keep the clinic going just doesn't make it anymore. Samuel's situation is taken care of. He's set for the rest of his life. I'm broke. We eat, but only because we eat here at Lucila's."

I mentioned that I had talked with Samuel earlier that afternoon and that he really did want to work something out. Jenaro said he knew. We discussed the Asoka money and the possibility of writing grants to offer health worker trainings at the clinic once again, but I got the feeling that after working his entire adult life for the clinic and Project Quilá, what Jenaro

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* World Health Organization

really wanted was the personal and financial independence that he hoped his own business would provide.

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A few weeks later I met with Samuel for our first interview. We had agreed to meet after lunch. I found him in the wheelchair shop working with Adolofo and Jeff, a volunteer from England. They had designed a three wheeled wheelchair for a new boy named Osvaldo who had just come to the project. He had been hit by a run-away truck. He had lost all feeling and movement below the waist and had little function in his right hand. So they had developed a one arm drive wheelchair. Jeff helped Osvaldo into the wheelchair and Samuel put an orthopedic glove on his left hand. Polo and Tomacito, who had been helping, told him that he got it on wrong, that Osvaldo's thumb needed to come out of the side opening. They were right. Samuel saw me, then nodded and got up from the box he was sitting on.

When we went back to his house, which was a simple two room brick structure, he said he would send for copies of the four part journal he had written years ago. "These cover my first year in Piaxtla," he said, "and describe that period far better than I can from memory." I said I'd like to read them and suggested that we do a short interview about his childhood and life up until the period covered by the journals.

My brother had Charcott Marie Tooth muscular atrophy," Samuel began. "Though it's not expressed in girls, women tend to be carriers. My mother decided in her teens that she wasn't going to get married because she didn't want to pass on this disability. She made it into her early forties and then fell in love and married, perhaps with the hope that she'd have girls. She had

two boys. When my brother began to develop the disease, it was so hard on our mother that she completely refused to see any signs developing in me.

"I began to play the piano when I was quite young. Then I began losing my deftness. Rather than getting better my piano playing began to get worse. No one recognized why or wanted to admit it. I was about eleven when I snooped in a drawer of letters that my mother kept in a private place and found a letter from our doctor. He wrote that he had seen me walking outside his office and thought that I had the same problem as my brother. My mother's response was to change pediatricians.

"Once we were playing a board game. My brother was sitting across from me, and my parents were on either side. After a few minutes my mother said, "Samuel put your hands down!" I put my hands down and went on playing. Then without thinking I put them back on the table. "Samuel, I thought I said put your hands down!" I put them in my lap, but soon had them up again. "Samuel, how many times do I have to tell you?" she said, and sent me to my room. About half an hour later my mother came up and said, "Don't you see that your brother has this condition in his hands, and he's getting worse almost by the day, and you have the audacity to imitate him and make fun of him?" I didn't say a word. I just shut the door and wept. That sort of game went on for years. I pretended not to have anything wrong with me. I knew very well that I had the condition and that it was progressive, but I kept it to myself.

"The children in school imitated my walk and paddled behind me like a duck. I got nicknamed "Rickets." At summer camp I won the award for the clumsiest camper. I became a kind of a loner and took a great interest in natural history. I spent a lot of time on my own in the forest collecting insects and doing things like that.

"The condition began to develop. I was finally taken to a podiatrist, or God knows what, who found that I was developing weak ankles and that the arches of my feet were sagging down because of the weakness. He gave me arch supports which was the theory at the time. But the lift on the inside of the foot tended to roll the whole foot outward a little because of my weak ankles. So I sprained my ankles and they were constantly swollen and black and blue.

"I'd take out the arch supports and hide them, but then my parents would discover that I wasn't using them and scold me and take me back to the specialist. He'd also scold me and tell me that if I wanted to get better I had to do what I was told. When I was in my mid-teens I graduated to the so-called calipers, the metal orthopedic braces with two bars coming up from the shoes to stabilize my feet. The calipers were uncomfortable and heavy. They wore holes in my shins when I went on long walks. I was miserable with them. Its strange. Even with the metal braces my mother still didn't fully accept that I had the same progressive, inherited disability as my brother. When I finally got to the age where I could make my own decisions about what was done for me and to me, I got rid of them and continued to paddle around like a duck. It wasn't until I became involved with Quilá that I began to think about the possibility of plastic splints. Working together with Andrés I devised the basic design that I use now.

"My father was a lawyer. Ours was a very conservative Republican family. I remember cheering when Roosevelt died, because this, of course, was the attitude that my parents had. They were anti-union and anti-Communist. Good people in their own way, but very conservative. I began to develop in that direction, but soon was to take a real swing to the left.

"I was greatly influenced by a friendship with a man that I met when I was fourteen. Our friendship lasted until last September when he died. He was from a Quaker family and had refused to be conscripted into the army. He spent a couple of years in jail because of that. He was a naturalist with an enormous knowledge of birds and got me interested in ornithology. But he was also involved with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, which at that time was doing support work for a group in Americus, Georgia. It was a community of black and white families living together and running a small truck farm. It had features of racial integration and communal living, all of which people labeled "communist" in those days. Their produce was boycotted in the South, so groups in Cincinnati where I lived and all over the North, developed a distribution system for their produce.

"I left Ohio the day before my high school graduation. I took my last exam and split for California where I worked in the mountains for a while in blisters control. I was determined to become a self-made biologist. I didn't want any more schooling. I'd had it with schooling. Especially since my brother was always a top student, and I was always mediocre

"When I finally decided to go on to college I decided to go to Australia. This was partly because it was as far away as I could get from the United States without leaving the planet. I applied to a rural university in South Wales—Anadile they called it. They held off making a decision on my application for the better part of a year. So finally I just packed my bags and left for Australia and arrived on the doorstep of the registrar and said, "Well, here I am," just before the school year was to begin. They hemmed and hawed and said, "Well, the American educational system isn't up to the British system, which is what we're following, and there's a very good chance that you won't do well. Your grades have been rather mediocre," and so on.

"But they decided they'd try me. This was kind of a test for them and for me. So I worked my tail off and ended up getting the award for the most outstanding science student for two consecutive years. But in the process I became disenchanted with formal science and with the focus of the biological pursuits as they were. I had always been fascinated with natural history because of the beauty and the intricacy of nature, but I discovered that formal science was not really my cup of tea. After graduation I was offered a scholarship for an honors program, but I turned it down.

"After a two year bicycle trip through Asia, I returned to the United States and taught at an alternative high school. I began taking groups of kids to Mexico. I first went to the Sierra Madre Occidental one winter, looking for a new area to take the kids. I picked the road which, on the map, went furthest back up into the mountains. I met a school teacher on a little backwoods bus going into the village of Piaxtla, which was as far as any transportation went in. The teacher invited me to go with him up into the mountains to a settlement called Verano. I continued on foot on to the upper villages.

"One afternoon I took too much time along the trail looking at the birds and plant life. It started getting dark and I still had a long way to the next village. Hurrying along, I passed this little pole-walled hut on the mountainside, where the people called out to me, said that I wouldn't make it before dark, and asked if I wouldn't like something to eat. They sent a kid out to look under a chicken for eggs and cooked them up for me. Then I realized that the family was eating just boiled beans. They were giving me the best they had. Then they invited me to spend the night. I had a knapsack with a sleeping bag in it and spread it out on the ground in the hut, but the family only had a couple of blankets for seven or eight people. They all huddled in a ball under the blankets trying to keep warm, but winter high in

the mountains gets so cold that around 2 or 3 in the morning they couldn't sleep any longer so they all got up and built a fire, and sat in a sort of circle around it. The older people sat with the youngest ones in their arms to keep them warm, talking and passing time until dawn came.

"At dawn I noticed that one little boy was limping and that pus was running out of his foot. I asked him what had happened. He said he had stepped on a thorn some three months before. That triggered something in my mind. I saw that although these people were very self-reliant in health care and in many other things, there were gaps in their knowledge and ability to deal with health problems, and that this could lead to a permanent disability or worse for this kid. And then I noticed that two younger children, maybe 4 or 5 years old, were already developing goiters from the lack of iodine in the mountains. And I knew that a little bit of iodized salt could make a big difference in preventing or treating that condition. But of course I didn't have iodized salt with me, and I didn't have anything to treat the kid. I ended up leaving a sweater with them, which was the best I could do, and continued on my way.

"When I got back to Pacific High School I talked to a group of students about the experience. We decided to take a field trip down into this area and focus on trying to do something about the health needs of the people. It was a very ambitious endeavor and perhaps a bit foolish. But we put together some simple first aid medical kits and made comic strip like instructions so that the people that couldn't read or write could use the medical kits.

"We drove to the village of Piaxtla, which was the end of the road, and then continued on foot and made a loop of about 100 miles through the mountains, stopping at different villages.

"Actually people ended up helping us much more than we helped them. One of our girls developed pneumonia, which turned into pleurisy when we were two days from the closest road on foot. The villagers probably saved her life. They heated water over a fire and then had her sit over the bucket with a sheet over her head and breathe in the vapors.

"A lot of the kids really didn't have the survival skills necessary for the mountains of Mexico. People were constantly bending over to help out in any way they could. But they appreciated our efforts, and they appreciated the medical kits and always asked, "When are you coming back?" It was after this trip that I decided I'd ask for a year off from teaching to see what I could do in the mountains. I set about trying to raise money selling prints of birds I had painted and subscriptions to a newsletter of the area I was going to write. I raised a total of about $1,000 for the whole year. Some friends also helped out, I gathered medical books, and I got a little bit of training in the Stanford University Hospital Emergency room."

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It was a Saturday afternoon. I was waiting for Camilo to finish work so that we could do an interview. After a few minutes Camilo came up and suggested that we do the interview at his house. As we were leaving the project and tall man with thick graying hair approached Camilo and asked if he could see him. They went back to the consultorio and I waited outside. After a few minutes Camilo called me in. He said that the man had an inflamed prostate. He was going to put in a catheter and wanted me to hold a pot for the urine when it began to flow. He tried several times but had difficulty getting the catheter in. The man was lying on the examination table, still wearing his white cowboy hat. He grimaced each time Camilo tried

to put in the catheter. Other than that he was completely stoic about his discomfort. Finally Camilo told me to go get Adolofo. Adolofo was paraplegic and used a catheter himself. He was also very good with his hands, and was in charge of the wheelchair shop. After a number of tries Adolofo finally inserted the catheter and a small amount of urine ran through the tube into the pot I was holding. When we finished the man thanked us and left. He was tough, an aging macho, and had successfully maintained his masculine persona during the awkward ordeal.

Camilo and I went to Camilo's house and sat on his patio. He leaned back in his chair and told one of his children to get us cokes from the refrigerator. He had dark skin, black hair, and two false front teeth that had yellowed just a bit. Camilo was a handsome and very complex man. Many of the young men at the project were suspicious of him. Ruben had asked me to make sure that the money I was paying him for language tutoring went directly to him, and not through Camilo. Camilo knew this, but was nevertheless out in the yard everyday bathing Ruben and treating his pressure sores with great care. He started working at the Project Rio Verde Clinic at the age of fourteen, and was the clinic's coordinator in the program's heyday. He was now responsible for curative medicine at Project Quilá.

Camilo's family was from Piaxtla's social periphery. They were tolerated but mistrusted. His brother Ignacio, a fighter from birth, had been a hired assassin for the police, and was assumed dead by all but the family. His sister Tonia visited Piaxtla dressed in straw hats, low cut blouses, and tight pants, during occasional vacations from her work in a nightclub in Mexico City. Camilo's youngest brother killed a man on Piaxtla's main street at ten o'clock in the morning.

Camilo was the one who made good. As a child he stayed at home and helped his mother bake bread instead of working in the fields or hunting like his brothers. Kids teased him for being a mama's boy. But Camilo was smart. He only had to see something once to make it his own. Camilo earned people's regard as he gained prominence in the health program. He once told me, "even my enemies have to respect what I can do." His character was a tangle of contradictions, a mixture of confidence and insecurity, much like many of the people who have been drawn to Quilá.

"I was born in a rancho named Saus," Camilo began. "My grandmother was the midwife. My parents brought me down to Piaxtla cradled in their arms. From that time on we never stayed in one place. We moved from house to house, from rancho to rancho. When I was about four my father heard that there was work along the coast, so we went to Sonora. My little brother died there. I remember that a woman brought flowers for him. We returned to Sinaloa to work in the tomato fields and my mother gave birth again in El Salado. The baby died from an attack of diarrhea. We lived in the worker's quarters and drank the only water available which was from the irrigation canal by the tomato fields.

"From there we moved to a rancho deep in the Sierras called El Candelero where my grandfather lived. It was a very hard time for us. I was old enough to start school but there were no schools that far into the Sierras. Sending us to school wasn't a priority for my father. To this day my brother Javier doesn't know how to read or write. A child in the ranchos doesn't have a voice, doesn't have the right to have opinions about anything.

"My grandfather, my father's father, was wealthy but selfish. His corn barns were always full. The corn would rot because they couldn't eat it all,

and so he'd feed it to the pigs. We were without tortillas and he'd use his corn to feed the animals. It was especially difficult during the rainy season. It's the hardest time of the year in the ranchos because the new crop has just been planted and the previous year's harvest has long been eaten. We would go to the hills and look for roots, those potato like tubers, and bring them home and boil them. That was our food for the day. Or we'd eat wild figs, guamuchiles, or green bananas boiled with salt. My grandfather was the richest man in the area, he had such abundance of corn, and he wouldn't even give us a couple of liters."

"Was there a problem in the family?" I asked.

"No, no problem. Only greed. We didn't have money to pay for it. You could say that our blood is mixed. My mother had a very beautiful heart. Many people want everything for themselves. But not my mother. Her mother was a well known *curandera.* People came from all over for her herbal remedies. My mother inherited this desire to help people. If we had something good to eat she would share it with our neighbors. "Even if you have only a little, share it," she'd tell us.

"My father's family wasn't the same, and my father can be selfish, less humanitarian. That's why I say that our blood is mixed. Those of my brothers and sisters that are always getting in trouble have inherited this from my father. I think its a question of genetics. Our poverty was also a factor. But the truth is that my father is not a good person. It hurts me to say this. He has moments of goodness. He also has his moments of meanness.

"His father was like that too. He had no feelings for his children. The time we lived in the same rancho with him was a very bitter time for us. We were the poorest of the poor, and he was the richest of the rich in that village."

"What made the difference between rich and poor in the isolated ranchos at that time? Was it land ownership?"

"No. Wealth came from the possession of cows, orchards, and how much grain one had. That's what made the difference. Anyone that had a cow seemed rich to us. Up in the ranchos at that time it wasn't a matter of who had land. We could have had just as much land as anyone else. You could plant anywhere you wanted. My grandfather's family had been in Candelero for years and had a large orchard, cows, and mules. We were new and we had dirt, nothing. When we used the word "rich" then it had an altogether different meaning than it does here in Piaxtla. Here it means someone that is very well off, has an easy life, and doesn't have day to day economic worries. I dreamt of having a donkey to carry firewood from the forest. Things were so simple. I dreamt of having an entire piece of bread by myself. I was never able to do that. We always had to split whatever we had into several pieces for all the brothers and sisters. We finally decided to move because there was nothing there for us, no way we could improve our diet.

"From Candelero we moved to Arroyo Grande, which is about an hours walk from Piaxtla. I started to get more emphatic about my desire to learn to read and write. My mother had never gone to school, but she taught me what little she knew. She'd draw letters in the earth and I would copy them. I was about eight at the time. I later used a piece of charcoal to write on a piece of wood. I'd ask everyone who passed through to teach me. I'd ask them to write the word stone, or tree, or whatever. In this way I learned to read and write.

"In Arroyo Grande my father traded an old 22 rifle for a calf. We took really good care of that calf, and it grew, and eventually gave birth. That year

my father borrowed corn from Gabriel Manjarrez. It's common for people to borrow corn at the beginning of the rainy season to eat during July, August and September, while they plant and cultivate their fields. In October the squash is ready, and they can start eating corn on the cob. We were a large family and we needed at least 5 sacks of corn to make it through those three months. At the time you had to pay back three liters for every liter that you borrowed. So, at the end of December, when we harvested the dried corn for tortillas, my father owed Gabriel Manjarrez 15 sacks of corn. It hardly rained that year and we had a very poor harvest. My father couldn't pay off the loan so Gabriel came and took everything, our cow, the calf, even our burro.

"Once again we had nothing, so we moved to Chicuras, a rancho across the river from Piaxtla. There's a guy in town who calls me the "Indio de Las Chicuras." It's a way of deprecating my Indian blood. Of making fun of it. He doesn't know it, but I feel honored. I honestly do. I even joke with him. I tell him that I'm the Indian with the big shorts. That's the way Indians used to dress.

In Chicuras I asked my parents if I they would let me go to school. They agreed and my brother and I started primary school in Piaxtla. We'd have to cross the river every morning. I hated that. Especially during the rainy season because of the cold water. We'd have to take off our pants, and sometimes in November or December the water would go up to your neck.

"After two years I had already made it to the fourth grade, but then my father took us out of school to go to work in the tomato fields outside of Culiacán. At the time working was more important than studying. You don't earn your food by studying. I was disappointed about leaving school, but one has to obey. We lived in a room made from tar paper and cardboard provided by the company. There were no beds. We slept on the ground. We

were with Indians from the south, people from Oaxaca. I had to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning. Make tortillas and food for my father and brothers. And then go to work. There was a foreman who counted the amount of crates we picked. At times I wasn't able to pick my quota. I was twelve, but I was undernourished and small for my age. In the end they fired me."

Camilo pointed down the street to a funeral procession and said, "they're going to bury the skeletons they found in the Sierras two days ago." A man and a woman. They were not from Piaxtla but had family here. At the head of the procession was the sister of the dead woman, crying, "hermanita... solita..." Hanging on to her for balance was a very drunk man . His shirt was half unbuttoned and hanging out of his pants. On either side were relatives. Then a flatbed truck with two cheap white coffins on the back. About thirty people followed, possibly friends or acquaintances. And finally, three drunks straggled behind, beers in hand, a little less staid than the rest of the group.

By the time I left Camilo's it was early evening. I went to Lucila's to eat and then stopped by the project. Manuel's bladder infection had gotten worse and he now had a high fever. Several of the women at the project were watching over him. They were sitting around a fire by the Salate tree talking quietly. Lupita said that it was Manuel's own fault. Speaking of the men with spinal cord injuries, she said "the only fluids they get is when they go out and get drunk." Behind her the bicycle rims and tires hanging from the wire mesh wall of the wheelchair shop were silhouetted by the orange light coming from a bulb hung from the center post. A little light also dimly came out of the two small windows of the shop attic. From time to time she went into the men's house to place a compress on Manuel's forehead, or try to get him to drink the herbal tea they had made for him.

Headlights then dominated the yard and put the swings, carrousel and parallel bars into harsh relief. A white VW van pulled into the project. A man carrying a manila folder got out and introduced himself. He said he was from the Human Rights Commission. He slid open the side door and a shorter, darker man got out. Partially hidden in the shadows in the far end of the seat sat a boy. The driver said that the boy had been run over by a truck six weeks before. He been convalescing in the Social Security hospital but there was no longer anything they could do for him. Lupita said he could sleep that night on the empty cot in the women's house. Osvaldo, who had just ridden up in his new red wheelchair, asked the other man if the boy had lost sensitivity in any part of his body. If so, the cot could cause pressure sores. The man didn't seem to understand. The driver reached into the back of the van and pinched the boy's leg. The boy smacked his hand away and howled *"madre puta!"*

They managed to get him out of the van and transported him by wheelchair to the empty cot. By then he was spitting and flailing his arms. "Baila, Pedro, Baila!"* said the darker man as he clapped his hands. He repeated this a few times and the boy quieted and then began wriggling and bouncing on the edge of the cot and sang, "Pedro Camacho, dance the tango." This must have been the way he was pacified at the hospital.

The driver said that Pedro was twelve years old. He had a big round head, was blind, and was unable to walk. His scars suggested that he had suffered head injuries. The men got back into the car saying it was a long drive to Culiacán. The driver said he would be back in a week. He left no medical history, significant paperwork, or facts about the boy.

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* "Dance, Pedro, dance!"

After the van left Pedro asked for something to eat. Lupita heated up a bowl of beans and tortillas and brought it to him. He wolfed it down and asked for water. After he tossed down a tall plastic glass full of water he started asking for food again. *"Señora, quiero comida... señora, quiero agua"* When Lupita told him that was it until breakfast he began a tearless wail that went on for sometime.

I said goodnight and walked back to Lucila's. She had left the door slightly ajar for me. The porch was filled with cots where she, her husband Chema, two grandchildren and Marta were sleeping. The two grandchildren, Tomasina aged eight, and Ramón, aged seven, were sleeping together in a cot against the far wall. They were both in a prenatal position and fit together like two pieces of a puzzle.

I walked down to the bluff overlooking the river. Across the river a thin cloud traced its way through the lower ridges. I heard gunshots. Probably a drunk emptying his pistol by the plazuela. Chema's dogs started barking but then curled up and went back to sleep. As I walked back to the house to go to bed a donkey brayed, with power at first, but then dropping off like an old pick-up rattling and petering out when shut off.

La Clinica

Chapter Two

Samuel Eddings, a high school biology teacher from Palo Alto, California, first came to live in Piaxtla in 1966. He hoped to start "a small personal program providing medical and related aid" to the inhabitants of Piaxtla as well as to the villages and ranchos that lie deeper in the Sierra Madre Occidental. Within a few years he had recruited a "mini Peace Corps" of volunteer doctors, nurses, and students. By 1975 the program was staffed primarily by local villagers. Like Jenaro and Camilo, many of these health workers had started out as teenagers helping Samuel Eddings pack medicines and keep patient records. At its peak in the early 1980s, the program's loosely structured network of health workers served a population of roughly ten thousand people living in the four hundred square mile area known as Las Barrancas. The health workers were responsible for "the diagnosis and treatment of common health problems and referral of difficult problems; education for self care and preventive care; preventive services, including vaccination, family planning and under-fives programs; and leadership in community sanitation and water programs" (Eddings 1976).

My move to Don Goyo's house coincided with his slip into senility. Don Goyo's son had offered me the upstairs loft. The room was set off from the family and provided the privacy and quiet I wanted. It overlooked the pueblo's main street, reminding me of the room over the saloon in a Hollywood western. *Musica ranchera* came from nearby houses and added to this effect.

The loft had the added advantage of being in "neutral" territory. There seemed to be feelings of animosity between Jenaro and Camilo. Jenaro was now the sole health worker at the clinic. Camilo was one of the leaders at Quilá. Both men had offered me their friendship, and both would be important for my work. I wanted to avoid alienating either. Camilo was against my staying at Lucila's. Lucila was Jenaro's mother-in-law. I enjoyed eating at Lucila's, but wanted someplace quieter to sleep and work. Jenaro suggested that I sleep in the loft in the clinic. Camilo was against this. He said my things would be stolen. He offered the loft above the *consultorio* at Quilá. Jenaro's wife Norma, however, told me that it had rats. Every room I found had something wrong with it until Salvador offered me the loft at Don Goyo's. Don Goyo had avoided Piaxtla's personal and class conflicts and it appeared that his loft was neutral ground.

I was told that Don Goyo was a storyteller and that he knew more about Piaxtla's past than anyone in the village. Though his body had weathered the years, his mind had recently become feeble. He began to beg for chewing gum in the street. His son Salvador, who inherited Don Goyo's vocation as a blacksmith, made a wrought iron gate for the front entrance. Don Goyo now spent most of his time looking out from behind the padlocked barrier.

On my third morning at Don Goyo's, I was looking out from the loft over Piaxtla's red tile roofs when a white pick-up braked to a sudden stop in front of the billiard hall. Several *judiciales* * jumped out of the back of the truck and ran towards the building. They took cover by the doors, automatic rifles pointed up as in the movies, while a man in black Levis and a black t-shirt ran to the back to cover the rear entrance. Then they entered. The judiciales brought out a young man, pulled a gun from his belt, handcuffed him, and

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* state police

put him in the back of the truck. I climbed down the old wooden stairs and unlocked the metal gate. Don Goyo gestured for me to let him out. A warning glance from Jovita, Salvador's somber wife, preempted any thought of setting Don Goyo free. I crossed the street, where Jenaro told me that the judiciales were sweeping the town for guns.

As I entered Project Quilá, Valdo took out a pocket knife and reached for the humming bird nest in the laurel tree. Valdo was one of the boys that hung out with Samuel. He had noticed the pleasure I got when watching the baby chicks and was out to see if he could get me upset. The two baby humming birds and the lilac vine that framed the entrance to the men's house were two bright spots at the project. The smell of the lilacs when they bloomed covered the odor of urine that pervaded the grounds. And the first time I saw the two chicks in their little nest of broken leaves, their long thin beaks pointing up in search of their mother and their next meal, I wondered how long they would last in this environment. The day before Manuel had cut a notch in the ear of the project dog. Negra, the dog, was bone thin with tired hanging breasts.

I decided to ignore Valdo. This was a mistake that proved fatal for the birds. I went out to the alleyway where Adolfo, Ruben and Manuel were sitting. Manuel passed me a *caguama* * they had been drinking from. After I took a few swallows, he rolled over to Ruben and put it to his lips. Ruben finished off the bottle and said, "I was telling them about the time when I was sixteen and planted *mota** up in the mountains with some friends. We had two hectares between the three of us.

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* A liter bottle of beer.
* Bud, slang for marijuana.

"One day I had this urge to see the plants," he said. "So we went up to the field. We didn't know it at the time, but they had just launched Operation Condor. The plants were about knee high, and the field was bright green and beautiful."

I noticed that urine was dripping from the plastic urine bag hanging from under Ruben's gurney. I mentioned this. Manuel explained that the plastic knob was broken. No one seemed to think much of this, so I shrugged my shoulders and Ruben continued.

"We heard the airplanes, but they seemed far away. Before we knew it they were circling above us. We didn't know where the hell to hide. The hillside above us was rocky and barren and there were only a few large trees below. One of the planes passed over and sprayed the field. We were covered with herbicide. Then *el gobierno* * was everywhere. My two friends ran. I hid behind a large boulder. They passed right by me, as close as you are to me," he said pointing to Manuel. "They destroyed our pump and hose and passed me again as they went back to the planes. The very last soldier, *hijo de la chingada,* saw me and shouted, 'come out *cabron!*'

"I walked out with this stupid shit eating grin on my face. I had trimmed and smoked a few of the leaves and was pretty stoned. They put me in one of the planes and we took off. I spent all day with them as they sprayed the dope fields. When we arrived in Culiacán the soldiers there beat the hell out of me. They said they wanted marijuana, dried and packed for shipping. I said they knew where they had found me, in the field, and that I had no *mota* ready for sale. So they drove me to the rancho where I lived. When we arrived they started to grab people right and left."

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* The government, in this context meaning the federal soldiers.

Maria, Jenaro's ten year old daughter, came up and Ruben stopped for a moment to see what she wanted. She told me that Valdo had knocked the baby humming birds out of the nest and then crushed them with his foot. I went to the Laurel tree to check the nest. It was empty. I found Valdo in the wood shop and asked him what had happened. He smiled contemptuously and said something I didn't understand. I pushed him against the wall and told him to stay the hell away from me. I spoke in English as my Spanish at the time was too awkward to express anger convincingly. Adolfo, Ruben, and Manuel could see what was happening through a gap in the cactus fence that separated the alleyway from the project. They laughed and shouted encouragement and I quickly came to my senses. I let go of Valdo and went back to sit with them.

Samuel was at Lucila's when I arrived for lunch. I was irritated and told him about Valdo and the birds. The unstated implication was that he was somehow responsible for the boys he invited to hang out at the project. He became defensive, and said, "you can't pin the birds' death on me. In this culture it's an act of bravado to show that you can kill something."

"But you're the one who brings these kids into the project," I said, repeating what I had been told by many of the paid staff.

"Jenaro was once caught stealing from the money box at the clinic," he said. "Camilo was a mama's boy who was teased by the other kids. The purpose of these programs is to work with those in most need."

We talked a little more about why Valdo would do such a thing. I suggested that my mistake was letting him know that I cared about the birds. He agreed, but added "in mestizo culture men use everything up, their land, their women, and their money." Changing the subject, Samuel mentioned that the journals had come with the van. We walked over to his house. He

gave me four mimeographed volumes titled Report from the Sierra Madre. Samuel was about to leave for New Hampshire where he spent his summers writing. Later that afternoon I saw him as he was driving out of the village. He waved good-by and said, "Be a gentle dictator." He was gone before I had a chance to tell him that he overestimated both my power and my ambitions at the project. I went back to Quilá, carried a chair to the porch in front of the *consultorio* , and started reading the first report.

Report from the Sierra Madre

January 29, 1966

The day we arrived in Piaxtla the weather was muggy and hot. The winter rains had still not arrived. But they were closer on our tails than I realized. In the afternoon as we drove in a strong wind suddenly arose, shaking leaves on the trees and billowing clouds of dust. Ben Carver, who had made the trip down with me to take my Jeep back to the States, asked me if such wind was normal here, for there was something strange, even spooky about it. I said I had not experienced it before.

We arrived at sundown, and Jose Vidaca, who had helped me so much the year before with the Pacific High students, invited us into his home. During the night the sky clouded over, and in the morning it was dark and ominous. And then it came: a few fat drops exploding in the dust, then the downpour. As we stood in the "portal" of the casa looking out into the street the water streamed down as from a hundred hoses from the tile roof, forming a giddy curtain. "You'd better take off for the highway," I said to Mike, "or you'll never make it." And sprinting through the rainfall he scrambled into

the Jeep and departed. I assume he made it all right, as no word has come back to the contrary.

I stared at my huge cargo, mostly medicines, stacked against the back wall of the front veranda. I felt a little ridiculous with all those cartons and boxes piled between the squash and corn. But when the storm slackened the people, remembering me from our trip the year before, began to arrive for medicines.

The first two or three days were rather hectic. I arranged my medicines according to categories on the floor. There is not so much as a table available, and occasionally the family rooster parades across the boxes of medicines or tips one over as he leaps with a squeak, trying to escape a pursuing child. Jose Vidaca and a little boy named Ignacio have become my assistants, and are a great help during the periods of "rush."

The list of ailments I have already encountered goes on and on: eye and ear infections; festering cuts and scratches; chronic bronchitis; rashes; vaginal and urinary infections. Of less frequent occurrence, have been the stings of scorpion and centipede. The vast majority of the sicknesses here are related to either poor hygiene or malnutrition, usually both; children with head lice where dirt and scratching has caused secondary infection and sores; boils, especially on children; rickets; mouth ulcerations; ringworm infections, especially on children around the eyes; arthritis, rheumatism, sciatica sometimes beginning in children, and present to some degree in almost everyone from middle age on; hemorrhaging, especially in women; stomach ulcers and painful hyperacidity; and an endless variety of aches and pains and organic disorders coupled with anemic conditions and general debility. Dysentery, both bacterial and amoebic, causes much suffering and takes many lives, especially of young children. Rare is the mother of a large family who

has not lost one or more children, and on the average, a mother here loses one fourth to one third of her children, frequently more.

I have been doing my best to treat the people who come to me, but for many ailments I am frequently at a loss. I have had to turn many persons away, saying that I lack both the knowledge and equipment to make a proper analysis. For others, it is apparent that the only reasonable treatment is an operation. Yesterday, I gave a father fifty pesos to take his small daughter to Mazatlán to have an enormous and rapidly growing skin tumor removed. And I have provided others likewise but there is a limit to my funds, and none to the need. Frequently I have to make blind guesses as to the seriousness of a condition I have little or no understanding of. It is easy enough to say, "You should see a doctor." But most of the people can no more afford the journey to Mazatlán than they can to New York. I alone have to make the decision -- for there is no one else to do it -- as to whether to provide the trip-money to this person or that. Usually if I am not fairly certain that the need is critical I do not provide the money, for there are more than enough cases were there is little question, even to a layman like myself. At times I am forced to play the role of a blind god...

Adrian

In the night as we were unfolding the beds to prepare for sleep the message was brought by a tall, thin man that a child was ill on the hilltop, in the casa of Candelario. Federico offered to guide me there, and we set off together, following a rocky trail which led between the casas and up the side of the hill behind the village. The mother, a stout, large-breasted woman met us at the door and ushered us to the bedside of her son, a boy of 16, small and

young-looking for his age. The sides of the boy's face and beneath his jaw were swollen and covered with a bandana which was tied at the back of his head. I put my hand against his brow and it felt hot. This condition with the swelling behind the ears was described as "coquetas." I thought it might be mumps, but I had already encountered a variety of swellings and facial infections, and was not sure. I went back down the hill and returned with a thermometer. The boy's temperature was 104. I gave him aspirin to help reduce the fever, and Vitamin C for good measure. I waited for a while after giving the aspirin to see if the temperature would drop. All the while the mother hovered about the boy like a moth, full of worry. I took his temperature again, and it had already dropped to 103. The frightened mother was enormously relieved. Adrian had been ill already for 5 days, and she was terrified that she might lose another child. I was deeply moved, overawed, by the intensity and immensity of her feeling.

The following morning I went to see Adrian again, and was delighted to find, on taking his temperature, that during the night it had dropped to normal. His mother, too, was delighted, but in spite of all the evidence of improvement continued to worry and to fret that he might have a relapse. That evening, in fact Adrian did have a relapse, and I was sent for again. This time his temperature had soared to almost 105. His head ached, his stomach ached, and although the swelling beneath his ears and jaw was mostly gone, a new, acute pain and swelling had developed on his right side roughly in the position of the appendix.

I thought it unlikely that the boy had appendicitis but all the same, I put him on Tetracycline. The mother had somehow obtained an injectable solution of "Dicryticina," a combination of Penicillin and Streptomycin, which she was bent on having me inject. I did not look forward to injecting,

particularly in such unsterile conditions as a village casa, but the mother was near hysterics in her concern, and the evident faith in the healing power of the needle seemed to be so great that I finally decided to inject, if only for the psychological benefit. (The first injection I gave in Piaxtla had been to a mule that same morning, and I was glad for the practice.) It seemed to work. We sterilized the needle and syringe by boiling and no sooner had I injected than Adrian broke into a sweat. In a few minutes his fever had dropped to 103.

The next morning Adrian's temperature was still about 103 and that evening it rose again to over 104, and the pain in his abdomen was worse. I gave him another injection of Dicryticina. Adrian's temperature again began to drop. He had not eaten since the day before, although he had drunk much water. Now he developed a passionate craving for "limas," and it was all I could do to convince his mother that this was precisely what he should have. Finally she sent her younger son out to get some and Adrian consumed the sweet fruit with relish.

It was another two days before Adrian's temperature finally dropped to normal and stayed there. His infirmity, which I am sure a physician would have realized from the first, was a classical acute case of mumps. The virus had traveled from one to the other of his glands: from the salivary glands it went apparently to the pancreas and finally to the intestines, which enlarged to some three times their normal size. Also affected were his eyes and central nervous system.

Adrian's case was one of the early incidents of the mumps which at present are striking nearly every family in Piaxtla. Everywhere one goes one sees persons, especially children, but grownups as well, with bulldog jaws swaddled with handkerchiefs holding compresses of "colomo" leaves, an aram lily which grows wild in the moist ravines. So far, thank heaven, few

people have been afflicted with high temperature, and I have been doing little more than prescribing bed (a recommendation seldom heeded) and dealing out salicylates. There would be little point in suggesting quarantine. Most of the houses have no more than one or two rooms, and the children have to sleep together anyway for lack of blankets...

Death Of A Child

Yesterday a small girl met me at the calle and asked me to follow her to her house, which was near the river on the west end of town. I was ushered into a dark room where a number of figures stood silently around a cot on which sat a young woman, a white cloth bound tightly around her head, and in her arms a tiny baby wrapped in pieces of cloth. The shutters of the single window were opened part way to allow enough light to see. The baby had a high fever, and had not urinated for more than 24 hours, nor had it taken its mother's milk. Earlier it had had diarrhea, first yellow, and then green. It had been born with a congested condition, and for this the family had acquired from Dr. Oseo a variety of antibiotics, including chloromycetin. The fever had commenced some 24 hours after the injection of these drugs.

I did not know what to do. I returned to the casa Chavarîn and hunted through my manual of pediatrics and the Merck Manual but still I lacked both the equipment and knowledge for sensible treatment. I was afraid to give more antibiotics for fear the child was already suffering from "drug fever" or the like. Yet for all I knew a high dose of antibiotic might be what was required to save the infant's life. One thing was probably imperative, and this I had no means of providing: intravenous feeding. On the off chance that the failure to urinate and fever were associated with heat exhaustion I prescribed

a small quantity of electrolytic salt, together with a very small dose of salicylic acid to lower the temperature, and pediatric vitamins.

As I left the house I was again caught by that uneasy feeling of questioning the value of life itself. This baby is so small, so sick, so soulless and still. It is far from beautiful to my eyes at least. I learned that the mother so far has no living children, and that already she has lost two, with similar illness, in the first week or so of life. And that the child's life was of great importance, not only for personal reasons but for social as well, for in Mexico a woman's self-worth is in great part measured by her ability to bear and rear children. To be without children is to be abandoned by God.

But God, if there is one, abandoned her, In the night I was awakened by the howling of a dog... a high, painful wail, and I knew. In the morning, before the sun had risen the news came. I have still not gone to the house to make lamentations, and I don't know if I shall go. I wonder what I could or should have done. I wish I knew more...

As ever, troubles seem to come in numbers. The day that the child died, was the same day that Adrian whose temperature the day before had dropped to normal, suddenly took a turn for the worse, soaring to almost 105. I feared it might be some sort of reaction to the medicine. (It wasn't.)

The combination of these factors filed me with a sudden and stunning sense of failure. It seemed to me the inevitable nemesis for presuming to practice this art for which I was utterly untrained. I kept trying to reassure myself that if there were two or three patients who had taken a turn for the worse as a result of my administration, there were 100, 200 who had been relieved. But I could not reassure myself. What if one of these patients died? What if two or even three died?... and the fault were mine. I was afraid.

I tried not to let my fear show, but as I made my way up the trail to see a woman on the east side of town who was stricken with severe bronchial asthma, an enormously ugly, stumpy, dirty white, one-eyed dog which previously I had passed a dozen times before without disturbing, sensed my radiating fear and darted out suddenly, closing its jaws around my leg. Fortunately it was malnourished and did not bite very hard...

Ignacio

If there is one child in Piaxtla that my heart has gone out to more than all the rest, it is Ignacio . Ignacio is eleven years old. He can see with only one of his eyes, and he has only one arm. Yet Ignacio can hold his own with almost anyone. My heart goes out to him not because of his deficiency but because of his surplus, because he is so alive, so mischievous, so responsive, and - like many eleven year olds - so unfathomable.

The first time I saw Ignacio was some eight months ago when our group from Pacific High School first brought medicines to the Sierra Madre. Our group was sitting in one of the casas waiting for our burro driver when Ignacio first appeared. Unlike the other children who crowded the doorway, Ignacio stepped inside and greeted us individually with a radiant and welcoming smile. This December when I arrived again in Piaxtla, Ignacio was quick to make his appearance. The first heavy downpour of my first day in the village had gradually subsided. Little by little the word of my arrival had been spreading and people were beginning to appear for medicines and treatment. Ignacio arrived, his thin shirt and trousers soaked. He greeted me ecstatically, remembering my name. We shook left hands, and as I proceeded

to examine the ailing villagers and parcel out appropriate medicines Ignacio was constantly at my side. He would fetch pill boxes for me and put the lids back on bottles, holding the bottle between his knees. There were some things he could do better with one good hand than I can do with my two bad ones. At one point when I was fumbling to untie a difficult knot on a carton of medicines, Ignacio held out his hand an said, "Dámelo." Quickly and deftly he untied it with his teeth.

Ignacio and his family live in "Las Chicuras," a small settlement of six primitive casas in the hills on the far side of the river from Piaxtla and about three miles away. A small spring or "aguaje" in a deep arroyo provides year-around water for the families who live there. Every day Ignacio and his 14-year old brother, Camilo, walk the three miles to school in Piaxtla wading across at a shallows in the river.

The home where Ignacio lives together with his mother, father, aunt, and six brothers and sisters, is a small one-room adobe hut on the crown of a hill. Inside the hut is a large corn crib, two hand-hewn, rope-strung cots, and a crib suspended from the middle of the roof. In addition to the doorway, which can be blocked with a pole frame covered with pieces of cardboard, there is but one small window. The room is used for little more than sleeping and the storage of grain. The parents sleep in one cot, two of the older boys and one girl on the other cot, and the rest of the children curl up on deer skins on the floor, sharing a common blanket. The earth stove is in front of the casa, beneath a tiled canopy. Here in the open air is where the meals are cooked and eaten. Each day the girls carry water on their heads in earthen jugs from the "aguaje" an eighth of a mile away while the boys scrounge wood from the surrounding hillsides and chop it for the fire.

Ignacio's 16-year old brother Javier never had the chance to go to school. He is quiet to the point of being taciturn and enjoys nothing more than wandering alone through the bushy hills in search of game to help feed the family. Ignacio's 14-year old brother, Camilo, tends also to be quiet, but when given the opportunity and attention becomes exuberant. Both he and Ignacio began school at the same time, two years ago, when the family moved to their present shelter only three miles from the village. There is no question that Camilo is bright. He soon skipped a grade, and at present can read and write better than many a child his age in the States, although he's still in the third grade, and although other than his school books [he] has nothing to read but a now tattered copy of "La Lampara de Aladin." which our Pacific High group had presented to Ignacio last springtime. He knows the story by heart. Camilo never tires of picking my brain in matters of astronomy, geography, other languages, etc. Sometimes when I am working with Ignacio on his reading, Camilo will drift quietly in and begin reading over Ignacio's shoulder. When this happens Ignacio suddenly discovers something else to do that requires his urgent attention, and takes off. Camilo takes over the book and proceeds to read aloud.

Measles

From the time I have come to Mexico, the villages have been plagued by one epidemic after another. First mumps, then bacterial dysentery, then influenza, then strep throat and now measles. One can follow the path of the diseases through the mountains from village to village. The mumps came from Jocuixtita to Guillapa and Piaxtla, then slowly moved northwest to where they are now striking in epidemic fashion the small village of

Campanillas. The measles have taken the opposite route, coming from Campanias via Guillapa.

One little boy, my "tocayo" (also named Samuel) aged six, failed to recover after ten days with the measles. The spots had subsided, but the fever continued and the boy, who was now little more than skin and bones, refused all nutriment. His mother, being one of the shopkeepers, made frequent effort to give her son fruit juices, but he stubbornly refused. Yet, when I said, "Mire, Tocayo, el jugo te da mucho provecho. Quieres?" The boy nodded "Yes." When his mother, somewhat doubtfully, handed him the glass, the youngster gulped it down like a mouse dying of thirst. His stout mother looked at me wide-eyed and laughed. From that point on, all that was necessary for me to do was to recommend a good food and the boy took it. His health took a turn for the better and in a short time he was recovering rapidly. Many children, I find, respond similarly. Sometimes it seems as if they try to get well just to please me.

Navidad

At the beginning of December the cities of Sonora and Sinaloa were already busily decorated for Christmas, loud and cheap embellishment, in imitation of Christmas in the United States. Here in Piaxtla there is nothing of the sort. Today is Christmas Day and the village wears the same quiet face it wore the day or the week or the month before.

This Christmas day I have received many gifts. Shortly after noon I set out toward the far end of town to call on a boy with an acute case of the mumps. The grandmother of the youth, dark and crumpled as a leaf in primavera, presented me with an armful of "maiz rosero" with which to

make "palomitas" (popcorn). As she was loading my arms, another woman, who had seen me enter the casa, arrived and presented me with three small eggs, which she placed on top of the corn. At the gate a thin boy, about 10 years old with a reddish birthmark on his face was waiting for me. His father, in a casa on the hill top, was ill, and he asked would I go with him. As we cut across the churchyard and followed a small trail behind the houses on the main street we were hailed from a tiny window at the back of one of the houses. On turning I saw two thin arms, shiny with age extending from the window. In each hand were several limes. "Que se pongalos en las bolsas," said the little old woman. Pockets bulging with fruit, arms with corn and eggs, my assent up the steep hill was restricted. The boy led me to his house, and I saw that his father was a man who a week before had summoned me in to feast on guyabas he had just gathered. Now he was stretched on a cot and covered with a blanket. The mumps had struck again, and struck low. He was in considerable pain. I told him I would dispatch a sedative for him, and the boy accompanied me to take the tablets back. On the way back down the hill, one of the women I had treated for kidney infection, and apparently, temporarily, made worse, summoned me inside to give me an "aguinalda" (Christmas gift). Seating me under the tree on which the lemons had matured, she gave me a saucer full of "conserva de limones" which had been prepared by rasping of the skin of the lemons, boiling them with spices, drying them in the sun, and then boiling them with sugar. They were delicious.

A Myth Is As Good As A Mile

I am an enigma to the people in Piaxtla. They are so used to being exploited that they find it hard to believe that anyone should come with medicine and simply give it away with no thought of profiting by it. When someone insists that I take money for the medicines I tell them, "No, you need it more than I. If you feel you must pay for the medicines, give your money to a family who needs it more than you do." All this tends to throw the people into confusion. I am frequently asked what group, or party, or creed has sent me here with the medicines. One rumor after another has grown and then slowly died for lack of sustenance; so far I have come as an F.B.I. agent, as a miner, as a seeker of buried treasures, or as a Communist.

Returning from my recent trip to Mazatlán, while staying in the casa of Estebano, the one-legged escobero, I awoke in the morning twilight to overhear a conversation, concerning myself, which began with the peace symbol on my hat. The conversation, roughly translated, went something like this:

"...Yes, 'Peace.' It is to show he is not in accord with the war."

"Then he is a communist?--"

"No, he says he isn't one thing or the other."

"All communists wear beards like that."

"Yes, certainly."

"And they carry back-packs like that, too."

"With medicines?"

"Well, who knows?"

"Then that is why he gives away the medicines?"

"Clearly, propaganda!"

"Yes, certainly."

This last "claro que si," uttered with authoritative finality...

Within a few years Samuel founded a small clinic in Piaxtla staffed by what he has called a "mini Peace Corps" of visiting physicians, dentists, and pre-med students.

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Quilá's weekly meetings were held every Friday afternoon. That particular afternoon I arrived late. They were discussing the kitchen. The kitchen had been in chaos since Lupita, Ruben's sister, had moved to physical therapy. Katalina had volunteered to take over as the cook. She was a Tarumahara Indian from Chihuahua who damaged her spinal cord by she falling off a mountain trail on her way home from a dance. Katalina was telling the group that she wanted out of the kitchen. No one else wanted the job.

"Katalina is the only one available." said Claudio.

"Not if she has to take the abuse the men give her," said Elena. "Its hard enough managing the kitchen and people's complaints. But she also has to hear people's insults about being an Indian. And why does it always have to be a woman? Why don't one of you men take over?"

"How many want Lupita back in the kitchen?" said Manuel. Most of the men raised their hands.

She shook her head and said, "I'm not going take their crap anymore."

Rosa offered to cook breakfasts. Katalina said she'd be willing to prepare lunches. Elena asked if any of the men would help with dinner. There was silence. "Chupón?" she asked. He refused. "Manuel?" He shook his head.

One at a time she asked each of the young men and received the same answer. There was silence. A gentle breeze blew through the large Laurel tree that shaded the meeting. These pleasant afternoon breezes were common this time of the year and were known as the winds of Lent.

Camilo finally said, "Well, the men can decide this between themselves."

Andrés, who was coordinating the meeting, read the next item on the agenda. "Pedro," he said. The man from the human rights commission who dropped off Pedro said that he would return in a week. A month had now passed and the project had yet to hear from the man.

When Pedro first arrived at Quilá his world revolved around food, water, and the tango. As he finished the last bite of a meal he would ask for water. When he had gulped down the water he would ask for more to eat. This was his routine. When denied he would snap *"hijo de puta!"** and start to wail. Valdo and the other boys teased him relentlessly, often driving him into rages in which he'd spit in all directions and start flailing with his arms. Pedro seemed to love music and would calm down and start dancing in his wheelchair if someone clapped rhythmically and said, "Baila, Pedro, Baila!"*

Pedro defecated in his bed at about five each morning. Rosa, who was responsible for bathing him, said he often smeared himself with his feces. When she tried using diapers or shorts he ripped them off. Rosa bathed Pedro and Katalina fed him. Claudio provided him with some very basic physical therapy. After that Pedro was pretty much on his own. He slept by himself in a small room in the men's house. The room was empty but for his tilted cot and a wooden crate. He slept curled up in a worn gray blanket. At such times Pedro seemed all too alone and abandoned.

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* Son of a whore
* "Dance, Pedro, dance!"

"Andrés finished my leg and I'll be leaving tomorrow," said Rigoberto, pointing to his artificial limb. Rigoberto was a tall man in his early sixties. During his stay at Quilá he had become very fond of Pedro. "Pedro needs attention and I don't know who'll give it to him when I go," Rigoberto continued. Pedro was sitting quietly outside the circle. He seemed to be comforted by the voices. Camilo asked Rosa if she was interested. She said she already had too much work, but could help out at times with Pedro.

I offered to track down the people who had brought him to us, just in case we should decide that "there is really nothing we can do for him." I looked to Rosa and Lupita. Though the women were the ones who cleaned his sheets and were the targets of his demands for food and water, none of them seemed interested in the possibility of sending him back to Culiacán.

"Do you really have experience with children with brain injuries?" I asked.

"Pedro might just need time and care,' said Elena.

Andrés looked at the list of agenda items again and said, "Isabel." Isabel was a thin woman with a handsome lawyerly face. She shifted in her wheelchair and said, "I'd like to come back to Quilá. I could work in the toy shop and help out where needed." There was silence. Andrés asked what people thought. Elena said that Isabel had been asked to leave Quilá a year earlier, and asked her talk about it. Isabel said only that she had made an error. People seemed to feel that was enough. It was agreed that Isabel could stay at the project and work in the toy shop and would receive room and board and a small stipend.

After the meeting I asked Camilo if we could do an interview. After reading Samuel's journals I was anxious to hear Camilo's perspective on the development of the village clinic. We carried two chairs to the stand of

mango trees and sat down in the shade. Chupón and Manuel were doing their laundry at the concrete wash area behind us. Ruben's sheets, which Rosa had hung up on the line, fluttered in the gentle wind.

"Samuel first came to Piaxtla in 1964. The only car that came to Piaxtla in those days was one of those four wheel drive Jeep Commanders that drove in from San Ignacio twice a week. The road ran through the riverbeds and had been made by hand. During recess at school we got the word that there was a Gringo in Piaxtla. "What's a gringo?" I wondered.

"The whole school went to see Samuel. Of course my brother Ignacio was there first. Samuel was surrounded by children. They were staring at him as though he were a lizard. Poor Samuel. He didn't speak a word of Spanish. Maybe "Buenos Dias" or one or two sentences like that. But not enough to really talk to anyone. So he looked at us and we looked at him.

"He was so white, and he had a long beard. He seemed to be a very rare species. He smelt bad. I said "Gringo cochino" and grabbed my brother and said, "lets go." But Ignacio refused. I left for home and he stayed behind. Ignacio didn't go to school the next day. I was worried. I asked around and was told that he was walking with the gringo in the direction of our house.

"We were angry with Ignacio and embarrassed. What could we offer this man? We had nothing. We really didn't know what to do. Ignacio was a devil. But my mother was very talented. She immediately found a way of communicating with Samuel using gestures. In Mexico you always offer your visitor something to eat. Fortunately the chicken had laid an egg that morning. So my mother prepared it for him. I don't know if he likes eggs, but that's what he ate that day. He had no choice. Samuel returned to Piaxtla the next year and stayed with us a couple of days. After he learned the road

he would come by himself without waiting for Ignacio to bring him. I don't think he ever dreamt of forming a health program. He came because he had heard that somewhere in the mountains there was a very special bird.

"He started bringing donated medicine and old clothes to give to the people. The Chavarîn family let him keep all of his stuff on their porch. People lined up outside to get the clothing and the stuff that Samuel would give them. Pretty soon Samuel couldn't fit in there with all his junk and medicines. By that time we were living in Piaxtla. Do you know where Mario lives?"

"The little house across from the clinic with the plaster falling off the adobe?"

"Right. That's where we used live. There's a lot of *ole* plants out front. People make shampoo and soap from them. We planted them. Now there's tons of it, and we have to buy it from Mario. After Samuel left his job in Palo Alto he came to live with us in that little house. My mother was very astute and a very frank woman. She taught Samuel many things that he hadn't learned in the United States. Samuel had a metal trunk where he kept sausages, tins of tuna, and other special foods. He never shared this food with us. When my mother was cleaning up one day she found a can of pineapple juice under his bed that he had forgotten to lock in the trunk. She wanted to teach him a lesson. So she opened the can of pineapple juice and poured us each a small cup full. It was delicious, the best juice I had ever tasted. She saved a cup for Samuel and when he returned she said, "here's your share of the juice." He didn't know whether to get angry, cry, or laugh. It was his food and there was nothing wrong with him saving it for himself. It's just that we were raised to shared everything with the other members of the family.

"Samuel then got money from some wealthy Americans to buy a house on the edge of the village. He asked us to come live there with him. By then he was spending most of his time giving out medicines. Samuel converted most of the house into a clinic. I loved to help him package the medicines. He would say, "wrap up so many capsules of this medication," and I'd do it and write down the daily dosage. I also sorted the donated clothing and learned how to take x-rays."

"The clinic had an x-ray machine?" I asked.

"It was an old second, third, or fourth hand portable x-ray machine. We also had a simple laboratory where we did some kinds of urine tests. I was fifteen then and got a lot of satisfaction from this work. It was about that time that we went to the Culiacán valley to work in the tomato fields. When we returned to Piaxtla Samuel offered to send me to school in Palo Alto, California.

"I stayed for two years in the United States. I found jobs gardening after class and was able to save enough money to buy a sewing machine for my mother. When I was about to return to Mexico the teachers at the high school I attended collected money so that I could continue my studies in San Ignacio. While studying in San Ignacio I spent all my vacations working in the clinic. I learned a lot from Samuel and from the visiting doctors. I always had a lot of questions when they came. At times when Samuel and the other Americans weren't there I'd have to try to do what I could for the patients. I'd look things up in the books. Sometimes I made mistakes. But often I got it right.

"After finishing high school I was given two alternatives. I could continue on to preparatory school and then medical school, or I could attend a two year program for community health workers in Mexico City. I wasn't

interested in becoming a doctor. It didn't seem that the title of doctor meant much to the people of the mountain villages. So I decided to go to the course in Mexico City.

"When I returned to Piaxtla I dedicated myself full time to the clinic. Carlos Manjarrez' house was up for sale. Samuel raised the money to buy it and we moved the clinic. At that time there were a lot of volunteers from the United States. Many of them were college students who were thinking about going to medical school. They had a great time. They came and worked for two or three months and then went back to the United States. The people treated the volunteers as if they were gods. A few of them were really dumb, but just being an American was like having a title. It was as if this made them superior. I can also remember very good people, very humble, very professional people who worked together well with us.

"From the beginning we were told that we had control of the clinic. The reality was different. We finally stood up and said that any North American who comes through Piaxtla should come with the understanding that they are here to train the local health workers rather than to play God or to play doctor." From that point on no North Americans gave consultations by themselves. They were always accompanied by one of the health workers. "I became the coordinator and recruited Rosa, Alejandro and Chuy. Jenaro first came as a patient. When he arrived he was in very bad shape. We knew nothing about treating juvenile arthritis. He was malnourished, just skin and bones. If we moved one of his hands he'd holler because of the pain in his joints. We had to feed him by hand. There was a North American doctor with us at the time named Robert. He said to bathe him in hot water with salt. We started to give Jenaro very gentle massages. He would cry from the pain in his joints. With time, massages, exercise, salt water baths,

encouragement, and the medications Robert gave him, Jenaro began to improve. He took an interest in the program and started attending the consultations. A few years later I started a new clinic in Durango. I prepared Jenaro to take over the clinic while I was away. Once I was in Durango and he was the clinic coordinator, he feared that I would return and take back the position. This was when he first began speaking ill of me.

"We started running health worker trainings. People came from all over Mexico and Central America. We also started a corn bank, a chain of vegetable gardens, and the campesino union. When people came down from the Sierras, the clinic would be their first stop. We gained their respect and their confidence. They knew that we were committed to helping them regardless of whether they could pay for the services or not.

"When you give yourself to work like this I think that you deserve to be paid a decent wage. Samuel and the other North Americans volunteered their time or worked for a small stipend. We were expected to do the same. We saw them work without thought of recompense and this inspired us. Later I found out that most of them had other sources of income. Some had scholarships, others had inheritances, and all of them knew that anytime they wanted they could return to a comfortable life in California. Still, this philosophy of service made us less selfish and more humanitarian. The clinic was like a school for us in which we learned both skills and the importance of helping others. Not just helping others, but doing so as a friend rather than as a patron.

"There were some things that we were never able to accomplish. I wanted to form a truly functional health committee made up of community members that would be in charge of the clinic. We did have a health committee, but people always thought of the clinic as belonging to the

Gringos. They never felt that it was their own. They saw all this medicine and equipment come down from the United States. It was never explained to them that much of this was funded by international aid organizations and was not a gift from the Gringos who came to Piaxtla.

"Other misunderstandings arose when the Ministry of Agrarian Reform began sending groups of health workers from Puebla to attend our courses. They sent about thirty campesinos and high school students at a time. These health workers had little effect on their communities because the Ministry never gave them the support they needed. The trainings did however effect our own small group. People began saying that some of us were taking Ministry money.

"Some of the other health workers thought that you were getting paid from the ministry?" I asked.

"Right."

"But you weren't?"

"We were getting paid. But we shared everything we received with the other health workers."

"And they didn't believe it."

"They didn't believe it. That's how the problems started. And as you know, where there's money there are misunderstandings. They honestly thought that we were taking the money."

"And that led to other problems?

"That created conflicts between people. People started fighting with each other instead of working as a team like we did in the past.

It was a little past closing time when Camilo and I finished the interview. I walked back to his house with him. We sat on the porch and talked until

dinner was ready. On my way home I passed Andrés, Juan and Claudio who were sitting in front of the pool hall. They were leaning against the neglected adobe building sharing a *caguama** of Pacifico. Their three pairs of crutches lay haphazardly by them. Juan, Elena's husband, was feeling good and was more talkative than usual. He spoke with a mild slur and a trace of saliva teetering on the edge of his mouth, remnants of a long ago night of polio fever. Andrés hissed at Claudio, and said, "Despacito cabron!* " Claudio had been taking three hits from the bottle for every one Andrés and Juan had taken, and none of them had the money to buy a second bottle. Claudio's red shirt was open, revealing his broad shoulders and powerful chest. He hadn't shaved for several days; his light beard and hair are the same shade of sandy brown as Piaxtla's streets.

Someone called to Andrés from inside, telling him that a table was open. They finished the bottle and went into the pool hall. The pool hall was pretty basic. It had dirt floors and one of the two aging tables was patched with gray tape. Andrés racked the balls and made the break with a faultless shot. With a crutch in one hand and the pool cue in the other, he continued to knock one ball in after another with the same deftness that he made braces and artificial legs. Juan said it was getting late. I walked back to his house with him. Unlike Andrés, his gait was struggling and awkward. His belly protruded over his pants as he advanced step by step down the street.

When we arrived at the house Elena and Rosa were watching television. A thirty foot cable connected the TV to the parabolic dish of Kiko Manjarrez, the neighbor across the street. They were watching a black and white film from the forties, the golden age of Mexican cinema. The movie was coming

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* litter bottle of beer
* "Slow down!"

to a climax: the heroine, who had become a prostitute to send her sister Beatriz to a prestigious school, appeared to be in great danger. She was on her knees before an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. "Virgencita. Por favor..." she pleaded. There was a pounding at her door. As she turned towards the wooden tenement room door the televisión screen snapped to static. Kiko Manjarrez had gone to bed and turned off his receiver. I was outraged but Elena shrugged as if this were a common occurrence and shut off the set. Besides, she had most likely already seen the film several times.

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A few weeks later Jenaro, Valentín and Mario were sitting in front of the clinic. "Chema's going to slaughter the fat one tomorrow," said Jenaro. He was talking about an enormous pig that spent its days in a kidney shaped pool of mud behind Lucila's house. It had soft brown eyes and sparse stiff hair caked with dried mud and kitchen waste. Early the next morning Chema, Eligio, and an older heavy set man bound the hog. It squealed in terror as a rope was tied to each of its front legs. Another rope was tied to its back legs which had been bound together. Two of us pulled on each of the ropes.

Under Chema's direction the heavy set man attempted to stab the animal in the heart. The hog screeched in pain. The man stabbed again. He had a hard time finding the heart. The pig was large and the man was inexperienced. At each stab the pig jerked violently and we strained to keep him in place with the ropes. "Up and over," Chema directed the man. He found the heart this time. Dark burgundy colored blood bubbled out of the pig's chest as it finally collapsed into death.

Chema's dogs lapped up the blood. He shooed them away, but they stayed on the edges of the scene. As the heavy set man wiped the pig's blood

off the knife he said, "its better to live than to die." They dragged the pig by its hooves to a make-shift table they had assembled from wooden boards. Eligio sprayed the pig with a hose while the others scrubbed it down like a fat man in a Turkish bath. When they finished they turned the hog over on his back with his hooves up. The heavy set man plugged the knife wound with a corn cob. Eligio cut the pig open, revealing a layer of about an inch or two of pure white fat. He pealed off the fat and the others cut it into small chunks and threw it into a metal tub. Jenaro came out of the kitchen warming his hands with a cup of hot coffee. He said he had come for *hígado con salcita y limón,* roasted liver with a little salt and lemon juice. Lucila and Norma were roasting pieces of meat on skewers over the kitchen fire. But before Jenaro had a chance to eat, he was called back to the clinic. I walked back with him. An old Ford pick-up was parked by the clinic. An older woman was sitting on a bench in front with a little girl in her arms. She told Jenaro that the child had been stung by a scorpion. They brought the child into the clinic and laid her on the consultation table. The child appeared very sleepy.

"What time did it happen?" asked Jenaro

"About five hours ago" said the woman.

"Did you give her any kind of medicine?"

"Nothing," said the woman. "I brought her down by mule to Bordontita as soon as it happened. From there we came by truck."

Jenaro took the child's pulse. Her arm laid limply in his hand. Her pulse was high, but not precariously so. Then he listened to her chest. A scorpion bite can cause inflammation of the lungs and fill them with mucus. He said there was some wheezing, but apparently no obstructions to her breathing. Jenaro then took her temperature.

Small beads of sweat appeared on Jenaro's forehead and nose. A couple of years earlier a child from Jocuixtita died from a scorpion bite on the same consultation table.

He went into the back room and came out with a hypodermic needle and a small bottle of hydrocortisone. He injected the child. Jenaro said the hydrocortisone needed about fifteen minutes to take effect. If her condition didn't get worse by that time, and if there were no side effects, she would be all right.

For the next quarter of an hour we sat quietly and watched the child while the woman stroked her hand softly. Jenaro pulled out a handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his face. The stethoscope around his neck seemed oddly compatible with his plaid shirt, Levi's, and work boots. As we waited Jenaro explained to me that he had no antitoxin, as it was expensive and had a short shelf life. "Anyway," he said, "it's only effective if injected within a few hours."

After fifteen minutes Jenaro checked her pulse again. He then listened to her chest and took her temperature. He nodded to the woman and we relaxed a bit. They talked about friends in Caballo Abajo, the rancho where she lived. The woman said she was the child's grandmother. The mother was in Los Angeles working. We sat together in the small consultation room for a couple of hours. Every fifteen minutes or so Jenaro checked the child's vital signs. Finally, he listened to her chest one more time and said that the inflammation had gone down and that they could go next door to Celia's where they would be sleeping. He told the woman to let him know immediately if there were any problems, and that she should bring the child back in the morning.

Jenaro and I had planned to do a second interview that afternoon. He stretched back in his chair and asked if I wanted to do it now. I nodded and ran to Don Goyo's house across the street to get my tape recorder. Jenaro picked up his story where he had left off several weeks before.

"After leaving Doña Cuca's they brought me to Piaxtla on horseback to have an x-ray taken. It was Sunday and the clinic was closed. The clinic was here, in this same house, but at the time they only had one large room. I sat there on the patio. I didn't have much faith in doctors by that time, but waited for someone to show up. Finally an American doctor came. I told him about my illness and asked him if he would treat me.

"He told me that I'd have to come back for the x-ray when they were open. I became discouraged and said I wouldn't come back. As we left the clinic I thought, "Gringo sons of bitches. I come all the way from Campanillas and he tells me to come back another day."

"A relative of mine heard that I was in Piaxtla. The woman I came with was related to him too. I was just about to leave, when he found me and said I could stay with him. I really had nowhere else to go, so I accepted. The next day they took the x-ray and told me that it looked like I had juvenile arthritis. They gave me cortisone and aspirin. Soon I was able to roll over in bed and started to sleep better. I forced myself to get up and start walking with crutches. I didn't want to spend any more of my life in bed. The pain didn't go away completely, but the inflammation in my knees went down. Finally I could walk from one end of the village to the other.

"In the mornings I'd go and sit on the bench in the clinic waiting room. There were Americans everywhere and this was something new for me. I had never heard people speak English before. The clinic was always full, and

I'd just sit there and watch. After a few days a gringo sat down besides me. It was Robert, an American pediatrician who had seen me hanging around. He wanted to practice his Spanish and asked me what kind of work I did. Nothing I said. "And your family?" he asked. "I don't have one," I said. "I have a brother, but he's younger than me. We don't have a house, nor a mother or father. We have nothing." Well then, "this is your family here," he replied. This made me feel good. I felt supported and paid attention to.

"Susan, the wife of one of the visiting doctors, taught me how to keep the patient's records in alphabetical order. The clinic was always busy with people coming and going. Before they'd see the doctor I'd have to find their card. People started noticing me and paid more attention to me.

"Robert asked if I'd like to observe the consultations. I'd stand there to one side of him. He was a good doctor and a very good man. He'd explain to me in detail, really clearly, about the illnesses. He made drawings of the organs, and taught me about the causes, the treatment, the proper medication, and when it was important to get laboratory analysis. I also learned to take x-rays and how to suture. I began to get involved in everything.

"I remember Robert smoked a lot in the consults and often looked things up in books. He taught me well. After each examination he would ask, "Jenaro, what do you think? What does he have?" At first I was quiet, but after awhile I began to say, "well, I think I know what the problem is. He has..." Learning to do the consults came easily.

"Two years passed. I made friends in Piaxtla. People came to respect me. The gringos helped me a lot. They gave me opportunities, and this was important, that they gave me opportunities. I felt as if I had a family.

"At the end of 1970 I went up to the Sierras with an American whom we called Guillermo. We went up from Chilar. He's a paramedic now. We

became good friends and I told him my story, as I'm telling it to you. He invited me to live with him in the United States. I left for Palo Alto at the end of 1971. He paid for my passport, visa, and all my travel expenses. I lived with Guillermo and his father. I had everything there. I had food, clothing, a good watch, everything of good quality.

"But I didn't like it there much. Not to live there. I thought about Mexico. I didn't feel free. I just went to English classes in the morning and came back and spent the rest of the day watching television and maybe cleaning the garden up a bit, or playing pool. I was stuck there in the house.

"On Sundays we'd go to the beach, or San Francisco, or to the mountains. But I didn't like living like that, with wall to wall carpet, with everything.

"They were going to arrange the paperwork for me to stay there. They would become my family there. But I couldn't live there."

"I felt like I was in prison. Their way of life is very different from ours. Its difficult. My life had been disorganized. Up there, especially among the middle class, everything is ordered. They have their own freedoms, but they're very different from ours.

"I wanted to be here, talk with my friends, have a beer or a cigarette. These are things I shouldn't have been doing, but I did. I felt like a little poor boy, *jodidillo*, a child I had to be there.

"The moment finally came that I called Samuel and I told him that I was fed up with it there and wanted to go back to Mexico. And I don't regret it. I'm happy here. I feel that I'm of use to the people. I'm the only one now that does consults at night, Saturdays, Sundays, I'm available at all hours.

"The program had been going for about five years, when Samuel bought this house for the clinic with money that he raised there in the United States. At that time there were nothing but gringos at the clinic. Pediatricians,

internists, and other specialists passed through to volunteer their services. Groups of students would come, volunteers, fifteen or twenty at a time, and go up to different parts of the sierra. They spoke in English at the clinic meetings and I understood almost nothing. To this day people call it "La Clinica de los Gringos," even though the Americans rarely come here now.

"The dollars came down from above. Many things came down from the United States, zaz, zaz, zaz. Everything depended on Samuel's money. So one ought to obey Samuel.

"Samuel arranged for disabled children to go to San Francisco for free surgery. That's when the clinic gained its reputation. They were seeing forty or fifty people or more a day. The clinic was always filled. There were times when they couldn't see everyone, there were so many people. A lot of people came down from the sierra, but the majority were from the coast. They came in pick-up trucks, like they now come to Quilá.

"The consultorio was in front, where the co-op is now. All the shelves, where there is now merchandise, were filled with donated medicine. Everything was free. They gave away clothing, blankets and bags of powdered milk. They started charging a peso per consultation, but that was almost nothing.

"When I first arrived the back rooms were in ruins. An American carpenter repaired the roof and built the surgery room. A group of students from the United States plastered the walls. An ophthalmologist then came once a year to do eye surgery. They started a septic tank. Using my crutches to support me I helped dig it out.

"Samuel started to rethink the role of the North Americans at the clinic. They worked with enthusiasm, with love, but they stayed for a short time and then returned home. "They come and go. They're not going to make a life

here in Piaxtla," Samuel told me. "And that's the bottom line. You and the others live here and know the people. You need to take the reins of the program, and be the ones who work directly with the people. Even if you're more competent than the North Americans, you'll never gain people's confidence as long as they're the ones providing the services." I didn't understand any of this at the time. I was delighted just to be able to walk, work, and ride on horseback through the Sierras.

"We began to depend less on the gringos. We wanted them to keep coming but as teachers not as practitioners. They were asked that they write first, to see if we had work for them. Camilo became the coordinator. He had been to a two-year course in Mexico City. I helped with the consultations and the two Miguels worked in dentistry. They all been working with Samuel since they were young. Then later Rosa started in the laboratory with Ramona, Don Goyo's daughter.

"We started offering health worker training courses. It was Samuel's idea. He was always looking to the future. Our goal was to have health workers in villages all through the sierra. The idea was to teach what one learned. This is still central to my work, to teach what I learn. That we spread out and multiply

"The courses were taught by North American doctors. These courses went on for about seven or eight years. We learned from the courses and from the consultations. There was always someone at the clinic to guide us when we came across a problem we didn't understand. We learned many things from the Gringos. But they weren't very good teachers. They didn't know how to teach. They were often very traditional in their teaching methods. At times we didn't understand what they were trying to get across.

"Little by little the North Americans withdrew. Samuel stayed and perhaps one or two more. We started to get a better handle on the situation and won the confidence of the people. We hosted international conferences. Bus loads of people came up from all over Mexico and Central America.

"When Samuel first started about a third of the children born in Piaxtla died before the age of five. Mostly from diarrhea and dehydration. The road washed out each year during the rains so it was hard to get out, and doctors never came to town. There were no vaccinations. There were no outhouses. Midwives were not taught about the causes of tetanus. There was no birth control available. Women became pregnant year after year. They had ten, twelve, thirteen children or more. Retention of the placenta and hemorrhaging was common. Many woman died giving birth. That's why so many adults here grew up as orphans.

"We brought vaccines up to the sierra. We taught people about the importance of rehydrating children with diarrhea with a drink prepared in the home from water, salt, and sugar. We started a baby-weighing program and a prenatal care for women. We talked about family planning. We weren't trying to stop people from having children. We'd say fine. Have a family. Have all the children that you want. Often the only help a campesino has is his children. When they begin to grow up, the boys help in the fields and the girls help their mothers. So we didn't say not to have children. We suggested that they space their children, plan for their children, so as not to put the mother at risk.

"By that time I was able to walk without crutches. I could run, I could dance, I could do all the things that I couldn't do when I was a boy. I started to get really irresponsible. I got drunk every weekend, and became less reliable at work. I remember one time when they gave me two thousand pesos to buy

baby chicks for one of the clinic's self-sufficiency projects. I went to the plaza and started drinking and never went to get the chicks. People lost confidence in me. I became isolated from the others.

"Camilo humiliated me at the meetings. It was if I was the only in the group that screwed up. He talked about my drinking. He talked about my stealing. I was the worst. He turned people against me. Samuel went months without talking to me. The Miguels laughed at me. I was a clown to them. A drunk. I was a jerk. I was useless. I was screwed once again. But this time, not because I was sick. I was like Claudio, without opportunity, without support

"This was in 75-76. Camilo was the coordinator and could manage everything to his liking. We were his sheep. I knew of a lot of Camilo's misdeeds, that he charged a lot for the consultations, that he took money from the clinic, that he mismanaged the clinic's money, that he bought things for himself. Camilo's family came and took what they wanted and left. I couldn't say anything. He humiliated me. That's why I have this resentment against him. And for that reason Camilo and I will never work together again. I don't trust him.

"I began to have girlfriends. That's when I met Norma. I married her without thinking much about it. Just to get married. Son of a bitch. I finally left the clinic for a time. I had a wife to support and had no money. They paid me two hundred pesos a month. Two hundred pesos. That was nothing. So I left. I began to think about things. Norma was pregnant and I was going to have a family.

"I borrowed five thousand pesos and bought a hundred cases of beer to sell up in the Sierras. Camilo loaned me an additional two thousand pesos to buy even more. Two thousand pesos was a lot of money. He knew that I was

going wrong. He loaned me the money so that he could say, "now he's really screwing up," and keep me from coming back to the clinic. As a health worker I shouldn't have been selling beer. But I had to eat. I didn't have other options, other opportunities. I traveled all night long on mule back. The river was high and it was slow going. But I was independent. I was going to do what I wanted. I was thinking about getting in other things, contraband, illegal activities. That's how I felt at the time. I bought sixteen goats, a cradle for the baby, blankets, and a cot with the profit.

"When Samuel returned to Piaxtla he always heard immediately about what I had done wrong during his absence. No one ever told him that I was a good person or that I had a good heart. He only heard about the bad things. By the time Samuel returned this time I had already made another trip to the Sierras. Norma told me that Samuel was looking for me. I immediately knew what this was about. He lived in the clinic, up in the loft. I called up, and he said, "come on up". "I heard that you were looking for me," I said. "I already know why. To give me shit for selling beer. Look, I did it from necessity. I'll return the forty cases of beer I still have and I'll go back to the clinic and be responsible this time. But I need your help, don Samuel, at least for this month." He agreed. So I brought back the beer, paid off the money I borrowed, and have never sold beer since.

"A few months later I asked Samuel if he would loan me some money, and he said angrily, "Aren't you satisfied with what you've already robbed." This made me angry. "What's with you?" I asked. "Last night you took money from the cash box," he said. In the consultation room there was a wooden box were we keep the clinic's ready cash. I figured out how to get it open with a pair of pliers and had taken money from the box several times in the past. Camilo often brought this up at meetings. None of the gringos

wanted anything to do with me, because I was labeled as the one who stole from the clinic. But since I had made my agreement with Samuel I hadn't stolen from the clinic.

"I've always told Samuel the truth. I trust him. I know that he'll try to understand why I did what I did, or believe me if in fact I didn't do what I'm accused of. So I said, "Yes, I've taken money from the box. I took about 500 pesos. I was broke. But that was before I promised you I wouldn't do this shit anymore. I swear to you that I haven't taken a cent since then. The one who told you about this is the one who took it." Camilo had the keys to the box. He knew all about my trick with the pliers. This time he took the money and blamed it on me

"I began to get more deeply involved in the consultations at the clinic. I learned to treat most of the problems people came in with. Its a wonderful feeling to be able to alleviate someone's pain, or lower the temperature of a child who is burning up with fever, and know that the mother has full confidence in you. Or someone comes in with a toothache and I pull the tooth or give them something for the pain. I also helped teach the health worker trainings. At the end of one of these courses we performed a sociodrama for the pueblo. It was about the new corn bank. We explained how it would work and why we had created it.

"This was when there were powerful men in the pueblo, who manipulated the poor, and owned the majority of the land. They planted the least and received the major part of the harvest. They loaned corn to the poor at the beginning of the planting season when everyone was in short supply. After the harvest the campesinos had to pay back double or triple what they borrowed. The corn bank loaned corn at low rates of interest and provided an alternative to the landlords.

"The day after we did this sociodrama, Gabriel Manjarrez, in whose house I was living, ordered me to get out. He was a landowner and was furious that we had criticized the practice of charging two liters interest for every liter of corn borrowed. He told me he needed the house. I said fine. The house was his. But I had two children by that time and nowhere to go. I asked him to give me a month and he agreed. Samuel loaned me the money to build a small house. It had no doors, no kitchen, no porch, no floors, just two rooms with corrugated tin on top. At night we'd put a few boards in the doorway.

"About that time we also organized campaigns to put pressure on the authorities to close the cantinas. Not just for the violence, but also because of the family money the men spent there. We gathered signatures, held meetings, and met with the municipal president. They arrested Miguel Angel and we even made it into the newspaper a couple of times. After a couple of more killings in the cantinas the government finally shut them down. They were almost always owned by rich people in San Ignacio with contacts in the municipal government. But there were also people here who made money from the cantinas and these people were furious with us. Zenón, the síndico*, once beat me with a pistol. It was late at night and he was drunk. He knocked me to the ground and someone said, "lets kill him." But that's as far as it went. After that we also got the beer dispensary closed, and Zenón went after me again. He threw a six pack at me. One of the cans broke off and smacked me in the knee. He later apologized, but I knew they were keeping an eye on me. It wouldn't be difficult to close the new beer dispensary. But I think the new Municipal President will close it down. And this way you don't have any of the hassles.

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* The government representative in the village.

"I started attending meetings of the ejido. People were upset because one landowner had taken the land of twelve men. "This isn't right," I thought, "but what can we do?" I thought about this a lot and decided that we needed to know the agrarian laws so that we could defend ourselves.

"I bought ten copies of the agrarian reform laws and started meeting secretly with my father-in-law and a group of older campesinos. We studied the codes and who had the rights to the ejido land. I learned a lot from the conferences we had at the clinic. People from Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras often attended. They were bright and were an important influence on me. They weren't just talk, but struggled sincerely. I began to read a little. My compadre Valentín returned to Piaxtla. He had been in the United States. He had stopped drinking. We became friends and I invited him to join our group.

"When I first came to Piaxtla, I lived with one of the caciques, Then when I got involved in the corn bank, the cantina campaigns, and especially the land struggle these people criticized me. "This is how you repay favors," they asked. "We fed you when you were sick and could hardly move. And now you're against us. What have we done to you?" They just didn't get it. One loses his friends, he loses a lot of things, sometimes even his family. But time has passed and now they all talk to me and we're friends again.

"Project Quilá started from the roots of Project Rio Verde. This is how the other organizations started, like the Campesino Union. You can't separate these groups, though they are autonomous. They all grew out of this house here. This is where we took the first steps. We were sending a lot of disabled children up to the United States to the Shriner's Hospital there. Samuel suggested that we learn to treat some of these problems here. We just

called it the rehab program. We didn't have a name for it yet. Later we called it Project Quilá.

"We didn't know how it would function or how people would respond, but the principal idea was to help disabled people to learn to become more self-reliant and to learn and demand their rights. So that society would adapt, and that they would continue on with the course of their lives, as full citizens. Disabled people here in Mexico are treated like they are useless. As if they can't work or have a family. Like lumps. And the idea we had was different.

"We talked about the program for about a year. The objectives, what we wanted from the project, the needs. Samuel started writing proposals. We talked with the pueblo about the idea, what we wanted to do, to see if they agreed to the starting of a rehabilitation project. I really liked the idea. I would learn about rehabilitation and would work in a group with other disabled people, people with problems like mine. So, I entered and stayed eight years with the project. I learned how to do orthopedic evaluations, physical therapy, repair braces and wheelchairs, because I spent all day long, every day doing this. When I began with Quilá, I wasn't able to leave Piaxtla, so I worked in both projects. This was in 1980.

"At that time Miguel Angel's wife started working at the clinic. She was a doctor. She handled all the medicine. She bought it without consulting us. She worked alone. We had various problems and disagreements with her. The question was whether this was a program of the neighbors or of the doctors. The other health workers and I went out and got drunk when we should have been working. We started losing the confidence of the people. I thought about quitting. I didn't want to hassle with her anymore. She started having problems with Miguel Angel and finally left for Culiacán.

"Samuel was the driving force behind the program. He's always thinking about things, coming up with ideas, like how to teach a class imaginatively using what materials we have, so that people could learn easily. After Samuel left the clinic to start Quilá there was no significant development. We continued working, but we didn't progress much further.

"Those of us that worked here, we never had the consciousness, that this is a health program that's to serve the people without condition. We were always thinking about the dollar sign. We always expected that we should be paid to work. We never understood well that one has to serve the people just to serve. One needs money, but not to make oneself rich. The problem is that we have to live. On one hand, one had to be realistic, because we have to eat, we have families, and have to find a way to live.

"A lot of the workers, perhaps, didn't think about this. And for that reason had to leave. Maybe they have their own ideas, maybe they are helping the people in other ways, I hope. But outside of the clinic.

Samuel became dedicated to Project Quilá. To making Quilá a success. It's hard to work in two programs at once. Or at least this is the experience I had. At that time there was Chuy and Alejandro in dentistry. The Miguels were studying medicine and Camilo was up in Durango. The government put in their clinic in 78 or 79, I believe. They give everything away free, medicines, injections, everything. The first few years our clinic remained strong. But with Samuel's absence, the new government clinic, and all our internal bickering, our clinic began to fall apart. Miguel Angel now works in a private medical center in Culiacán Miguel Angel Manjarrez is working in a hospital in the United States. Camilo is with Quilá, Chuy and Alejandro now treat dental patients out of their homes and Valentín works for the government. But after twenty-one years I'm still here in this house, this

clinic. It feels like my own, not in the sense that I own it, but in the sense that I found a home here. *Yo voy a seguir, aunque ya sea solo."*[*]

Jenaro looked at his watch and said he was still in the mood for some roasted liver. We walked back to Lucila's. Chema was in the back yard stirring a large metal vat with a wooden paddle. The fat had mostly melted into a dark clear liquid. Eligio was cutting the pork rind into small pieces to make *chicharones*. The men were drinking and there were several empty beer cans on the ground. Chema dipped a pot into the vat and then covered it with a pan, leaving a small opening for the lard to slowly drain into a bucket. He dumped the unmelted chunks of fat that remained into the bubbling vat.

As the day wore on children started showing up to order lard or pork rind for their parents. Norma wanted a kilo of lard. Elena and Petra wanted a kilo of *chicharones* each. The smallest of the children would wait patiently until one of the women noticed them and asked if they had come for *chicharones*. By mid afternoon the beer was all gone. The men were talking by the Tabashin tree, from which hung two slabs of meat and the pig's head.

The children were sitting on a large cot playing *la loteria*.[*] Maria called the cards in a steady monotone. The others watched cards with intense concentration. *"La muerte, la dama, el negrito..."* [*] Maria kept an eye on her little sister's card to make sure she was keeping up. *"La luna, la bandera, el*

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[*] I'll keep on with the work, though it be alone.

[*] La loteria is a game played with tarot-like cards. Each player begins by putting his ante into the middle of the table. The dealer tosses the cards down, one at a time, calling out the name of a card. Some of the older people in Piaxtla add rhymed descriptions after the card's name. La Loteria is similar to Bingo in that each player has a cardboard card divided into sixteen small squares. Each square contains a small replica of one of the playing cards in the deck. A handful of beans is often placed on the table by each player. If a card tossed down from the deck matches one of the squares on a players card, he or she marks it with a bean. The first player to fill a row, or fill their card, depending on the chosen rules, wins.

[*] "Death, the lady, the black man..."

diablo," Maria chanted in a steady clipped cadence. Four sets of hands moved to her rhythm as they covered the corresponding boxes on their cards with bottle caps and small pebbles. One of the boys shouted "bueno con la rana" and pointed to his card in which all of the boxes had been covered with rusty bottle caps. Maria checked his card carefully, and said, *"pinche moro,* the rooster didn't come up!" The boy claimed it had and the game degenerated into a shouting match. Finally Maria gathered the cards and started a new game. *"el corazon, el soldado, la palma..."*

Chema was drunk, which was a rare occurrence. He sat quietly in the afternoon sun with his eyes closed. Norma ran her fingers methodically through his hair looking for lice. Behind them the pig's head hung by its ear from a branch of the guamuchile tree. Its brown snout looked very much like it did the day before when it rooted through the kitchen garbage by its kidney-shaped mud pool.

The Accident
Chapter Three

Quilá participants with spinal cord injuries generally became disabled later in their lives. In their personal accounts they often focused on the initial months of crisis. As their families searched for a "cure", they embarked upon an "medical pilgrimage," selling land and livestock and falling in debt to pay for unproductive operations recommended by surgeons in the major cities. The scars on their bodies map out their experiences with the medical establishment. Many spent months or years in self imposed isolation and developed a near complete dependence on family members for their daily needs. Both the disabled person and the family were convinced of the disabled person's inability to care for themselves and the impossibility of pursuing a "normal" life of work, marriage, and family. The accounts in this chapter present a variety of individual experiences of spinal cord injury and focus, in part, on what Mandelbaum (1973) has called "turnings," those critical junctures at which an individual "takes on a new set of roles, enters into fresh relations with a new set of people, and acquires a new self-conception." Junctures marked by injury and loss, the hospital and surgery, care at home and increasing despair arose frequently in these interviews.

Crows descended on the ciruela tree. They cawed down, sullen and aggressive, black against the barren branches. Across the street, in front of the church, children gathered around an ice cream truck. It was a worn Chevrolet pick-up filled with cardboard tubs of ice cream. Every few minutes a children's song played on the truck's loud speaker.

Doña Petra stood under the arched church doorway looking natty in her Sunday best. Everywhere there were little girls in white dresses and boys in clean t-shirts and stiff new blue jeans. Doña Petra turned to go in. As she passed through the thick adobe doorway she entered a room of great simplicity and beauty. Hand hewn beams, bowed with age, supported the red tile ceiling high above. Pictures of the twelve stations of the cross hung on the walls. The Franciscans built the sanctuary three hundred years earlier over a Mayo cemetery.

Chrysanthemums filled the open space directly in front of the altar. Above hung an ivory crucifix, flanked by the Virgin of Guadalupe and Saint John. A painted clay figure of Saint Jerónimo stood at the top of the altar. From down below, where one can't see his frail white face and sad little whiskers, he appeared to project a vitality and benevolent warmth. The priest stood to one side of the altar, in black slacks and an undershirt, as he put on his robes. The undershirt stretched at the waist, emphasizing the bulge of his belly. Perspiration had glued his thinning hair to his scalp.

He visited Piaxtla no more than a few times a year. This morning's mass was to celebrate two different Saint's days, though it fell on neither. San Javier's day was last May 22nd. It was traditionally the time at which the priest blessed the farmer's seed. *El dia de San Juan* * would come in a few days on June 24th. Coming at the summer solstice and the beginning of *las aguas**, the mass for San Juan included a prayer for the rain on which Piaxtla's agriculture depended. After the rains arrived and the soil was well soaked and softened the planting of the cornfields would begin. Several people waited in line to place bags of seed, jars of water, and small portraits of the Virgin of Guadalupe on a table by the altar. After the mass the seed would be

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* San Juan's Day

taken home and mixed into the seed bags before planting. The water would serve many purposes including the tracing of the cross on people's front doors before the arrival of a heavy storm.

A few men stood in the back of the church fanning themselves with their hats. Rosa and Alicia entered, Rosa pushing Alicia's wheelchair down the wide isle. The priest turned on an electric fan and directed it towards the pulpit. His white robes flapped in the breeze as he gave the mass. Every few minutes the ice cream jingle penetrated from the outside.

After the mass the priest arranged the children for baptism. When he called the first group, a young couple stepped forward, along with the *compadres,* or godparents. The priest explained the meaning of the sacrament and the duties of *compadrazco.* He also talked of the bonds being formed between the families, and between the families and the church. The *compadre,* a wiry man wearing black Levis 501s and a dark paisley shirt, took the baby and held it by near edge of the baptismal font. The priest sprinkled the baby's cheeks with water. A young cousin from Los Angeles came forward to take a photograph. She had on black leather pants with rawhide lacing that criss-crossed down the side of her left leg. As she crouched to take the picture, the lacing exposed a strip of flesh. The priest christened the child Marta Elena Alvarez, blessed her, and welcomed her into the church.

Some in Piaxtla have an understanding of the sacrament that varies from the explanation given by the priest. They say that at birth an infant has a tail, the umbilical cord. To have a tail is to be associated with animals, the devil, the non-human. Baptism cuts this tail. Until the child is baptized it is not a true member of the community. If it dies without being baptized it is caught in a dilemma. It can't go to heaven because it hasn't been christened, and it can't go to hell because it hasn't sinned. The child enters a twilight world

where it ages, but keeps a child's physique. Such children are called *duendes*. Having the attributes of both child and adult they grow old and mischievous and live in abandoned houses. In the late hours of the night they can sometimes be found gathered around flat rocks drinking tequila and playing cards.

After the baptism I walked over to Elena's to see about setting up an interview the next day. She was watching television with several people from the project. After arranging the interview I asked her if it was true that Miguel, the project driver, had gotten drunk the day before and had not made it into Mazatlán to pick up the materials for the brace-making course. She told me to shut up and watch the television. It was Sunday, her day off, and she didn't want talk about the project.

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By the next morning Piaxtla had been without water for two days. Kiko Manjarrez left for Mazatlán to visit his sister and forgot to arrange for someone to turn the pump off when it wasn't in use. The pump had burnt out. In the morning I asked Lucila if there was any news about it. "Kiko returned last night," she said, "but he won't let anyone near it." Kiko's cousin, a municipal official in San Ignacio, had placed him in charge of the village water system. A large cyclone fence topped with barbed wire had been erected around the pump. Kiko had the only keys to the gate. Twice a day, morning and late afternoon, Kiko would turn on the pump and water would flow through Piaxtla. Now he refused to let anyone into the compound to look at the pump. He insisted that they wait for the technicians to arrive from San Ignacio. Jenaro came in as Lucila and I were talking about Kiko.

"No tardan los aguas*," he said. He told me that the grasses had long dried up and that he was going into debt buying hay for his cattle.

I went out back to use the toilet but it was stopped up, and despite that fact had apparently been used a number of times by the children. There was huge pile of dirty laundry by the wash area. I went back to the kitchen and told Lucila about the toilet. "You can't do anything without water," she said.

I went to the project to do the interview with Elena. She was sitting on the porch outside the consultation room. Out under the midday sun Pedro slowly made his way across the yard. As he crossed the yard that morning he came up to Yoali and Andrés under the mango trees. They were eating from a small pile of mangos that Andrés had just picked. When they saw Pedro they started to laugh. He had pulled his black t-shirt off over his shoulders and up to his forehead. It fell around the back of his head like a woman's shawl. Yoali called out "Viejita.* " "Morenita,*" replied Pedro giggling. "Viejita," said Yoali. "Morenita," said Pedro. This went back and forth until Valdo, one of the boys from the village who hung out with Samuel, came over and started clicking his tongue. He knew that this would infuriate Pedro and he got the reaction he sought. Pedro went into a rage and started spitting in Valdo's direction and let out with a stream of invectives. "Yeah, enough," said Andrés, and told Valdo to leave the boy alone.

Elena and I went into the consultation room. She shut the door and sat by the archives. The room was cool and dim, cave-like in the mid-day heat. This was Elena's domain. Dust covered everything and the files were a tangled thatch of paper. The plywood book shelves, examination table, and

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* "It won't be long until las aguas." Las aguas are the summer rains on which the yearly corn crop is dependent."

* "Little old lady."

* "Brown skinned woman." Pedro was dark-skinned and of indigenous ancestry. It is likely that he had been called this himself by other children.

rusty scale gave the room an air of simple respectability. "So my story?" Elena asked. She shook her head and smiled. Elena treated these interviews as a chore, though once she started talking she would turn inward and thoughtful.

Our eyes met briefly. She looked away and said, "We were coming back to Mexico to get married. Well, actually, we got married a few days earlier in the United States and were returning to Mexico for the church wedding and fiesta. We had been driving for a day and Juan was tired. It was getting dark and I noticed that there was something wrong with the lights. "Its your nerves," he said. "Hell if it is," I told him. He finally pulled over and we looked at the lights. The left one was out. "Only men know about cars!" I told him. "That's right," he said. We got the light fixed at a roadside shop. That was about four in the morning. I offered to help drive, but he said no, he didn't trust my driving. He took some pills and we continued on for another couple of hours. Juan fell asleep at the wheel outside Los Mochis. The car went off the road and into a ravine below. It was a flat, open stretch of road. There wasn't even a curve, nothing, nothing.

"They took me from one hospital to another, because none wanted to serve us. Finally a private clinic admitted me. I woke up on a gurney. I heard my sister-in-law say. "You'll be all right. We're taking you for x-rays." I felt stiff and wasn't able to move. Entering the x-ray room was like entering a dream. It was already evening and the shift was about to change. "What's wrong with this one?" asked the x-ray nurse. The nurse who brought me in said, "she needs a spinal cord x-ray." The x-ray nurse got angry and said, "Why bother, whatever we do she'll end up in a wheelchair. " I didn't understand. A little later I tried to move and couldn't. Then it hit me that maybe she was right. My sister-in-law was holding me at that moment and

felt me tense up. I began to scream. The nurse moved me under the x-ray machine and my sister-in-law lost her temper. "Why did you say that to her!" she said. "Who are you to give a diagnosis?" The nurse said her shift was over and that this wasn't her responsibility.

"The x-rays showed a fracture in my spinal column. They operated and tied together the vertebra. My family took me to a hospital in Guadalajara to continue with the treatment. In Guadalajara a specialist told me that it might be as much as a year before I would walk again. I was very young and a year then seemed like fifty years now. I'd have to postpone my wedding. I had everything arranged. I wondered what I could do for a year unable to move. I still hadn't realized the full state of my body and the problem of going to the toilet when you can't feel below the waist. They gave me this hope that in a year I would walk, and I accepted it, not happily, but I had the support of my family and, I thought, the person I had married. And what else could I do.

"A nurse came into my room and said that she wanted me to move from the bed to the gurney. I didn't understand why, because I wasn't yet scheduled to leave. I asked her where she was taking me. She said, "you're going home. Do you want to spend the rest of your life in the hospital?" "What?" I asked. She thought for a moment, and went out without answering me. "This one's the paraplegic, right?" I heard her ask. I started crying. My mother came in, and asked me what had happened. I was hysterical and couldn't answer. This was the second time that I had heard the same thing. Both times it was just suddenly dropped on me. But the doctors kept telling differently. I now demanded that they tell me the truth. The nurse came in and said, "We're sorry! Its that there's another girl that's going to leave, and yes, she won't be able to walk. But you'll be fine." I wanted to walk again so bad that I let them convince me and finally had no doubts that this problem would pass.

Elena shifted in her wheelchair. She was a big woman. "They took me to my husband's home in Michoacán. I was supposed to live there after we married, but now they were taking me like this, to recuperate until I could walk again. They said that I needed to rest for two months to let the bones knit from the operation.

"Juan's family found a doctor in Guadalajara who wanted to operate on me. He had seen the tests and doctors reports and said that with two operations I would walk again. They asked me if I wanted to risk the surgery, and I said yes. My mother was in Tijuana. They wanted to tell her, but I said no. I only told my grandmother.

"So they took me to Guadalajara and on the tenth of March they operated. My grandmother was the only one there. She had always supported me. She has always been with me. "Elena, shouldn't we tell your mother?" she pleaded. The doctors were confident that I would make it through, but they did say there was a risk of dying on the operating table. I remember my grandmother's face, looking at me, as they took me into the operating room. She blessed me and wished me luck. Once inside they covered my mouth with a mask, for the anesthesia , and told me to breath deeply. I inhaled as deeply as I could, to insure the success of the operation. I did this three times and was out.

"My heart stopped during the operation. The surgeon went out and told my grandmother that I had died. Back in the operating room the anesthesiologist kept struggling with my heart. They called the surgeon back in again. I had revived. So he did little bit of bone grafting, stabilized the spinal cord a little, and closed me up.

"By the end of the month the surgeon wanted to operate again. I said yes. But my mother had returned. "How can it be that easy," she said, "just like

that you'll walk again?" They had said that after the first operation I would be able to move my legs. But I had shown no improvement. I hadn't gained any sensation in my legs, nor could I move them. Just the opposite. I vomited for weeks after the operation from the anesthesia. Every time I coughed it felt like my chest was opening up.

"My mother spoke with other doctors, who told her that only if she wanted me to die, should I have another operation. My heart wouldn't take another operation. Especially two weeks after the first one. So, she said no more operations. She finally convinced me that with time I would walk again. All the doctors had told me so. She spoke about getting a wheelchair, but I wouldn't hear anything of it. It wasn't like I had a disease from another world. Everyone said this would pass. So I refused the wheelchair and said that we should use the money to buy things for the house after the wedding.

"My husband left for the United States and my mother took me home to Sinaloa to recuperate. I spent most of the time sitting up in an old hospital bed. A red spot developed up on my butt. It was a pressure sore. I had a fever and I felt awful. My family took me to a doctor in Mazatlán. I began to despair. Eight months had now passed and I seemed to be the same, even worse, because now I had this pressure sore and other complications that I didn't understand. In the hospital they had said that I had to change my position, but they didn't say why, nor what could happen if I didn't. I became deeply depressed. I now felt that yes, I was an invalid, a person that could do nothing for herself.

"I was always a hard working person. I had gone to the United States and picked grapes and oranges in the San Joaquin Valley and packed roses outside of Salinas. Now I was dependent on my family for everything. I needed their

help even to go to the toilet. This dependence was what made me feel the worst.

"A year after the accident a letter arrived for me. It contained annulment papers and a note from a lawyer asking that I sign them. Juan was claiming that I had refused to return with him to the United States and that I no longer wanted to live with him. He wanted an annulment so that he could continue on with his life. Nothing was said about the accident or that I was disabled. I was so depressed that none of this mattered. But my mother told me not to sign. She said she would not let him make a fool of me so easily. She believed that he was drugged that night and that the accident was his fault. When the police questioned me about the accident I told them nothing. So my mother got really angry. She said, "Don't be a fool. Don't sign the papers!" She said she would fight the annulment in court. At that point it made no difference to me. So I did what she said and didn't sign the papers.

"I was heartbroken. I thought there would never again be anyone who would want me. I would never again have a boyfriend, much less get married and have a child. But these were secondary problems. More important, I thought that I would never work again or be independent. I believed that for my entire life I would need my mother or a nurse to help me. That someone would have to do all the things for me that one has to do. I would spend all my life as if I were in a hospital.

"When the doctor came to put in the catheter, I asked him to teach me, and he more or less told me how to do it. He didn't teach me well, for I tried to put it in by simply putting it up my vagina and of course no urine came out. But with time I began to learn and began to do it alone. I wanted to learn to take care of myself, but this was the only thing he taught me. They were still telling me that with time I would walk again. At one clinic a doctor told

me that when I least expected it I would stand up and walk. I kept trying to stand up, but each time I fell to the floor. I thought that if I could only stand I would be able to walk.

"I spent the next two years secluded in a room into which almost no light entered. I grew pale, almost yellow, and cried day and night. My family pleaded with me to come out, even if just to the backyard. They said no one would see me, and I could get some sun. Romantic novels were my only consolation. Especially those with small print and loads of details. I immersed myself in these novels. I would let no one talk to me so that I could enter the lives of the characters and leave my own. I had piles of these books around my bed. This was all I did for two years.

"My mother sent children to visit me, to distract me. I never treated them badly, but I did tell them to leave. I told them I was busy, or that I had to do something, but I was never rude to them. However, if an adult visited me I would brush them off or say, "here come the busybodies to see what they can see." I was really rude. People from different religions also came but I paid no attention to them. Sometimes I was so depressed that I didn't eat. My family knew which foods I liked and made them for me. I would leave the food untouched or throw the plates onto the floor . They felt really bad, but were patient and caring.

"Then they changed their tactics. Instead of pleading with me to do things, they began giving me orders. One afternoon my brother Diego carried me to the bathroom so that I could bathe myself. As usual, he put me on the edge of a cot and brought me some soap, shampoo, and a bucket of water. When I finished bathing I called for him and said, 'Diego, help me, take me back to bed.' He picked me up, but instead of taking me back to my room he carried me in his arms out towards the backyard. He had set up a chair there

so that I could sit and get a little air. I told him again to take me back to my room, but he ignored me and tried to put me down on the chair. I slugged him as hard as I could and became hysterical. I then grabbed his arm and bit him. My mouth filled with blood. He put me down on the chair and went into the house to treat the wound. We were covered with blood and looked like two dogs after a fight.

"My mother was furious. "Your brother loves you, helps you, and you go and do this," she said. "Then he shouldn't help me," I cried, "and if you don't carry me back to bed I'll throw myself on the ground." She became hard and said, "So do it! Your the one who's going to feel it." I cried and cried like a crazy woman. Neighbors came to the house to see what had happened. 'What happened to Elena? What did you do to her?' they asked my mother. Finally, my brother came out, his shoulder now bandaged, and took me in his arms, and said, "All right, if you want to stay locked in your room, stay there. I won't try to take you out here again. He laid me on the bed and walked out.

"After that they never tried to make me go out. But I came to see how much I was hurting my family and became more accepting. We began to communicate better. My brother even started kidding me, and would point to his arm and ask if I was hungry and in the mood for a little more flesh. About that time I heard about Project Quilá from a friend. She said that spinal cord specialists often visited there. My spirits began to rise. Finally there was going to be someone who could help me walk.

Elena paused for a minute and then nodded. I turned off the tape recorder. She smiled and said that her throat was dry from all that talking and that she sure could use a coke. I went up to the CONASUPO to buy two cokes. As Maggie was making change a pick-up drove by pulling a dead cow. The

cow's mouth was open and its head bounced each time it hit a rock in the road. Mario was sitting outside the store.

"What happened," I asked him.

"It starved to death."

"Have there been others?"

"This is the first one."

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Enrique and I sat on the patio outside the consultorio. From that vantage point one could look out over the project. Elena often stationed herself there, yelling out orders across the yard. Enrique tilted his wheelchair back against the adobe wall. He had on worn Levis, a red Texco baseball cap, and a tight white T-shirt that displayed his shoulders and chest to good advantage. Behind him, on the adobe wall, hung AIDS awareness posters from Nicaragua. On the other wall was a large sketch of a one-legged boy somersaulting down from a set of high bars. Its caption read, "Notice my abilities, not my defects."

I had sat with Enrique on that patio several times before, usually to speak with him about the need to put aside his contempt for the project staff and get on with his apprenticeship in the wheelchair shop. I argued that instead of openly smoking marijuana, and thus getting himself thrown out of the project, he ought to take advantage of the training opportunities at Quilá. I might as well have been trying to sell him copies of Watchtower magazine.

Enrique seemed to enjoy these interviews. It was a chance for <u>him</u> to talk. This time I asked him to tell me about his accident, hospitalization, and arrival in Piaxtla. "I wasn't the oldest," he began. "I have an older brother, but my father had more confidence in me. We were eleven with my mother.

My father left often for Culiacán or across the border and left me responsible for the family. I told my brothers, 'You know what? We're going to do this, this, and this,' and they did it. I was responsible for everything. If we lacked food, I was the one who got it. If someone was sick, I was the one who took them to the doctor. If there was no money, I somehow got it or borrowed it. Everything that happened was my responsibility. I did what I could, and we got by.

"I was seventeen at the time. My father was away in the U.S. and my mother was sick. We took her to the doctor's but she didn't get better. She said she was better, but no, we finally had to hospitalize her. The doctors told us that she needed an operation, but that they didn't know whether or not she would survive it. She had been a big healthy woman, but this disease had consumed her, and now she was nothing but skin and bones.

"They operated and she seemed a little better, so I decided to go to Badiraguato to attend a wedding. As the evening wore on I began looking for a ride back but couldn't find one. So I stayed at the party and danced. My friends got into some problems with some of the guys there. We finally decided to go home and get some sleep.

"As we got into the pick-up I saw the guys who were having problems with my friends. They were staring at us from the other side of the street. They starting shooting as we crossed the intersection. I was in the back and saw the gunfire. The guy who was sitting in the front seat by the door jumped out and fell rolling. The car was moving and someone yelled, 'we got one.' The driver stomped on the gas and we got the hell out of there. The road was awful, full of rocks, and we kept loosing our traction. I got hit. I didn't know what to do. Even had I known what to do I couldn't have done it.

"Down the road the driver pulled over. Those who had been in the back with me got out. They didn't know that their brother, who had been sitting in front next to the driver, was dead. I was left in the back, because, well, I was unable to get down. He drove a little further on, and got out, and pulled the body onto the ground. I told him I was really screwed up and asked him to leave me where I could get some help. But a few kilometers down the road he stopped again and lowered me off the pick-up. He left me lying there on the highway.

"I dragged myself to the side of the road. Life was draining from my body and I thought that I was dying. I lost the ability to move. Then the lower half of my body went dead. I felt like vomiting, but couldn't. When I spit, I spit out pure blood. My friends came running by, and I yelled out to them, and at the people in the houses by the road. But no one stopped or came out, because they were afraid. They thought that maybe I had a gun. It was really cold, there was a frost that night. I became rigid, contracted, and curled up shivering.

"In the morning a friend who was coming home from another party saw me there. 'What happened to you?' he asked. He took me to his house and he and his woman laid me down on their bed. I had lost all strength from my waist down. When they carried me it felt like they were pulling my arms out of their sockets. I became dizzy, and my vision clouded. But my mind was clear, I didn't miss a thing. They went to tell my family.

"The police came and questioned me. They put me in an ambulance and took me to Culiacán and left me at the hospital there. An uncle came, but when they spoke to him he said he wasn't carrying any money and even tried to deny that he was related to me. The old man actually denied that we were related.

"The doctors nearly killed me cleaning out the coagulated blood. Then they put in a catheter and laid me out in the bed. Apart from that they did nothing. In fact, they left a heater on near my bed and burnt me down one side. My father arrived a couple hours later. I told him to get me the hell out of there. 'They aren't doing anything for me here,' I said. I told him to talk with the doctor at the clinic where they operated on my old lady.

"He wasn't really excited about this. We still owed the doctor money. My aunt had to leave the deed to her house while we got the money together. But I told my father to talk to him and see if he'd treat me. The doctor agreed. They treated me in his clinic for seven days. But now in addition to my mother's bill, we owed him for mine. I asked the doctor about my chances of walking. 'With time,' he said.

"So I left for my house. The blisters from the heater became infected and I developed pressure sores, one right in my asshole. I was being consumed from the bottom. A friend of mine had heard of the project here in Piaxtla. I'd never been to these parts. I only knew San Ignacio from the maps, those maps that they had at school, with all the states and municipal capitals.

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Isabel ran the toy shop. She was talented, hard working, and deserving of praise. I was fond of Isabel and trusted her. Other's didn't. "You don't know her," they would say. She was on the social margins of Quilá. She had been tangentially involved in the night of torture, an incident which I had not learned of at the time. For many, that incident still stained her reputation. I once asked Samuel if people's doubts about Isabel were at all grounded. He said yes, "the people here can change with the situation." So, depending on who you talked with, Isabel was shrewd, guileless, or both.

She often complained that the toy shop rarely got the supplies it needed. She was outside the circle of power. Despite these obstacles the toy shop prospered under her supervision,. The quality was up and production had increased several fold. Alicia and several of the village children worked under her supervision. Isabel often added thoughtful touches to their work. She painted details on the sides of charm boxes and phrases of encouragement on the walkers made for the children who came to the project.

Isabel looked good as she rolled up to the shop in her chrome hospital wheelchair. She had a handsome no-nonsense face. We talked for awhile. I then placed the tape recorder on the workbench on a bed of wood shavings. She nodded, I turned it on, and we began.

"I was fifteen and spent most of my time doing housework," she said. "I was the only girl in a family of boys, and had to adapt myself to the situation. My father left us when I was young. We lived in a house made of wood and sheets of corrugated tin that my mother and I had built. My mother went out each morning to the estuary to fish. When she returned I had to have the house clean and the food ready. When she was sick, I went out to the estuary for her.

"I dedicated Saturdays and Sundays to doing the wash. There was no running water where we lived so I'd pack the week's clothes into the canoe and go to a rancho across the estuary. We used to wash there by the corral. I finished late that day, and was in a hurry. I put everything in a metal tub. The clothes were wet and the tub was heavy. I needed the help of two women to get it up it on my head. Down the hill a large bull was grazing outside the corral. He turned towards me. This startled me and I slipped.

When I got up I could no longer lift the tub I had this pain here in the back of my neck.

"My mother stopped working and took me to one *curandero* a after another. They massaged me and gave me herbs. Some said that the problem was witchcraft. Others said that it was arthritis, or that my spinal fluid was spilling. One woman told my mother to rub my back with vaporub, place a cloth over it, and put a hot iron on top of the cloth. When she did this the iron pressed against the bone and I fainted from the pain.

"I had to keep on working. But I was no longer the same. As soon as I began to wash, pins and needles started in my hands and feet, and the pain increased. Sometimes I cried in pain while doing the wash. The neighbors said, "Look, Doña Matilde, if you don't do something about your daughter soon, she'll end up in a wheelchair." But how? We were really poor. My mother saw me working just as I had before. I did say that I was in a lot of pain, but she didn't know what to do. We had no money. She had already sold the dresser and the few things of value that we had. After that she had just given up.

"I became feverish and my whole body felt heavy. A little bump developed on the back of my neck. I went to the toilet and unbuttoned my pants. But I could no longer feel my stomach. I couldn't get up. I couldn't do anything. That evening my aunt rubbed me all over with green alcohol, in which marijuana had been soaked. Then she covered me with a blanket. I began to sweat and sweat. Finally, the fever broke and I felt better. I stood up as if nothing had happened. I went to the toilet and then laid down again. I was weak but content because I could walk. That was the last time I did so. Later that night my feet became heavy again. I could no longer move them. My mother had to carry me in her arms like a little girl. Each morning my

brother carried me out back, so I could lie there under the fig tree. Once his arm pressed against the bump on the back of my neck and I passed out from the pain. The bump grew and I lost sensation in my hands, it was like they were asleep.

" A neighbor spoke to a doctor about me. She said that I just laid there, stretched out on a board under the tree. They came to the house. He brought his medical bag and everything and examined me. He told my mother that I was in really bad shape. He wanted to take me to have some tests done. He knew we had no money, and told her that it would cost her nothing. He called an ambulance and they took me to Tepic. After seeing the x-rays the doctor told my mother that they had to take me to Guadalajara for emergency treatment. The bump on the back of my neck was going to burst if they didn't operate. If it burst I would have no hope of walking again. My mother said that we, well, didn't have the money to pay for this. The doctor said it would cost us almost nothing, and that he would help, that he would raise the money to help us.

"In Guadalajara the surgeons told us that they were going to put in a graft. They had never done an operation this delicate before. They said they didn't know if I would survive the operation or die on the operating table. My mother cried and then agreed to the operation. She had already lost hope. But the operation was a success. A lot of doctors and medical students participated and they were very happy. They told my mother that I would walk perfectly, but that I needed physical therapy first.

"I began to feel warmth in my hands. They said that my blood was circulating better in my hands and feet. With therapy I was able to move my fingers and toes. And then my hands were fine. But I was only able to endure the therapy for a month. One of the other patients told me that the

meat we were eating was cut from the corpses down in the morgue. I left my tray untouched and I stopped eating. It was nonsense, but I believed it. I became anemic and fainted every time they sat me up.

"Finally, my mother said "no more!" She demanded that they discharge me. The doctors didn't want me to leave, but my mother took me by force. We went back to the ranchito where we lived. My mother bathed me, fed me, and fixed me up. But only that. She couldn't continue the therapy. She went to work and left me each day with someone who took care of me. I was really thin, only skin and bones. I looked like a skeleton. I did nothing but lay there on the cot. Everyone who saw me felt sorry for me. People gave me food and brought me things from their houses. One neighbor met an itinerant healer and sent him to our house. He came and we talked while he waited for my mother. He said that he was a doctor and had a clinic in Mexico City. There were many like him who traveled through the poor ranchos."

"He was a doctor?" I asked.

Her left leg began to tremble. Isabel suffered frequent spasms in her legs. I had once seen Claudio quiet her spasms by putting one hand on her ankle and pulling the ball of her foot up with the other. I did this and the trembling immediately stopped.

Isabel took no notice and continued with her story. "I don't think he was a doctor. He didn't look like a one to me. Anyway, he told my mother that if she gave him six hundred pesos he would make me walk again. This was a lot of money for her, but she said yes, that with all her heart she would try to get it.

"She worked hard and almost killed herself getting the money. The man gave me injections, waters to drink, and a bitter tasting green powder to put in my food. The powder made me hungry. I devoured everything, even

though it tasted awful. My mother brought cartons of apples. Even orange juice. Somehow she earned the money to buy these things. I began to feel stronger. I overcame the dizziness and learned to sit up on the edge of the bed.

"A relative gave me a second-hand wheelchair. I had never used one before. One morning I hooked the wheelchair with the sleeve of my brother's shirt and pulled it to me. I passed to the wheelchair using a stick to keep my balance. I went outside, and looking at the sun and the new leaves, I cried. I felt resurrected. When my mother came home and found me outside sitting like this, she cried too. So she was happy to pay the man his fifty pesos each time he came. He stopped giving me the powders and the injections, and told my mother to put me on a diet because I was getting fat. He then began to stand me up. With his help I walked a few steps. But the shrimp season soon ended. My mother continued going out day and night but didn't catch anything. No fish, no shrimp, nothing. She finally had to tell the man that she couldn't pay him anymore. He said that he would at least need his bus fare. When she could no longer afford even this he stopped coming. She struggled to continue the therapy, but I never improved from the point where he left me.

"Do you think the treatments were useful?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "I think that they helped a lot. He looked after me well. We left Pancho Villa and came here to Sinaloa, to Pozole, a ranchito on the coast near Mazatlán. I met a group of teenagers there. I guess it was my wheelchair that attracted their attention. Its legs were bound with wire and the front wheels were rotten from the sea salt. It was a wonder it worked at all. They told me of a program run by sick people like me. The teenagers borrowed a truck. The mother of a boy who had cerebral palsy, and the

mother of a girl who suffered from attacks, and I, pooled our money to pay for gasoline, and we went to Piaxtla.

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"El diablo," said Tony, as he snapped the playing card onto the floor.* A red devil with a lascivious grin looked up. "La Campana" and a church bell came down over the devil. "El Valiente." A cowboy tumbled down towards the floor. As the card hit the stack Camelita smacked her hand over it. Socorro arrived before Tony had time to react. She rolled down the wooden ramp, took a quick half spin, and backed in between the stove and the table. "Híjole," she sighed, her face flushed from the heat.

Camelita was now in the corner clutching the cards to her chest. Tony had been given the cards that morning. He was five, Camelita two. Tony watched her hands as she threw down the three cards one at a time and called "La Campana ..... El Valiente ... El diablo," with a staged delight.

Socorro turned to me and said we'd have to wait for Tony's mother to come before we could do the interview. She called for Tony, gave him three pesos, and sent him out for cokes. "Hand me glasses for Tony and Camelita," Socorro said to me. On the second row of the cabinet, next to the drinking glasses, were three yellow plastic mugs. Each had a name in red block letters and a color portrait. Socorro's photo emphasized the roundness of her cheeks and her hair which was the color of her copper bracelets.

Tony's mother arrived with a pile of tortillas wrapped in a white embroidered cloth. Socorro told her that we would be doing an interview for about an hour and the children went out with her, Camelita still grasping the cards tightly, and Tony still watching her like a hawk.

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* Tony had a deck of La Loteria cards and was simulating the action of the game.

Socorro came from a pueblo called Costa Rica, now grown into a small city, in the heart of the coastal valley of Culiacán. During the harvest season Costa Rica fills with migrant laborers who have come to pick its tomatoes, sugar cane, and strawberries. Her father owned a trucking company. They lived in a comfortable brick house near the plaza.

Socorro clipped on the microphone, smiled, and put her hands in her lap like a school girl. "In a word, we were happy," she said. "We weren't rich, but we never lacked anything. We took trips to Guadalajara and Mexico City.

"I was fifteen at the time. One Sunday morning I saw my sister and her children coming. I ran to hug my nephew. I slipped on the tile floor and fell. I got up immediately. My boyfriend's friends were in front of the house and I was embarrassed. I continued walking and felt nothing, no pain, nothing. I was fifteen and healthy. Two weeks later when I was at school I was hit by a pain, an intense pain on one side of my waist. So, I left for home about four in the afternoon. As I crossed the street I saw a car coming at me. I was carrying a typewriter in one arm and a bag full of books in the other. I lost strength in one leg. I made it across the street, but once at home the pain didn't go away. At about one in the morning I could no longer stand the pain and I cried out. My mother made me some tea. It didn't help so they took me to the emergency room.

"I was able to walk using the wall for support. I was wearing a really tight pair of jeans and a black leotard. I was able to slip off my clothes and put on a hospital gown. But my legs buckled under as I climbed onto the examination table. I could feel nothing below my waist.

"By that time I had gone hours without urinating. My stomach was swollen. The pain had gone away, but I couldn't urinate. The doctor said, "Chiquis," that's what people called me, "try again." I tried, but nothing. The

nurses turned on the taps so that I could hear the water running, but no, nothing. I couldn't urinate.

"This is when my torment began. The interns decided to use a catheter. I didn't know what a catheter was nor where they were going to put it. They tried for sometime but couldn't get it in. I cried through all this. I was ashamed. No one had ever seen me in that way. I was a virgin. Finally a specialist arrived and put in the catheter.

"The doctors did a lot of studies and put me in a room alone. Me alone, with one else. The other rooms had six patients each. They put an isolation sign on my door. The nurses wore blue hospital gowns and had masks over their mouths and noses. They looked like muzzled dogs. I asked about all this but no one wanted to talk about it. Finally, a nurse told me that I had a highly contagious disease. Like I was a vermin that would contaminate others. My x-rays showed no damage to my spinal cord, so they said I had, I can't remember the name exactly, but it was something like Chilamparet o Chiampared. They said I had a virus in my blood that little by little would consume me. But it wasn't true.

"Did you believe them at the time?" I asked.

"Never. They gave me a lot of different kinds of medicine and I ate a lot. I got fat and pimples broke out all over my face. My stomach began to swell and became enlarged as if I were six months pregnant. The problem was that I wasn't able to defecate. My mother questioned the doctor about this, which annoyed him. "Señora, which medical school did you graduate from?" he asked. She said that she hadn't studied medicine, but she knew damn well something was wrong with my stomach.

"My father overheard all of this. 'Look woman," he said, 'keep it up and they'll throw her out of the hospital!' 'Say what you like,' she said, 'but If she

doesn't go to the toilet soon her intestines will burst.' They tried enemas but I still wasn't able to go to the toilet. But they didn't give me any medicine, nothing. I didn't think about this, I wasn't worried that I hadn't gone to the bathroom. I was like a child there. The next morning the hospital discharged me. My father was furious. He said that my mother's meddling had been the cause of my discharge.

"The doctor said that within a few months I would be walking again. If not in a few months, then in half a year. What I had would pass. My mother went directly to a private doctor. She got a small box of pills, tiny black pills. With one tablet, hijole!, I did what I had not done for twenty-one days

"The doctors lied to me from the beginning. They said I would walk in three months, then six months, nine months, a year, then a year and a half. All the time it was pure lies, nothing but lies. I couldn't feel my legs but I wasn't afraid. I had never seen a disabled person... well yes. I had seen people in wheelchairs, but I never really took much notice. They were old people and I never thought much about them. I had heard of a boy in town who used a wheelchair, but they kept him shut up in the house and I never saw him. So I had never seen a young person in a wheelchair and thought that what I had would pass like any other disease. I didn't know that it would last a long time or that it would be for all my life.

"That evening a cousin of mine, a nurse, came to give me an injection. She turned me face down and rubbed my rear with cotton and alcohol. She noticed something and started rubbing harder, first on one side, then on the other. On each cheek I had a pink circle. All that pink area was rotten. The flesh was putrid. There were two deep pressure sores on each side. The infections went nearly to the bone. Nobody at the hospital had examined my

back. They never told my mother, 'Señora, you must change your daughters position.' They never taught us these things.

"My father was rarely at ease. We had never had a problem like this before. He took me to a clinic in Mexico City. They told us that with therapy, lots of therapy, I would be able to walk again. We stayed forty-five days. We then went to Guadalajara, to another private clinic. I was the only teenager there. All the other patients were elderly people from the United States. The staff made me braces and had me do exercises in a tank of warm water. After another forty-five days we returned to Costa Rica.

"The next morning, the catheter got caught and slipped out as they transferred me to my wheelchair. My cousin, the nurse, wasn't there, so they had to take me to the hospital. They took me to the emergency room and laid me down on the examination table. I started to cry. They were going to put in the catheter, and all of this really embarrassed me. There were three interns, and like before, not one of them could get it in. This went on for hours.

"A nurse arrived, one of those arrogant despotic types, and asked me why I was crying. I didn't answer. She shook her head and said, "no chance you'll be a virgin by the time you finally walk again." Whether I was or wasn't a virgin was unimportant to me. What was important was walking again. But these words really hurt. So I said, 'At least I have the excuse that I'm like this. But you, you aren't sick, you aren't married, and you sure as hell aren't a virgin.' The specialist arrived and saw me crying. He cared for me a lot, as did many of the nurses. He stroked my hair, gave me a kiss, and told the nurse to watch her mouth. And he put the catheter in quickly.

"About that time, someone started leaving white roses on our doorstep. Three nights in a row, just about midnight. I was sitting on the verandah in

front of the house one afternoon when a man came up and said, "Buenas Noches." He asked if he could come in. "Pásale," I said. So he came in, sat down and asked me what had happened to me. I looked down and just sat there without saying anything. When my mother came out he said, "your daughter isn't suffering from a natural illness. She has had a curse placed on her." He said he had no personal interest in this, nothing to gain, only that he passed by and saw me and so stopped in. As he left he said, "the witches are working hard on her. If she gets worse bring her to me."

"That evening, about eleven or twelve at night, I got really sick. My father got out the pick-up and took me to the man's house. The man told me there were many people who envied me. I didn't believe him. I didn't believe a thing he said. He gave me some special water, but every time I drank it I got sick.

"We later learned of a woman named Sister Malena, who was a spiritualist living outside of Los Mochis. Though we told her nothing, she seemed to know everything about me. She knew all about the white roses and said they meant death. "There is a woman who wants to kill you," she said. "She's young like you. Is it true that there's a young man who wants to marry you?" she asked. I nodded. "Ah, well then, this young man loves you very much, and those aren't lies that he's telling you. But his ex-girlfriend is jealous and would like to see you dead." I was surprised. I was very young, right? And for me envy, or that someone would want me dead was a lot. But Sister Malena had known the truth about the flowers. I'm not a real believer in sorcery, but then again, there could be something there. Not completely though, for my spinal cord is still broken.

"We also went to a chiropractor. He looked at the x-rays and told my parents that I was lying. He said there was nothing wrong with me, and that I

could stand, and feel, and walk. My parents took on these credulous expressions. They seemed to trust him more than they trusted me. Imagine those deep sores on my butt. When they treated me, cut away my skin, I felt and said nothing. And now this man claims its all a hoax. "I'll prove that your daughter is lying," he said. He picked up a lamp, and with great drama, like he was doing something very important, he drew the hot bulb slowly, very slowly, down my leg. Like in slow motion, he burned both of my legs."

"Both legs?" I asked. There were in fact parallel scars running down Socorro's calves.

"Yes. because I had both legs together. I let the lamp stay. When he saw that I wasn't going to move, he pulled it away. My skin blistered. He gave me some salve, Vaseline, and said that it would bring the blisters down. But he said nothing more about my lying, or that he was wrong, nothing. As we left my parents paid the bill. He told them to bring me back the next morning, as if we were fools. We didn't know what to say. We just left him there in his office."

"How long did it take for the blisters to heal?" I asked

"Well it took a long time. I had to sleep face down because of the deeper pressure sores on my butt, so it took about two years, two years and a half. Every time I think of this I become angry.

"My father, poor man, sold his property and trucks to pay for my clinic visits. Finally we had no money left, only bills. I was in bad shape. I was emotionally traumatized and had deeply infected pressure sores. I needed help with everything. Putting on my underpants, putting on my shoes, even going to the toilet. I lost control of my bladder and shit in my bed. I needed a catheter to urinate. Losing my legs, well, it was like I had died.

"I closed myself in my room. I wouldn't accept the wheelchair they bought me. I never went out to the living room. I secluded myself. Reading, listening to music, watching TV, that's all I did. I didn't want to talk with anyone. I hardly ate. I would push the dishes onto the floor. When I was in the hospital, when this began, I never thought that it would go on for a long time. But when I got the pressure sores, and when I saw that I wasn't getting better, and when even going to the toilet... well, I began to despair.

"I refused to go out because when I did people stared at me as if I were a queer little animal that ought to be shut up in the house. They'd say, "poor thing, so pretty, but left like this." Or, "why do they take her out, she's sick and ought to be inside." These days in Costa Rica the people are different. They are accustomed, well, to seeing someone like me. When I pass by people say, "Chiquis, where are you going." They know what work I do. I have spoken to them a lot about the project. They no longer look at me with pity as they did before.

"But I know of many disabled children in Costa Rica who are still very isolated and who are ashamed to go out onto the street. Why? Because their families hide them, or their father is ashamed by them when he brings his friends over to drink, or says things behind their back. These children hear that they are retarded or that they should be shut up in the back room. People come here to the project with the intention of leaving their children with us. They don't want the responsibility, or they are ashamed. The people themselves, the people who have the problems, seclude themselves because they don't have the support of their family, or because people stare at them, or act as if they shouldn't go out. This isn't right.

"One time, when I went to the hospital to have my pressure sores treated, they took me in the new pick-up truck. When we arrived back

home my whole family was there. They were arguing. My father was saying that they had to take me to Mexico City for treatment. But my mother suffered from high blood pressure and said that flying was bad for her. She didn't want to go by air. She suggested that one of my sisters go. My father said, "No, woman, you have to go with mé!" And they began to fight. And I was taking it all in.

"And I started to cry from sadness, because this argument, all these problems, I had brought about with my illness. I began wailing like a crazy person. I looked at my wheelchair and slammed my fist against the arm rests until they broke apart. My sister Luisa, the one who took care of me, said, saw what was happening and said, 'Chiquis, if I were you I would kill myself.' My other sister said, 'how can you say this to her!' Luisa looked up at the whole family and said, "If you want to argue go somewhere else, but don't argue in front of her! If you don't want to take care of her, if you don't love her, I'll take care of her. I'll bath her, change her, everything, but don't go around fighting like this in front of her." It was the truth what she had said, it was the truth. I had been thinking about death, I had that word in my head. We cried together, her and me. They took me back to my room, and the fight was over. It hurts to remember all of this.

"So I decided that I wanted to die. I was going to stab myself in the stomach. I had no sensation there. I wouldn't feel anything. But my mother noticed that my door was locked and had a feeling that I was up to something. She kept coming to my room. "Chiquis, open the door, I want to talk with you,." When she left I locked the door again. She knocked and said, 'Chiquis, don't lock the door.' Then my brother came home drunk. When the house was finally quiet I put the knife to my stomach. I lost my will. "Maybe I won't die," I thought. "What if I don't die and end up worse off with more

pressure sores or something worse. Finally, exhaustion overcame me, and I didn't do anything. That was the last time I tried to kill myself.

"They decided to take me back to sister Malena, the spiritualist. She lived in a pueblo outside of Los Mochis. She had a big house with a large open front room. There were lots of benches. Behind the benches were cots for people like me, with something broken or with some kind of disease. Most of us were bedridden. My two sisters, Yoali and Silvia, took care of me there. My father built us a room from sheets of corrugated tin and bought us a stove. We had our own cots and kitchen ware. We were three women on our own.

"There were many people there. I was happier. I came out a bit from my seclusion, from here inside my heart. Though I didn't put on make-up or anything. I didn't wear clothes like this either, because I still had something bad inside. But I passed my time there well, very well indeed. The people who worked there were like the people here in Piaxtla. They were good people, very dedicated. They weren't patronizing. Well, they did look at you like you were, like you were a sick person, but they trusted you and they treated you well .

"They said that I had a shadow, and that it was sick, but that they were going to do everything they could for me. Sister Malena served as the channel. She loaned her body to the spirits. The spirit who treated me was a doctor from Guadalajara who had died long before. She also treated my burns and pressure sores.

"How?" I asked

"She washed her hands well with alcohol and then treated me with oxygenated water. She then put on an expensive spray, and then gauze. They cured all four of the burns on my knees. But I didn't see any improvement in my legs. What I wanted was to walk.

"They told you that you would walk? That they would cure you?" I asked.

"No. They said that they would do everything they could to get rid of the bad shadow, the bad spell. But they also said that my spinal cord was broken. They gave me hopes, but not like the doctors. I spent a year and a half there. And then once again I returned home. I had now passed four years with my problem. A friend told me about Project Quilá. She said that the doctors were specialists from the United States. My father wanted to go. I said that if he wanted me to go, well then, all right, but if not, that would be fine with me.

"'*Mirá, la muchacha tán bonita.*' That was the first thing I heard as we drove into Piaxtla. 'Which one?' '*La güerita* with the red hair.' I didn't pay much attention. When I was in the pick-up you couldn't see that I was disabled. In the city young men would call out things like '*mamacita, que buena estas.*'

"We had heard that there would be foreign specialists at Quilá, but everyone I met was Mexican and disabled. I asked about the Americans. Samuel was up in the sierra, they said, but perhaps they could help me. One of them had arthritis. The others had polio or were in wheelchairs. I said, "how can you possibly help me. You're as bad off as me!"

Jenaro came over and introduced himself. He asked me my name, how old I was, and if I had studied. He didn't ask a thing about my illness. I knew that he was trying to gain my confidence, I wasn't stupid. But we talked and we got along well. He invited me to the consultation room. Once there he asked me about my problem. My father told him that I had pressure sores. I had six by that time . They were deep, and infected, and I was ashamed. Jenaro asked me to get up on the examination table, but I told him, "You

must be kidding! There's no way I'm going to let you examine me." I was that arrogant.

""So we walked around the project a little. My sisters were flirts. Polo caught their eye so we went to the wheelchair shop and watched him work. I was astonished. I saw what a person in a wheelchair could do. I had thought that a disabled person could do nothing, only eat, and that everything had to be placed before him. We then went to the orthotics shop where Javier was making braces. I thought, "he's a little better off than Polo, at least he can get around with crutches." Jenaro was also there. I asked him about his work. He said that he was a health worker. Samuel was an advisor, but they were the ones who ran the program and did the work. Hijole! I had been really rude to them. I felt terrible. Anyway, Jenaro began to gain my confidence and we discussed my problem a little. All of this affected me deeply.

"I was surprised time and again by this village. No one was startled by my wheelchair. I felt something very beautiful inside. I laughed and felt at ease. For a little while I forgot about my problem. We decided to stay in Piaxtla and wait for Samuel. I had rarely talked with anyone and had never put on make-up since my accident. But I felt different here. I asked my mother to get me some powder and fingernail polish I had seen at Celia's store. Confident that no one would stare, I started visiting other parts of the village. The people said buenas tardes, and asked me my name, and talked with us. No one said, "pobrecita," or asked what had happened to me. None of that. They looked at my face, not my legs.

When I returned to Lucila's for lunch Norma was about to go to the river to get water. The pump was out again. The pipes were clogged up with sand. I offered to help Norma. We went down the hill and arrived at what looked

to be an encampment by the river. Women were in all stages of cleaning, filling, or carrying off buckets or water. Others were doing their wash while their children played in river or looked for crayfish up stream. We joined the line at a water hole the women had dug in the sand. The water filtered through the sand and bubbled up into the bowl shaped crater. Two women were helping a third woman raise a large plastic bucket of water to her head. She left with her daughter who was also balancing a small bucket. It was one of those little white lard pails with the plump pink pig in the undershirt. After we filled our pails we left with four or five women, each with a bucket on her head. I carried mine by its handle.

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I arrived a little early for the interview. Ruben was out in the wash area where Lupita, his sister, was rinsing off the suds from his bath that still covered him. Water flowed in sheets down his back and buttocks, emphasizing the contours of his body. I said I'd come back. He pushed himself up with his forearms. His shoulder blades pressed out above the gentle arch of his back. "Sit down" he said, I'll be done in a few minutes."

Lupita toweled him off. His flawless brown skin glistened in the morning sun. His belly was round and extended. Scar tissue covered much of Ruben's buttocks, looking like bomb craters seen from high above. He still had two infected pressure sores, small pink holes that tunneled deep into his flesh, but they were healing.

We transferred Ruben onto his gurney and I pushed him out to the mango grove. This was the position from which Ruben met the world, lying on his stomach with his dark well proportioned face looking straight out. His arms dangled over the sides of the gurney. His right arm was thin and

scarred, from when he had got it caught in a corn mill in La Cruz where he worked as a boy. His hands were lightly curled, one finger overlapping another. Ruben looked up through the mango trees to the sky. Gray clouds passed over. We could hear the faint sound of thunder in the Sierras. I asked him if it looked like rain. "Not with this kind of cloud cover," he answered. "Before it rains the sky will become crystal clear for a short time. But San Juan's Day is coming up. It always rains on San Juan's Day."

I clipped the microphone onto his pillow. The pillow case and sheets were crisp and clean. I turned on the tape recorder and asked Ruben to tell me the story of his accident and his arrival at Quilá. "I had been up all night drinking with friends," he said. "In the morning we decided to go to the baseball game in la Sienda. My mother didn't want me to go, but I went anyway. When we got there we started drinking. I climbed up to the top row of the highest bleacher. I stumbled a couple of times. There were no railings or backrests. I sat down and watched the players warm up. I then bent over, picked up my beer, tilted my head back, and started chugging. That was when I fell.

"When I hit the ground it didn't feel like anything was broken. I grabbed on to the cyclone fence, and stood up. I tried to ask some kids what had happened. I was speaking, but I couldn't hear my voice. No sound was coming out. One of the kids was from my rancho. I sat down and laid back against his knees. A pick-up pulled up. As they lifted me onto the truck I felt this really ugly pain and let out with this awful scream. Then I didn't feel anything. Nothing. As we arrived at the house I thought, "this time I've really screwed myself good."

"I spent the next four days in the hospital in Mazatlán. They left me alone, without operating, or anything. They didn't even find the fracture

until they turned me over on my stomach to bathe me. Finally my cousin's wife arrived and asked the doctors, 'Is it true that you haven't operated? How many days has it been? He's been here that long and you haven't operated?' They said, 'It's that we can't operate.' '*A poco,* you can't operate.'

"She called and spoke with a doctor. I think she spoke to the one who gave orders there. She said she was going to bring this to the newspaper. So he called and spoke with the staff, and told them that I was not to be moved, that he was going to operate. Well, this put the *doctorcillos en chinga.** By the time he arrived, *los hijos de su chingada madre* had already started operating. They didn't give a damn about me and were angry that I was there. I had developed abscesses on my back and legs. But we didn't know anything about this, Daniel. So, we just went home.

"A fever hit me, every afternoon, for about an hour. My uncle said, "you know what, I'm going to give you a goatskin."

"What do I want a goatskin for?"

"To spread it out under your sheets. It'll keep you cool."

The room began to smell foul, like a dead animal. I figured it was the goatskin. My mother put some pillows behind me and tried to help me sit up. But *no hombre.* I felt as if I was going to pass out. So I yelled for her to put me back down. But she tried again, and this time I was able to sit up, little by little, with her gradually propping me up with the pillow behind me.*

"That's when she saw the pressure sores. It wasn't the goatskin rotting below, it was me. They called an ambulance to take me to the social security hospital in Villa Union. "No," I said, "not there!" Had I gone there I would have died. I didn't know where to go. So I told them to take me here, to

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* "This got the little doctors moving."
* Explanation of loss of equilibrium

Piaxtla. I had heard that the Gringos here were really decent people. My brother came here and spoke with them. He told them that I was pretty bad off. They told him to bring me here and they would look at me.

"I had seen a woman in a wheelchair once in La Sienda. I felt really bad, it seemed really sad to me. As we drove to Piaxtla I thought, "maybe I'll end up like that." I had a really bad fever and was trembling and shaking. They took me to the *consultorio* and laid me down on the examination table. Jenaro cut away a little of the infected flesh, but my fever was so high I couldn't handle it. He told my sister that I was *bien jodido,* pretty far gone, the infection was already advanced, but he said that they would do what they could. But I didn't hear any of this. They took me to a room, the same place I sleep in now.

"The next morning Elena began to cut in earnest. She kept cutting and cutting. It took days. The infection had nearly reached the bone, which they said was green. It frightened the hell out of me. The fevers got worse. I looked up at the roof tiles and they looked like rats. Then I thought I was walking with one of those aluminum walkers, that I was standing, walking. 'Shit, I said to myself, 'am I crazy or what.' I thought that a peso was worth less than fifty centavos. 'No,' I thought, 'I have to get a hold of myself. I can get it together. One peso... fifty centavos... No, a peso is a lot more. This is how it went while they were cleaning me.

"Everybody there was with me. They all helped me. They turned me over, every hour or two. They needed five people to do this because you couldn't touch me without causing me pain.. They turned me over, very gently. Once when they were turning me over someone pulled my arm down towards the floor. The pain, *nombre,* the pain went shooting up my

arm. I couldn't take it. I cried out in pain. My hand still hurts sometimes, and its been six years.

"Samuel made me a bed, the one I have now. He adapted it to me, so as not to place too much pressure on any part of my body. So they wouldn't need to move me so often. He asked me what I thought of the bed. I said, "it isn't worth shit." Samuel laughed and said that if he had known that I would have such a low a opinion of his work he wouldn't have gone to the all the trouble of making it.

"I mistreated all of them. I guess I made them feel pretty bad. I didn't consent to anything they wanted. I was urinating pure blood, so they wanted me to drink a lot of water. They kept bringing me water, but I wouldn't drink any of it, not a drop. I told them to leave me the hell alone. But they never stopped with the water. They never let up until my urine started flowing. It was beautiful, what they did for me. People came and talked with me. Elena too. They were great. But I was really shaken.

Ruben looked up and saw some pigs enter the project gate and start towards the vegetable garden. He lifted himself up and called, "Cooochi, Cooochi." The dogs, who had been sleeping in the sun by the kitchen, came ripping out. First the younger males, then *Anciano*, and finally *Negra*, a weathered, mangy dog with dropping breasts. They sighted their prey almost immediately, cornered them, and assaulted the piglets. The next few minutes were a mixture of squealing, howling, and Ruben's "Cooochi," inciting the dogs on. Antonio pulled up in his gurney. His gurney, like Ruben's, had been built at Quilá. It had two bicycle wheels in front and a smaller wheel in back. This allows the rider to lie stomach down, taking weight off their pressure sores. For those with full use of their arms, the gurneys were relatively easy to maneuver or to work from. Urine dripped from Antonio's

urine bag which hung by the left wheel. The plastic valve had broken off a couple of days earlier and Antonio seemed feel under no great pressure to fix it.

Ruben lowered his head and rested his chin on the pillow. "My sisters came to help me," he continued, "but I didn't want to eat, I didn't want to drink, I didn't want the pills, I didn't want anything. When they tried to give me a pill, *nombre*. And it was worse when they had me lying face down. I wasn't able to move at all. Nothing. I just lay there. And how am I going to take a pill like that face down. 'No,' Elena said, 'try.' I said 'I'll choke on it.' 'No,' she said, '*andale*, swallow it.' So I took one, and it went down. 'Good, now I can handle a little,' I thought.

"They continued like this until they had cleaned out the sores, got them really clean, and I no longer was feverish. After a few months I asked to come out here under the mango trees. People would sit here with me, well, like this," and he nodded at me and Antonio. "They would sit here with me. Now, I feel like I'm in another world. Even though I'm still here on this gurney, I feel good, healthy. Now, my only problem is with the catheters, when they stop up. But no more of the other problems.

Manuel came up for a coke. He put a peso in the cash box which was on a table in front of Ruben. Ruben nodded. Manuel then rolled over to the plastic ice chest and got himself a coke, which he opened on a gold capped molar. Pedro was a few feet away from us. He sat quietly, almost serenely. He seemed most content when around the sound of human voices. Manuel called out to him and offered him the last third of his coke.

"Pedro, quieres una coca?* "

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* "Pedro, do you want a coke?"
"Yes, Compadre, a lot. Do you have one?
"Yes, come over here."

"Si, Compadre. Si, quiero mucho. Tienes una?"

"Si, ven."

He started in our direction but got caught in the sand. The harder he struggled the deeper the wheel dug in. I went over and helped him get back on course. Manuel handed him the coke which he finished off in one long gulp. Pedro had taken on a role similar to that of the "village idiot." Manuel said, "Pedro, show Ruben your smile." Pedro responded with a wide-open broken-tooth grin that delighted both himself and his audience.

Lupita brought Ruben out here every morning about nine, and put him back in his bedroom before dark. She brought him his meals and fed him there under the mango trees. Behind them, at the edge of the grove a cactus fence marked off the steep drop to the river below. An equally steep bluff separated the far side of the river from the fertile flood plains. Beyond the flood plains stood the broken-tooth peak and the Sierra Madre Occidental.

Doña Petra arrived with her shawl wrapped tightly to protect her from the predawn chill. As she entered the warmly lit church an old man asked her what time it was. "Half past five," she said. He went out front and untangled the two long ropes to the church bells. He handled the ropes like long reigns and tolled the bells in a pattern of two slow leaden clangs, then a pause, then two more, and so on. A few young men were talking by the church fence. A friend came up and was offered a beer. They were probably still awake from the previous night.

When the church was about half full Doña Petra stood in front of the altar and began the rosary. "Ave Maria purisima..." At the appropriate moments the congregation responded in chorus, "Santa Maria madre de Dios

ruega Señora...." The benches in front were mostly filled with older women in black. Behind them a man gently rocked a baby in his arms. After the Rosary Doña Petra opened the bible and read the story of San Juan whose day they were celebrating.

When she finished Victor Rios, a large soft spoken man in his thirties, picked up the wooden statue of San Juan from the altar. One of the women in black handed out candles. After a few closing prayers the old man again rang the leaden church bells and the procession began. It was just starting to get light. The sound of roosters crowing could be heard from all parts of the pueblo.

Victor Rios led the procession flanked by two men holding large candles in silver candle sticks. They were followed by the women and then the men who walked with their hats in one hand and candles in the other. The procession grew in number as it passed by the doorways and front gates of Piaxtla. It then wound its way down a trail to the river. A light drizzle filtered down over the procession. It was just enough precipitation to reaffirm the widely held conviction that it always rains on San Juan's day.

Several young men climbed a low ridge and watched the procession stop at the riverbank. Victor Rios took the red robes off the image of San Juan and walked into the river. He turned to face each direction, north, south, east, west, as a circle of about twenty children formed around him. At each point of the compass he submerged the figure in the water. He then kneeled in the water with his head bent and held the statue of San Juan close to his chest. The children started splashing him creating a fountain like spray. Then the young men up on the ridge started setting off firecrackers. Two boys threw their friend into the water. A girl likewise pushed her friend in. And then the women, girls, and boys were all dragging one another into the river.

Gunshots came from the ridge. Then Chinese sky rockets hissed overhead and a group of women sang *la canción de San Juan*. Smoke from the fireworks drifted over the crowd as they spread out along the river to bathe in the sanctified water.

Dark Rooms*

Chapter Four

> At the end of the Middle Ages, leprosy disappeared from the Western world. In the margins of the community, at the gates of cities, there stretched wastelands which sickness had ceased to haunt but had left sterile and long uninhabitable. For centuries, these reaches would belong to the non-human. From the fourteenth to the seventeenth century they would wait, soliciting with strange incantations a new incarnation of disease, another grimace of terror, renewed rites of purification and exclusion. - Michel Foucault

The operation failed. The physicians could not usher Elena back to health. She was discharged from the hospital, *dieron la alta,* and spent the next four years in a darkened room in the back of her house. Considered ineligible for return to a life of family and work, she suddenly found herself in a twilight world on the margins of her society.

> Leprosy disappeared, the leper vanished, or almost from memory; these structures remained. Often, in the same spaces, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later. Poor vagabonds, criminals, and "deranged minds" would take the part played by the leper... In Frankfort in 1399, seamen were instructed to rid the city of madman who walked about the streets naked... Ships of fools... 'drunken boat[s]' that glide[d] along the calm rivers of the Rhineland and the Flemish canals... conveyed their insane cargo from town to town.

A high fever left Alicia disabled at the age of fourteen. She spent the next sixteen years alone in a back room. "What did you do," I asked once day as I helped her get her foot back on the footrest of her wheelchair. "I knitted," she

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* This section is based on the work of Robert Murphy, Jessica Sheer and the Colombia University Research Program on Social Relations and Microecology of Paraplegics (Murphy 1987; Scheer 1987; Murphy et al. 1988). Their research highlights shortcomings in the deviance model of disability and argues that disabled people, being of undefined status, "neither ill nor well, neither socially alive and active nor socially expunged and removed," should be viewed "as being in a liminal state, as in the liminal phases of rites of passages (Murphy et al. 1988)." Though their work is the outcome of a three-year study of paraplegics and quadriplegics in New York, (and on the personal experience of Robert Murphy who suffered from a tumor of the spinal cord), their findings reflected to a surprising degree the experience of disability among the participants at Project Quilá, in Piaxtla, Sinaloa, Mexico.

said. Claudio had polio as an infant. One leg grew smaller than the other and his thigh contracted and doubled-up. He got around on all fours until he realized that people were staring at him. He then isolated himself in the corn barn for more that a year. The leporisariums, the ships of fools, and the back rooms and corn barns of western Mexico all served the same purpose; to seclude and ritually divide the selected individuals from their communities.

During tribal puberty rites the initiates are often separated from the community and taken to the bush to live in shelters or caves. They are removed "from the profane realm of bounded social existence to the sacred domain of transition" (Scheer 1987: 100). Victor Turner used the word liminality, from the Latin word *limen* or threshold, to describe this state of apartness, ambiguity and paradox (Scheer 1987: 100). Like Piaxtla's duendes, the unbaptized infants who at death are shut out of heaven because they haven't been christened and excluded from hell because they haven't sinned, initiates of puberty rites are "betwixt and between," suspended in a cultural realm that is "frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon" (Turner 1969: 95).

Contamination and pollution are often associated with such transitional states. The initiates may "revert to nature by letting their hair and nails grow" (Turner 1977: 37). They are "allowed to go filthy," and are sometimes associated with menstruation and feces. (Turner 1977: 37; Turner 1967: 96). " Turner suggests that participants in rites of passage are "unapproachable, dangerous to [themselves] and others... What is unclear and contradictory... tends to be regarded as (ritually) unclean" (Turner 1967: 109, 97). Or as Barbara Myerhoff explains,

> "The edges of our categories, as Mary Douglas has also stated, are charged with power and mystery. The people, objects, or events that touch those margins may be taboo or polluted because they are out of place. They are sources of danger, a threat to our orderly conceptualizations and desire for form and predictability" (Myerhoff 1982: 117).

The ritual subjects may be expected to submit to trials and humiliations like enduring extremes in heat and cold or having their flesh marked. It is not uncommon for them to be stripped of all possessions and to go naked or in rags (Turner 1967: 99).

> "They have nothing. They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position... In the words of King Lear they represent 'naked unaccommodated man'" (Turner 1967: 98).

These ordeals facilitate the destruction of the previous identity. The initiates are "ground down" ..."and fashioned anew." They become like "clay or dust, mere matter,"... "a tabula rasa, [or] blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group" as it pertains to their new status.

Rites of passage are not limited to puberty rites. "Birth and copulation and death," T.S. Eliot's "brass tacks" of existence, are celebrated in most parts of the world by rites of passage" (Myerhoff 1982: 109). At puberty and marriage, pregnancy and birth, graduation, divorce, illness and death, these ceremonies dramatize changes in maturation, legal status, profession, and rank (Scheer 1987: 100). Such transformations in identity are often seen as "embodied or incarnate" in the individual.

In a few years Marta Elena, the infant baptized in Piaxtla that April afternoon, will return to the church alter for her first communion. If her family can afford a wedding, she will be married there. When she dies she

will return once again for the matrons to recite Ave Marias by her coffin. Rites of passage may also accompany changes in culturally recognized states, as when a person moves from a state health to sickness, a tribe prepares for war, or the changing of the seasons as with the blessing of the corn and the bathing at the river during the yearly celebrations for San Juan in Piaxtla (Turner 1967: 93).

When the ritual is completed the initiates return to a stable state once more. They now hold the rights and obligations or their new identity. This three part structure of separation, margin (or limen), and reincorporation is found in most rites of passage, though one of these three phases might be given more emphasis.

After the accident Elena's loved ones came to her support. Her obligations to family and work were suspended. In return, she relinquished personal autonomy to her physicians and family and became dependent and childlike. She submitted to ordeals reminiscent of those faced by the adolescent initiate. Elena, dressed in a hospital gown, like a neophyte in ritual rags, was taken to the operating room. The surgeons and nurses gathered around her like Piaxtla's matrons around a coffin, cut her open, and operated on her spinal cord. The humiliation suffered by Socorro as the young interns tried to put in the catheter rivals the indignities suffered during puberty rites. Her scars - the chiropractor's burns, the disfigured tissue from pressure sores, and the marks on her hand from the day she smashed the wheelchair - trace her medical pilgrimage on her bodily terrain. Had Elena, Socorro, Enrique, Isabel, and Ruben recovered, they would have returned to their work, family, and lovers, and resumed their lives where they left off.

The doctors and healers could not carry them through the transition from sickness to health. There was no "cultural resolution" to their situation. They were discharged from the hospital, but as Socorro observed, they were treated by many as if they should be shut away like "queer little animals." They were no longer "sick." But they were hardly "well" (Murphy 1988: 238). They could no longer walk. They had no control over their bladder and bowels. They could no longer feel their legs. Frozen in their passage, the attributes of the liminal phase stayed with them (Scheer 1987: 105).. They were suspended in a social landscape of marshes and lunar eclipses, a world inhabited by unbaptized infants, lepers and madman. Their passage from 'sickness' to 'health' was arrested. As Foucalt writes of the passengers of the ships of fools:

> He is the Passenger *par excellence:* that is, the prisoner of the passage... he has his truth and his homeland only in that fruitless expanse between two countries that cannot belong to him.

In their passage from 'normality,' through 'sickness', to 'disability', the Quilá people underwent dramatic transformations in their social identity. "I could walk, just like you," said Enrique. "I paid the bills. I did what had to be done for the family." He then became the sick son for whom the family rallied. And finally, he was a "*chueco,*" Mexican slang for crooked, bent, crippled.

Robert Murphy, an anthropologist who became quadriplegic later in life, wrote "I had experienced a transformation of the essential condition of my being in the world.... My identity [had] lost its stable moorings and [had] become contingent on a physical flaw (Murphy 1990: 105). The people at Quilá were "not only physically impaired, but also socially damaged" (Scheer

1987: 76). Erving Goffman used the word stigma, or "spoiled identity" to refer to this "radical loss of self-esteem... [and] damage to the self (Murphy 1990: 90)." "The Greeks," he writes, "originated the term stigma to refer to bodily signs.. cut or burnt into the body [to] advertise that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor - a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places" (Goffman 1963: 1).

Elena was no longer a grape picker. She was no longer Juan's wife. Her doctors, family, and even Elena herself believed that she could no longer work, attract a lover, have a family, or even take care of her most intimate bodily functions. Her identity as a new wife, future mother, and hard working family contributor was eroding. She had become a cripple. For Elena and her society, full personhood was earned "by being a responsible and (re) productive worker, spouse, family and community member" (Luborsky 1994: 240). At the heart of the Quilá people's accounts of loss and despair was the feeling that they were useless, *"que no sirve para nada."*

Shields, in her study of a Jewish nursing home, writes, "to give and receive are basic in human life... Elderly persons are able to maintain a fairly high status when they have something considered valuable by others in their society to exchange, whether it be customs, skills, historical knowledge, economic resources or inheritances" (Shields 1990: 333-4). She found, however, that little was expected of the elderly in the nursing home, and that there were few ways in which they were able to contribute to the life of the community. This inability to reciprocate made them "ineligible for serious treatment as adult persons" (Shields 1990: 349).

> The asymmetry of giving and receiving sets up a structure of inequality that reduces the status of the recipients... (e.g. 'Jerry's kids')... The act of giving is not a gesture of oneness with the donee, but a symbol of separation and superiority... Pity, [is the] cruelest of all sentiments extended to the physically impaired, for it adds the insults of patronization and social disdain to their bodily deficits" (Murphy 1988: 236).

Thus their "dependence on others and their perceived fragility, helplessness, passivity, and asexuality" erodes their "status as adults" (Scheer 1987: 81, 98). There was "an unraveling of the lifelong competencies that in earliest childhood marked the emergence of a full person: the acquisition of language and independent willful movement of the body by walking" (Luborsky 1994: 242).

Given the highly charged attitudes concerning masculinity in northern Mexico, Enrique and Ruben also faced a threat of a "direct and total nature" to their adult masculine status. "For the male, the weakening and atrophy of the body threaten all the cultural values of masculinity: strength, activeness, speed, virility, stamina, and fortitude" (Murphy 1990: 94-96). Both their paralysis and the sexual difficulties associated with spinal cord injury served as a "metaphor for the loss of both sexual and social power" (Murphy 1990: 94-96). Spinal cord injury might alter a woman's ability to have an orgasm, but she "need not be aroused or experience orgasmic pleasure to engage in genital sex.... and bear children," activities which are highly relevant to one's standing as a woman in the Sierra Madre Occidental. (Murphy 1990: 96).

Like the puberty rite initiates, Elena, Socorro and the others were thought to be unclean, polluted. They can't control their legs, nor their bowels. They accidentally shit in their clothing and carry urine bags on their knees. Socorro's neighbors in the pueblo of Costa Rica believed she was contagious

and kept their children away. Being neither well nor ill, they confused categories.

> The disabled suffer a contamination of their status as culture-bearing creatures through a profoundly destructive invasion by the domain of nature . One way in which this is manifested is in a paralyzed person's loss of control over 'dirty' body products, which are subject to rigid rules and decorum in all cultures. A hemiplegic or a person with cerebral palsy may have trouble controlling saliva, and paraplegics often have problems of bowel and bladder retention; the threat of an 'accident' is one of their greatest fears (Murphy 1988: 239).

Many have suggested that "the unconscious source of ambivalence toward the disabled are unvoiced anxieties about body integrity, loss, vulnerability and weakness" (Scheer 1987: 79). Robert Murphy writes that "the bodily impairment of one person bespeaks the vulnerability of all." He once witnessed "an eight-year-old European girl in Conakry, Guinea, who had just seen a leper with no nose. The child stared wordlessly for a moment, and then her hand went up slowly and fearfully to her own nose to make sure it was still there... The liminal are socially dangerous people, and the solution is to sequester them, interacting with them only within the protective armor provided by ritual formalism" (Murphy 1988: 236-7).

As one becomes "alienated from his old, carefully nurtured, and closely guarded sense of self by a new, foreign, and unwelcome identity,.. [and] faces an inimical world, using the limited resources of a damaged body," there is a "powerful pull backward into the self" (Murphy 1990: 106-109). Elena and Socorro withdrew into the "four walls" of a back room, a self-contained universeof pulp novels and romantic pop music.. "And, as if in covert cooperation with this retreat, society helps to wall [them] off... " (Murphy 1990: 108-109).

To some extent, and on some levels, the Quilá peoples wanderings through social liminality came to a close upon their arrival in Quilá. If, as Turner and Van Gennep have suggested, each rite of passage is in fact a collection of three rites, rites of separation, rites of liminality, and rites of reincorporation, arrival at Quilá was the very first stage in the process of reincorporation. The striking realization that people 'just like me or even worse off" were able to take on positions requiring skill and responsibility, and have lovers and families, shook the very foundations of their understanding of who they were and what they were able to do.

Legs and Lofts: Rehabilitation
Chapter Five

Project Quilá is a rural rehabilitation center run by disabled people in the foothills of the Sierra Madre in western Mexico. The project opened in 1982. It grew out of Project Rio Verde, the village health care network described in chapter two. Over the last fifteen years Project Quilá has served over two thousand five hundred children and adults. Their disabilities have included juvenile arthritis, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, polio, spina bifida, and spinal cord injuries. Those with pressure sores may stay for an extended period for treatment. People in need of braces, prosthetic legs, wheelchairs, or special seating often remain only long enough to have their equipment made for them in one of the shops. Project Quilá is unusual in that disabled people are in control of the program's administration and also provide the orthopedic and rehabilitation services. Since its inception, Quilá's craftspeople have disseminated low-cost aids and technologies for disabled people. Through its training programs and apprenticeships Quilá has influenced similar programs in many parts of Latin America.

The majority of the people interviewed experienced a dramatic life change upon their arrival at Quilá. After being told by doctors and family members that they would soon be well, many learned at Quilá that it was unlikely that they would walk again. This profound disappointment, however, was very often followed by a reevaluation of their situation. Moving through the project and seeing that virtually all the rehabilitation workers and coordinators were people with disabilities often far more significant than their own, allowed them to begin a process of rethinking the possibilities for their lives. The fact that the project was staffed and governed

by disabled campesinos provided participants with rare opportunities for training and responsibility, and contributed to generally high levels of self confidence among the staff members. This chapter presents personal accounts of the rehabilitation process and the Quilá apprenticeship program.

The hills were twig dry. A layer of dust had settled upon Piaxtla. Lamps, overcoats, and family photographs were all covered by the silky beige powder. Each morning the women swept the dust into little piles and herded it into the street. By noon it had returned and settled once again on their possessions. At Project Quilá the brace-making course had just ended. Plaster casts molded from children's limbs remained piled on the shop table. Some were shapely, some frail. Out under the midday sun Pedro slowly made his way across the yard in his hand-me down wheelchair.

It was a sleepy day at the Project. I was sitting with Ruben and Terecita under the mango trees reading interviews. I usually asked Ruben to help me with unfamiliar words or phrases. Today he was useless for this. At first I thought that he was just groggy from the heat. I then noticed that his warm brown eyes were a little glassy, and realized that the water bottle attached to his gurney probably contained a soft drink mixed with tequila. He was lying on his stomach with his back and legs partly covered by a clean white sheet. As we talked he lifted himself up on his elbows from time to time to draw on the straw coming from the plastic bottle.

"Do you love me?" he asked Terecita. "Aiiy Ruben," said the teenager as she shook her head. Pedro heard our voices and pulled his wheelchair up behind Terecita. "Tell Ruben he's drunk," Terecita said to Pedro. "Ruben you're drunk," Pedro repeated, as was his habit. Ruben made clicking noises with his tongue. The boys had found out that this would enrage Pedro.

When Samuel wasn't around Valdo made the sound whenever he passed Pedro. Ruben continued clicking his tongue until Pedro was spitting, flailing his arms, and howling.

There had developed a grudging warmth in the way Pedro was treated by people at Quilá. At times he played the rôle of the village idiot. After feeding him, Lupita, whom Pedro called "Mama Lupita" would say, "Pedro, show me your smile." He would respond with a wide-open broken tooth grin. The kids still teased Pedro, but a little less harshly. Samuel taught him to urinate in a bottle rather than in his pants. Each time Pedro did this he was given a handful of potato chips. Pedro soon developed a "container fetish," and along with his demands for food and water now came frequent demonstrations of his ability to urinate in cups, buckets, and bottles. He still shat in his bed every morning at dawn.

Pedro' head injury left some areas of his past personality intact. I could see traces of the twelve year old boy who was riding the bicycle the day he was run over by the truck. There also seemed to be large pieces of his character that had been erased. His cry, a tearless wail, was perhaps leftover from his time in the hospital. In recent weeks it was heard less often was less forcefully.

Valentín walked up, looked at Ruben's eyes, then the water bottle, and said "coke and tequila." Ruben grinned. As usual Valentín's shirt was open. Rubbing his belly Valentín looked for a chair. Chairs were in short supply at the project. Their purchase wasn't a priority as virtually everyone at Quilá had their own on wheels. As I was occupied the only chair in sight, Valentín ended up settling for a rock. "Que pasa?" he asked. "Nada." I said. I asked if this might be a good time to do the interview. He had agreed to an interview, but had put it off several times. Valentín nodded then suggested that we do it

at his house. The house was empty when we arrived. We sat in the sparsely furnished parlor at a wooden table which served as a desk and bookshelf.

"I was born in Piaxtla. My mother died when I was six years old. José Nuñez is my father but has never acknowledged me as his son. I was raised by Crecencio Velasquez. For all purposes he's my father. He was a hard working man. We were very poor but we always had food on the table. I have no complaints.

"As a kid I was always alone. I had no brothers or sisters. I was aggressive and liked to go about by myself. I was a complicated kid. Don't misunderstand. To be complicated is one thing, and to have complexes is another. I didn't have complexes and I don't now. I could have cared less if I were ugly or had only huaraches to wear. I've always been my own person. I know what I want. And I don't want to be like others. When I was fourteen or fifteen the other boys wanted to go about, you know, more or less presentable to see if they could get a girlfriend. I never had the desire. What I wanted was to get out of Piaxtla. At the age of 16 I left home and went to Tijuana.

"I suffered a lot at first in Tijuana. I went three or four days without eating. I couldn't find work. A cop asked to see my *Cedula,* my identification card, and I had no idea what he was talking about. I finally found work accidentally when I asked for something to eat at a construction site. The foreman said there was food in the back and to go ahead and take what I wanted.

"I've always been proud, not in the sense that I won't talk to someone, but proud about myself, about asking for handouts. I told the foreman, 'if you feed me I'll to repay you the best I can.' So when I finished eating I cleaned up

the site. I gathered up the trash, the whitewash, cement, and the rest of the construction materials left lying around. The next day I went back and did the same, and he had no alternative but to give me work.

"I lived in Tijuana for four years. This was when I began drinking. I drank, smoked marijuana, took hallucinogens, and ultimately stopped working. I met a woman who gave me everything. A place to stay, food, clothing, cash. She worked in a cantina. What happened is what had to happen. The time came when I grew tired of her . I was eighteen and she was thirty-five. I began meeting women more my age. She saw me with one of these women and she slapped me. I was angry but didn't say anything. The police are pretty rough there. I waited until we got back to the apartment and then smacked her back. I told her *un chingo de cosas.*[*] I realized that the situation was degrading and that I had to get out of there.

"So when I was nineteen I came back to Piaxtla. But by then I had a drinking problem. I hated the people. They never tried to understand me. They didn't like me much anyway, and if I smoked marijuana, well less. My hair was long at that time like a hippie. They said that I was a drug addict. They looked at my weaknesses but never their own. This is what they have always done, and will do all their lives. They won't change. This closed-mindedness has been passed down from generation to generation.

"I never really cared about a woman until I met my wife Clara. I never had girlfriends, just one night stands. The woman in Tijuana didn't mean anything to me. Clara and I got married in Piaxtla. We've been together twenty two years, the two of us.

"After getting married I left Piaxtla again. By that time I had two young children. I went to Los Angeles, crossing over without papers. I began

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[*] "What was on my mind."

drinking heavily and was drunk when my sister-in-law handed me a letter from my wife. She wrote that she didn't have money to feed the children and gave them fruit because she couldn't afford milk. She didn't have soap to do the wash and so was using a plant called San Juan instead. I wasn't working, just drinking. I hadn't sent them money. "This is the last time I'm going to drink," I told myself.

"When I woke up in the morning it seemed that I had dreamt all of this. 'What an awful dream,' I thought. I reached into my pocket to see if I had any cigarettes and found the letter. I read it again and realized it wasn't a dream. It was real. I remembered that the night before I had promised myself that I would stop drinking, and I've kept that promise these fourteen years.

"When I first came back I had problems. My friends wanted me to drink. One time they even poured beer all over me. But I know how to manage a drunk and when to give him what he wants. I know when to say, "You're one hell of a man." Now they no longer try to insist that I take a drink. They're cool about it. I spent last New Year's Eve with the two Miguels. They drank and I didn't. We finally got to bed about three the next afternoon.

"When I stopped drinking I started to think more about my children, my wife, my parents, and about myself. Then I began to read. Jenaro loaned me books on the problems and struggles of the campesinos. From there I got involved in the fight for the ejido land here in Piaxtla. I learned not to laugh when someone was down, but to help them. When I was drinking I'd think "why should I give a damn about poor people, I'm poor myself." I was strong and could care less about the *pinche chuecos*.* When I stopped drinking I needed a rudder to keep myself pointed in the right direction. I read, joined the farmer's union, and came to see things in a new way. Then in 1980,

* Damn cripples.

Samuel and Jenaro invited me to help start Project Quilá. I didn't see why we needed to start a rehabilitation project. I didn't think there were any people with physical problems here. At the first meeting I was surprised to see that there were eleven people with disabilities right here in Piaxtla. I didn't know this. We talked about what a physical rehabilitation program ought to be, what our vision was for the project, and what we had to do to make that vision a reality. I loved this work. I gave myself completely to the project.

"From the most disabled to the most pigheaded, we all worked hard. We were all paid the same. No one earned more than another. We were united. The program was very humanitarian, very service oriented. We didn't care if you had money to pay for services or not, we didn't care if Samuel was around or not. We took the reigns of the program and worked well with the children and were very attentive to their needs.

"We didn't take Sundays off or take vacations. We spent all our time with the people. If a quadriplegic person arrived, we would be with them and everyone recognized that this was important. We didn't need anyone to tell us to do that. If you talk with a person who just had an accident you can help them get out of the vicious circle in which they often find themselves trapped. Over everything else the project taught me to value people.

"I was responsible for the accounting each month. Once Samuel told me that he would be away for four months. During the hottest months of the year here he would go to his cabin in New Hampshire. He wanted to leave money with me for the time he would be gone. I told him this wasn't necessary, as we had a surplus of twenty thousand pesos. We were making about three to four thousand pesos a month at that time. If you came to the project for an artificial leg we'd work until ten at night to get it done for you. If you didn't have the money to pay for it, no problem. We didn't pay for the

materials as they were donated by hospitals in the United States. If someone arrived in a pick-up truck and well dressed, we'd charge them for the work but not the materials. No one pocketed the money. Everything we made was turned over to the project. I told Samuel that we didn't need the money and that we were working to be more self-sufficient. He wasn't happy with this, and we argued for awhile. Samuel had started a foundation in the United States to support his work and the work of the projects in Piaxtla. It wasn't in his interest, or in the interest of the foundation, for Quilá to be self-sufficient. Maybe I'm wrong about this. Despite our differences of opinion we are still very good friends.

"One day, after eating lunch and bathing, I returned to the project and saw Elena sitting on the patio in front of the *consultorio* with her legs crossed. I said hi and passed her on my way to the wheelchair shop. A little later I passed by the *consultorio* again and she was in the same place sitting in the same position. When I left for home at the end of the day I saw her still sitting there in the same place. What is it with this girl?" I thought. Her legs looked normal, actually they looked good the way the sun hit her skin. I asked her who she had come with.

"My mother."

"What's your name?"

"Elena."

"Where do you come from?"

"La Cruz."

"You brought someone who's sick?" I asked.

"No, its me whose sick."

"You? What's wrong with you?"

"I can't walk." So I looked at her more carefully.

"The next day I stopped to talk with her again. I asked her what they had told her during her consultation. She said that they had told her she wouldn't walk again. She looked so sad. I asked what she thought about what they had told her.

"What's there to say?" she said. "I'm useless like this."

"You're wrong," I said. "Its just a manner of knowing how to live."

"What would you know? There's nothing wrong with you."

"No. But I've learned from the people here that life continues. You won't do the same things, but you'll do other things, and you'll do them better, because you'll do them with more heart."

"We started spending more and more time together. In the afternoons I'd go home to eat and then I'd come back and we'd talk for a couple of hours out by the fence overlooking the river. We were drawn together. We lived for the time we spent talking with one another. We became so used to one another that when we had to separate we both suffered. At least I suffered. Who knows if she did. We've never talked about this.

"I tried give her the support she needed to change her way of thinking, so that she would want to live the life that she is living now. Now she doesn't need me in the least. But at the time she needed someone to be there with her. Elena was a woman who didn't want to live. She refused to accept her disability, she absolutely would not accept it.

"If you see a plant that's withering, and you give it a little water, and start caring for it, and the plant starts to grow beautiful, and even flowers; how do you feel? You feel good, right? Elena was like that plant. Her outlook on life started to change. She started to look happier, more active, and got more involved in the project. Now she is thriving. Elena and I grew together. For

me she's someone, how can I explain it to you? She's someone unique and unforgettable. We learned so many things together.

"It was something special, something wholesome. Except things always change. One may not want this, but it happens. They sent us to Mexico City. Hugo, Elena, and I went to a meeting there. I don't remember what it was about. Something to do with community health. So we flew to Mexico City. I had no expectations that something would happen between us there. It never crossed my mind.

"Hugo was obviously interested in her. He wasn't put off by how she was, that she used a wheelchair. I became jealous and didn't want to let him succeed. When it was time to go to bed Hugo and I went back to our room. He sat down on his bed, and I sat down on mine. We each waited for the other to go to sleep. Finally he went out the door and down the hall towards Elena's room. "I'll wait," I thought. "If he is gone for awhile I'll just stay here. But if he comes back soon I'll try going to her room. I went to the door and listened carefully. My stomach was all butterflies. Then I heard Elena say, "Go to bed Hugo." After Hugo returned went down the hall to Elena's room and knocked and told her it was me. "The door's open," she said. I went in and sat on the edge of her bed. Neither of us said a thing. That was the first time we slept together. What a fool I had been! I had been blind to her as a woman because I thought of her as disabled.

"I started to have problems with my wife, because people were beginning to say things. Elena began spending time with Moisés. She knew there was no future with me. None at all. I saw that too. But we were together a year and a half and I had come to love her.

"I left Piaxtla and went to a rancho far in the sierra to forget her. I wanted to hate her, but I couldn't. Little by little it passed. Once we were unable to be

without one another. Now we are independent, we each have gone our own way. Now she's like any other woman to me. Well no, there is still a deep respect between us."

Valentín walked with me to the door. Much of the sky was now covered with clouds. We could hear thunder off in the Sierras. "Rain?" I asked. "No," he said. Not with clouds like these. But it's not far off. Watch for the sky to become crystal clear, then the storm will move in."

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The first agenda item at the Friday meeting was Ruben's. "Yesterday Rosa left Terecita in the bathroom for an hour," he said. Terecita looked at her hands as Ruben ran down a list of other times Rosa had neglected her. "Someone else should take care of Terecita," Ruben continued.

Rosa was overworked. She did the laundry and bathed and cared for Terecita, Alicia, and Pedro. Rosa usually did her work conscientiously, but being one of the few non disabled people, she was often asked to do several things at once. When under stress Rosa would lose her patience with whomever was at hand. Often this was Terecita. Both Terecita and her sister had a degenerative disease related to Multiple Sclerosis. Her sister's affliction was more advanced. She was nearly unable to move and lived with their mother in Culiacán. Her sister needed to be more closely watched as she could choke in some positions.

When Ruben finished, Elena asked Terecita if she would like Lupita to care for her. Terecita had pulled the arms of her wheelchair in towards her body to better support her arms. Touching her cheek with her floppy right

hand, Terecita gave a barely audible, "Si." Elena looked to Lupita and Lupita nodded. Socorro then read the next item. "Francisco and José."

Elena introduced two men from Culiacán who had arrived the day before. Francisco was in his forties. He had shortish graying hair. Five years earlier he had been shot in the head. José , who was younger, had been shot in the back eleven years earlier. Elena asked them what they wanted from Quilá. Both men said they would like to learn to make wheelchairs.

"Do you think this is realistic," Elena asked Francisco, "given your disability and the fact that you have use of only one arm? This isn't to say that you can't learn wheelchair design, shop management, or things like that." Francisco nodded, but said nothing. Camilo read the list of Quilá agreements out loud for the new men: No drugs. No alcohol. No sex in public. Going down the list he emphasized the agreement on self-reliance. "Everyone needs to take initiative in learning to care for themselves. In Quilá you will find friends, not servants."

The group then talked about who would help the new men get up in the morning, bathe, and get ready for bed. The ball went back and forth from one staff member to another. Alberto said he would remain at Quilá only a while longer. He had told me the day before that a representative from his guerrilla group in Guatemala would return for him that month. Rosita said that she already had two people to care for. She was upset about the earlier criticism and wasn't about to volunteer for more responsibility. Camilo said he was already overworked. Socorro turned to me and asked if I had time. She caught me off guard. Every excuse I could think of sounded weak. "I'll help them get ready for bed," I said. Efrain, the project's driver, was finally pressured into assisting the men in the morning. Everyone looked at Camilo.

"Fine," he said, "I'll bathe them," relieved to have been able to hold his new obligations to a minimum.

The next agenda item was Camilo's. He read a letter from a college professor from Brigham Young University in Salt Lake City, who wanted to arrange a two month visit to Quilá for thirty of his students. I slumped in my seat. No one had any objections and the meeting adjourned. I asked Elena if our interview was still on. She said she'd meet me in the *consultorio* in five minutes. As I waited for her I imagined what Quilá would be like with thirty Mormon youth. Sweat began to break out on my temples.

Gunshots awoke me from my reverie. I first heard a few shots, then a barrage of gunfire. I looked out to the street from the *consultorio.* Claudio and Andrés, who had been working on the electrical box in front of the project, rushed into the women's house. Moisés was the only one left on the street. He saw me and asked if I had seen his daughter Yoali. I offered to look for her up on the main street. "Correle!"* he said, as I ran up the alleyway. Up on the main street people were standing in their doorways looking down toward the river. I found Yoali in the cooperative store. Maggie said she had heard that someone was trying to rob the beer dispensary. I went back to the project with Yoali and talked with Elena until Andrés came in with the news. The municipal police had come to Piaxtla to do a gun sweep and had come upon a young man drinking alone by the river. Andrés had seen him earlier in the day and said that he was quite drunk. The young man apparently had a pistol in his belt. The police surrounded him and ordered him to hand over his weapon. Andrés said the man told them they wouldn't take him to jail and beat him again and started to run. The police claimed that he fired first. Andrés went back to the shop to clean up. Yoali started to follow him. Elena

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* "Run!"

told her to stay with us in the *consultorio.* Elena closed the door and suggested we do the interview.

"I heard that foreign doctors often came to Piaxtla so I asked my mother to take me. My spirits began to rise. I had hopes that I might be seen by a spinal cord specialist from the United States. I thought that finally there would be someone who could help.

"There was very little to Quilá at the time. Just the orthotics shop and the wheelchair shop. They were just starting to build the *consultorio.* The property was covered with trees. There were a lot of children that had come for consultations. My brother carried me to a cot under the mangos. Then they took me to a room that they were using as an office. I asked see a specialist, but they said there were none there at the time.

"Jenaro examined me and we talked about my problem. He told me it was unlikely that I would walk again. I became furious. No one had ever said this to me. I cried and cried. They told me there were things they could teach me, but I didn't listen. When they started talking about wheelchairs, I turned to my mother and said "lets go." She wanted to hear what they had to say but I was insistent. It was getting dark so they took me back to the car and we left.

"On my way home I was a mess. I was sitting in the front of the pick-up by the door. I tried to open the door and throw myself out. But they grabbed me by the hair and held me in. I was still upset when we arrived at the house, and my mother was still yelling at me for what I had tried to do. Because I was so excited about seeing a specialist I hadn't eaten all day. I really like chile rellenos. A neighbor brought me a plate full when we returned. I told her to take her chiles and get out of my sight. She was very hurt but my mother

explained to her what had happened. Joking with me later she said, "Hell if I'll ever cook chiles for you again."

"My mother suggested that I return to Quilá to learn how to walk with braces. I told her I wanted to hear nothing more about the place. Samuel visited us and also brought up the topic of braces. Again I refused. But with time I came to accept the idea. Whatever it took I figured, even braces, as long as I could walk.

"So I returned to Quilá to have braces made. After a few days my mother had to go back home, but she broke her leg before she could return. My world fell apart. My mother had done everything for me. How would I get by alone? Who would help me? I felt I could do nothing. I had to ask for help to take a bath. I couldn't dry myself in the wheelchair. I wasn't even able to completely dry myself in the wheelchair. It was hard to ask for favors because I hardly knew the people there.

"They asked my mother to delay her return as long as possible so that I could learn to be more independent. I didn't know this and thought that she had become fed up with me. I got really angry. "My family has abandoned me," I thought, "but I'll show them that I can get along fine without them." I started using a wheelchair. I had little choice.

"Nobody at Quilá knew much about people with spinal cord injuries. We started experimenting. I could no longer defecate as I had before. So I made suppositories out of soap. A little bit of excrement would come out. It wasn't sufficient, but what came out was enough. At times someone would knock on the door. I was too embarrassed to tell them what I was doing. I just said I was busy, and would be out in a few minutes. When Socorro came to Quilá she taught me how to empty myself completely by putting on a glove and stimulating my bowel with my finger. But I couldn't carry the bucket of water

in to flush the toilet. I felt useless. I couldn't even carry a bucket of water. I had to ask Laura to throw a bucket of water in the toilet. Though this was difficult, I had to try because I was determined to show my family that even though they had abandoned me, I was going to *salir adelante.*[*] It seemed that it took them forever to make my braces. They did this on purpose so I would stay longer.

"I had arrived at Quilá two years after my accident. I spent all that time locked in my room. This was my doing, not my family's. My accident happened as my fiancé and I were on our way to our wedding. When it became clear that I was disabled he abandoned me. I thought that he had left me because I was useless and could do nothing for myself. That was my state of mind at the time. I'd also lost trust in my friends. They stopped showing up a few months after the accident. I felt that those who did visit me did so out of curiosity rather than friendship.

"During my first weeks at the project I often sat on the consultation room porch. I hardly moved. I just sat with my eyes nailed to the ground, submerged in my problem. Valentín once told me that at first he thought that I was deaf, dumb, and blind, because I never moved, and never raised my eyes to look at people as they passed. People spoke to me and I didn't answer. I was lost in my problem and didn't want to accept anything from anyone.

"With time I began to meet people. They offered me friendship, and that felt good. I missed having friends to talk with. This was when I met Valentín. We took to one another immediately and began to spend a lot of time together. I didn't think of him romantically because I thought all of this was over for me. I believed that the possibility of this kind of love no longer existed for me, and could not exist in the future. I didn't think about how I

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[*] Get ahead.

dressed and didn't use make-up. "Why bother?" I thought. I never stopped bathing myself and kept myself clean, but as far as feeling that a man might be attracted to me, well, no. There were people who misinterpreted our friendship, I can see how they could have thought something was happening between us, but at the time what we had was a very close friendship.

"Valentín teased me a lot. One day he asked me why I never helped swept the patio. "How am I going to sweep in this wheelchair," I said. "With the broom, like this," and he began to sweep the porch. He then threw me the broom and left. I asked myself how I was going to do this. Well, I picked up the broom, turned the wheelchair this way and that, and started to sweep. This was something really important for me. I swept the porch and the *consultorio*. I don't know how I did it. At that time it was very difficult.

"I began to clean the consultation room every day and read the village health manual which Samuel had written. I read every page of this book. I had nothing else to read. I then read each new chapter of the rehabilitation guide that Samuel was writing and began attending all the orthopedic consultations. Again, not because I was really interested, but simply because I had nothing else to do. I watched but never opened my mouth. Little by little, my interest grew. Samuel always looked for me when there was a consultation. He always treated me as if I were important. I felt I had to learn since it was so important to him that I do so.

"They finally finished my braces. I felt wonderful when I tried them on. "My hour for walking has finally come," I thought. I practiced walking day after day on the parallel bars. But there were a lot of children who came for consultations. "How am I ever going to learn to walk," I thought, "if I have to be with Samuel in the consultation room." But I'd take off the braces and go to the consultation and often not be able to practice for the rest of the day.

Samuel didn't insist that I be there, but I wanted to be. I began to enjoy it. I began to know the children and become immersed in project activities.

"I injured my foot while walking with the braces. I didn't realize this at first as I have no sensation below my waist. My leg swelled and I couldn't put on the brace. Finally Valentín took me to the clinic for an x-ray. My foot was broken. At that time they didn't know a lot about making things for people with spinal cord injuries. They made a special brace for me to stabilize the leg. The problem was that with the brace I was only able to lie down or sit with my leg elevated. "What am I going to do like this," I wondered. So I decided to go back to my home in Piaxtla. A few weeks later my leg was hit by a strong spasm and broke out of the brace. The leg was infected and there was a large pressure sore on my heel. It smelled like a dead animal. The doctor said that I had gangrene and that the foot had to be amputated. My mother arranged the paperwork with the social security hospital as fast as she could so that they could do the operation. "You're not taking me anywhere," I said. "I'm not letting them cut my foot off, whatever the consequences." "No *mihija,*"* she pleaded, "this can't wait!" And she continued to do what had to be done to get me into the hospital.

"Samuel came to visit. He suggested that I come to Quilá and said they could treat my leg there. Where I was they were about to amputate my leg, so I had no problem making a decision. At Quilá, Jenaro cut away the dead tissue and cleaned my sores. Samuel had heard that honey poured into wounds helps them heal. I was so bad off by that point that I told them to do whatever they wanted. My wounds healed within a month and a half.

"I became more and more involved in project activities. I wanted to learn as much as I could about doing orthopedic evaluations. I read Samuel's

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*The contraction of *mi hija*, my daughter.

rehabilitation handbook again and again. This was twelve years ago, in 1984. At the time Samuel did all the orthopedic evaluations. When he was in Piaxtla there would always be a lot of people who came for consultations. He always tried to involve me. He'd call out, "Elena, consults,"* and I'd come quickly. I was interested, and as I was reading the book I was motivated to learn about these problems. At first I just observed quietly. I have always been curious, so I watched what Samuel was did very carefully.

"Samuel began to ask me what I thought, but I remained silent. I was reluctant to answer because I wasn't sure if I was right. When he realized how much I was learning he made opportunities for me to take part in the examinations. If I made a mistake he'd insert himself in the conversation and go on talking for so long that by the time he corrected the error neither the family nor I would realize what had happened. After the people left he would explain the mistake to me. He had tremendous patience with me. Maybe it was my interest that caught his attention. This is how I learned what I know, thought I still need to learn more. I could not have learned these things anywhere else. From that time on I lived in Piaxtla. My mother was very proud of what I was doing. The anger I had felt towards them turned into affection and gratitude. What I at first took to be rejection I later came to see as support.

"With time I began to take more responsibility for the consultations. I used to encourage people to get out of the house, not to be ashamed, and to go out and enjoy themselves. But I myself never left the project grounds. This went on for quite some time. My life was about work. That was it.

"Even when I was with Valentín we always talked about work. We hardly ever talked about personal things, nor about his family nor mine. I

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* Consultations

was trying to immerse myself in my work in order to keep from thinking about my problems. I kept active all the time. Even if I were tired I continued working. It was fine if they woke me up at in the middle of the night if someone needed help.

"Valentín made me laugh a lot. He likes to think that he's a woman's man. When other men are around he tries to show that he's macho, that he has a lot of women, even though he always insists to me that he isn't like that. When a women would come to the project he would turn his head and say, "que buena esta esa vieja,"* or, "look at those legs she has." You've seen how foolish he can be at times. I just laughed. I wasn't jealous because as I've told you we were just friends. Sometimes it pissed me off because the women paid no attention to him but he'd follow them around completely infatuated. With others he had better luck. But he'd joke and tell me I was the only one. He always treated me with tremendous respect.

"Eventually our relationship began to change. I realized that I was someone very important in his life. Its wonderful when you're in love. Waiting for the time of the day when you'll be together. I had thought that a man would never again be attracted to me. Valentín showed me that this wasn't true. But he was married. I knew that our relationship couldn't go very far, and that there was no future in it for me. He began to have problems at home with his wife. I didn't feel good about this. It wasn't fair to her. And it wasn't fair to me. I don't deserve to be a second serving. I told him that it would be better if we ended it there. Like any macho male he didn't want to. It hurt me too. "But what future can I hope for with you?" I asked. "Soon everyone will be gossiping about me. They never talk about the man."

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*"What a body she has."

"I have much to thank Valentín for. His caring and support were very, very important to me. We once talked about the possibility that the feelings I had for him were mostly those of gratitude. I can't say that gratitude was all I felt, but it was certainly at the core.

"It was about this time that I got to know Moisés. From the very beginning he was someone important to me. When Valentín was away Moisés was always there to help me. I knew that he liked me and felt bad that I couldn't care for him in the same way. I began to think about him a lot, and that I would have a better future with him. Maybe it was this that helped me leave Valentín. But I refused to begin a courtship with Moisés until I could honestly reciprocate his feelings.

"I had always cared for Moisés and with time began to feel a special affection for him. Moisés knew all about my relationship with Valentín. He only said that I was the one that had to decide, but that he wouldn't demand anything from me. He was always so tender with me. With time my affection for him grew into love. He would bring me small gifts, chocolate, a flower. When I had a craving to eat something he would go looking for it in the tiendas or in houses of friends and bring it back to me. When I was sick he always stayed with me regardless of the time of day or night. He knew that I'm afraid of rats and always chase them away. These are small details, but when you're poor they can be quite beautiful.

"Wasn't this about the time that Vania arrived?" I asked.

"Yes. She came with her grandmother. They were from Culiacán. I was taking more responsibility for the consultations by that time. Vania's grandmother explained her situation to me. Vania was born in Culiacán. When she was one and a half there was a shoot-out in front of the house

between the *judiciales* * and someone they tried to arrest. She was sitting by the door and was struck by a stray bullet fired by one of the judiciales. It didn't kill her but it did damage her spinal column.

"Her parents started arguing a lot. Her father was upset about the medical expenses and didn't want to live with a paraplegic child. He abandoned the family and moved in with another woman. Her mother was left with Vania and her little sister. This was all too much for her. She took the easiest way out and killed herself.

"When Vania came to us she was about seven years old. Her grandmother was getting old and worried about who would care for Vania when she died. She had no other family. Vania's injury was high on her spine. She had infected pressure sores on her buttocks. We agreed to take her for a time and see if we could help her. We began to treat her pressure sores and arranged for her to go to school here in Piaxtla."

There was a knock on the door and Socorro entered the *consultorio.* When she saw that we were doing an interview she started to leave. Elena told her to stay, as we were talking about Vania. Elena explained to me that the two of them had been responsible for Vania, and that Socorro knew the child as well as she did.

"Everyone in the group helped with Vania," Elena continued. "She was very affectionate. You would have loved her Daniel. She acted as if life had been very good to her."

"How can I explain it," said Socorro, "She was like our child."

"What did she look like?" I asked.

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* Judicial police.

"She..." Socorro took a deep breath so as not to cry. We sat quietly for a few minuets until she was ready. "She a very pretty face, she was dark with clear skin, short hair.." Tears flowed down Socorro's freckled cheeks.

"We spoke with the principal and arranged for her to attend school her in Piaxtla," said Elena." Chayo, the woman who shared a room with Socorro and me, got her ready for school in the morning and was responsible for helping her with her homework. Everyone pitched in. Moisés and Andrés were very fond of her. She often hung out in the shop with them"

"The boys from school would visit her in the afternoons," said Socorro. "She had these deep brown eyes. There were always boys following her."

"When she came she had lice. Pretty soon we were all infested." said Elena. "I remember sitting under the mango trees together talking as we picked the lice off one another. She used a gurney like Ruben's to keep the weight off her pressure sores. Her friends would come for her in the morning and help her push the gurney to school. She stayed two years with us. She helped with the other children here at Quilá. She helped Yesica, a younger child that was here, with her bowel program each day. She taught her how to transfer from her wheelchair to her bed and other essential things. It was very beautiful to watch.

"A visiting nurse from the United States became very attached to Vania. She arranged for her to go to California for a spinal fusion. Vania had back problems and they said that this would stabilize her spinal column. This all happened very quickly and the truth is that we weren't consulted. Samuel arrived and said all the arrangements had been made and that we should get Vania ready for the trip to the United States. I understood the need for the operation, its just that it all happened so fast.

"Vania had a gold chain with a small medallion of the Virgin of Guadalupe that she had asked that I keep for her..." Elena paused, clearly saddened by the memory. "When the van was ready to leave I handed it to her and said, 'Que Dios te cuide.'* She gave it back to me and said, 'No Elena, you keep it for me until I return.'

"I was in the *consultorio* when a telegram arrived for Samuel. He read it and was silent. He had this odd look on his face. I took the telegram. It was in English but I understood what it said. I wanted to be wrong. I looked again at Samuel and saw tears were running down his face and I knew that she had died. We hugged each other. Then we told the others.

"We later learned that her heart had failed during the surgery. It was a complex operation it went on for hours. They knew that she had congenital heart problems and should not have put her under such a strain. I still have Vania's medallion. Its a memory of her that she left for me."

We sat quietly in for a few minutes. Elena turned to Socorro and asked her to tell me more about those early days at Quilá.

"I had just come back from same hospital in the United States, where they operated on my pressure sores," said Socorro. There were a lot of children at the project. The children from the pueblo came here to play. They had helped build the park. They went to the woods and helped bring back poles to make the swings, carrousel, and other equipment. The children knew that they themselves were going to use it together with the disabled kids who came here. The ramps, swings, and other equipment are designed to help with the therapy. The parents can build these things by their houses, because they are from materials from the woods. Everyone was active and working in

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* May God watch over you.

the shops and in the kitchen and seemed to get along really well. I moved into the women's house and shared a room with Elena.

"My first years here were very beautiful. All of us spent a lot of time together. In the afternoons the men and women would hang out together and joke and talk. It was lovely. Once we closed the project for a day to clean up the park. All of us together. Nobody tried to get out of it. Chayo was in charge of the kitchen, but Elena and I would help her. The project was cleaner. People paid attention to this. The men who have come more recently could care less, and go into the kitchen with their wheelchair tires full of dirt and mud.

"When we played *La Loteria* we taxed the winnings to help pay for the Christmas dinner we were planning. It was *bien bonito,* Daniel, *bien padre.* I wasn't actually there for the dinner, I went to Cosalá. But Valentín was there, Valentín's wife, Elena, Moisés, everyone.

Quilá gave me a new spirit, I felt reborn. Before my accident I did everything for myself. Then I was helpless. I thought that I would have to depend on a nurse and my family for the rest of my life. I thought I was sick and had to be in bed, and that they would have to put on my socks, shoes, even underpants. When I was at Shriner's Hospital I learned once again how to take care of myself. The only thing that I can't do now that I could before is walk. That is the only thing. I learned to iron, do the wash, cook, dress myself, bathe myself, alone like before. Its a little more difficult, it takes a little more effort, but I can do it. Shriner's Hospital had all the conveniences. There is a chair with a foam seat in the shower. Here no. Your bed is at the same level as your wheelchair. The washing machine was also adapted to the height of the wheelchair. Everything there was adapted. Here no. So I had to adapt what I learned there to my life here.

"In the United States Samuel spoke to me about living at Quilá. He said there were people there that needed my help. At first my parents said no. But I was determined to show them that I could get by on my own, without nurses, or someone attending to me every moment. I wanted to help other people. I felt good inside, because I knew I could help someone who is in a wheelchair, and teach them what I had learned.

"When you are healthy you think that you have the world at your feet. You think that you can do anything you want to. But it isn't like that. I never paid attention to those who had problems. I might have felt pity for them, but I never thought that I could help them. Maybe I was self-centered, or maybe I just wasn't aware.

"I was very content at Quilá and I learned many things. I learned that being in a wheelchair doesn't keep you from being able to work if you are given the opportunity. At Quilá I learned how to live. I worked with people who had recently become paraplegic. It made me sad. I remembered when I was in their situation. So I wanted to help, to give them support, advice, talk with them, tell them that just because they use a wheelchair doesn't mean that their life has come to a halt. I helped with their physical therapy, fed them, and taught them things I thought were useful. Elena taught me how to treat pressure sores. When she was away I was responsible for treating their sores. I had these feelings of satisfaction which I had never had before. My first paycheck was a great event for me. I think I earned all of sixteen pesos. But it seemed like a fortune to me. I felt great. I used to reject my fate. "Why me?" Now I think, "Why *not* me. What can happen to her can happen to me."

"I saw that many people at the project had boyfriends and girlfriends, and that they, well, had a full romantic life. This opened up a hope for me that I

too might have a boyfriend. I felt that my life was going to change. I got all dressed up my first Sunday in Piaxtla. I looked pretty good, I think. As I crossed the yard Efrain arrived on horseback. 'Who's that?' I heard him ask. It was planting time so he had time off from the project. But from the moment he saw me he started coming around every afternoon when he finished working in the milpa. He finally got the courage to talk with me. We became friends and one Sunday he said he liked being with me, and we started going out together.

"For me to have a boyfriend, well this was like another life. This was another way of thinking, that a man would notice me, not my wheelchair. I saw that Efrain loved me. This was a turning point for me. We'd buy tacos in the plazuela and go to the weekly movies in the empty lot by Chunel's house. Every Sunday I'd eat at his house. His mother would send a kid to get me. Once Efrain and I went to a rancho named Las Chicuras on horseback. We took sandwiches and oranges and ate them under a large fig tree. It wasn't all so ideal. We had our share of problems.

"Efrain proposed to me on Christmas Eve. I said he'd have to talk with my parents. He went to Cosalá to speak with them. My father became furious."

"He didn't want you to marry Efrain?" I asked.

"He didn't want me to marry anyone. He said that a man would tire of me and leave me. He didn't want me to suffer. Finally he accepted the idea. My mother convinced him. So he agreed but said that we should get married in Piaxtla, not in Cosalá. We were married here in the pueblo by Kiko Manjarrez, the justice of the peace."

"Little by little more people arrived at the project. Adolfo, Ruben, people who were more... I don't know, people who life has treated more harshly.

People began to arrive who were more violent, who smoked marijuana, and drank into the middle of the night at the project. Adolfo beat a visitor with a belt. And this for me was really bad.

"The children stopped coming because of the alcohol and drugs. I wish that we could go back to those earlier times. I was so happy here. I used to have so much passion for the project. But my enthusiasm is fading.

Socorro then said she had work to do and left Elena and I alone in the *consultorio*. Over the years Elena had become extremely competent in doing orthopedic evaluations. She was especially effective when working with people with polio, spinal cord injuries, and cerebral palsy. I asked her to tell me to tell me a little about this work.

"When I enter the consultation room," she said, "it's as if I am entering into another world. I put aside my troubles and focus on the family here to see us and their problem. Sometimes I lose track of time. I have been criticized for taking too much time with each consultation. They say at other places it takes ten minutes but here we can take up to two or three hours. It is important to immerse yourself in the person's problem and how you are going to help them. When I do a consultation I give all of myself. I never worry how I look in front of people, or pretend that I know everything even though I don't. Over the years I've learned a lot about orthopedic evaluation and have worked with people with many kinds of problems. I know when I can handle a problem and when I can't.

"From the moment the family enters the *consultorio*, I try to meet them with a smile, so they feel like they are with family. I always try to make the person feel comfortable. If its a child brought by his family, I try to be friendly with the family, and a perhaps give the child a gentle hug. Its very important

to gain the confidence of the boy or girl and their family. If you show some affection they will be more likely to talk about their problem.

"I learn as much from talking with the child and family as I do from the physical examination. If the child is unable to speak for herself or care for herself, I talk with the family, get to know a little about them, how they live, their house and their economic situation. I ask if the child spends time alone, and if she has friends. I look to see how they treat their child and if the child is over protected or poorly cared for. If the child needs stimulation and could benefit by listening to music, it is important to know if they have a radio, because not everyone has one. There are people that don't, and there are people who have too many things. I base much of my consultation on these discussions. If the person is an adult, I also need to get to know them and find out if the person is able to take the medicine alone, or not.

"We have learned from life. We haven't gone to the university, and we don't know all the treatment strategies. At times people come with difficult kinds of cases. So, I like it if there are other people at the consultation, someone from the brace shop, prosthetics, physical therapy, or whatever the problem happens to be. I know when I have the capacity to help and when I don't. If I don't feel secure about something I won't do it. But sometimes the lack of a university education can be an advantage. We can see when someone doesn't know how to read, for example. So when we give them medicine we need to draw a diagram on the pill container to explain how to take the medications. We make four boxes. Three of these have a picture of the sun at different phases of its daily cycle. The first box shows the sun at dawn, the second at noon, the third at sunset, and the final box has a drawing of the moon. So we might mark the first and third boxes and say 'take half a tablet in the morning, and the other half in the early evening.' It might seem

like were treating them like fools, but many people become confused if you don't explain it to them carefully. It's the same with the exercises. After I demonstrate exercises for the child, I watch to see if the family can do them. If not, we go over them again.

"There are times when medications, exercises, or even surgery will not help the child. Sometimes there is not much that can be done. Families with a son with muscular dystrophy or a daughter with a spinal cord injury arrive at Quilá with expectations that we can cure them. We can suggest exercises and activities, but first the family has to know the problem. We can't deceive them. They need to know what future to expect for their child.

"We explain the importance of the family's support and love to the child. We try to get them to understand what the child can and can not do, so that they will not under stimulate the child on one hand, or demand too much from her on the other. Sometimes you see a child fall and you hear, 'get up if you don't want a spanking.' But if the family understands the problem they will understand their child better. This is what we do here. I feel its very important and I'm proud of our work with the families.

"We always give people the opportunity to ask questions. For this we need their confidence, their friendship, so that they can ask things that they are holding inside. Things that they have never spoken of with the doctors. They look at the doctor, so elegant, so arrogant, and are afraid to talk about their problem. When you ask the family, "what did the doctor tell you, what do you have," they say, "he just told us to take these pills." The doctors sell them pills and vitamins and tell them only that they have a disability.

"When I see a person with a spinal cord injury I understand their situation well, because I have this problem myself. But I always try to put

myself in their place to see what their feeling. I went through a deep depression myself and need to be sensitive to such things.

"The doctors often give people false hopes. You will never accept the work it takes to re-learn to do the things you did before, or how to use a wheelchair or crutches, as long as you have this hope that with time, or with another operation, or with another stay at an expensive clinic, you will walk again. Hope is a good thing, but at the same time it can hurt you. For this reason its very important to tell the truth even though it might be painful.

"Its hard to tell someone the truth about the problem they have when they have come with such high hopes. It is the most difficult thing I do here. But I know that one day they will accept it and understand why I had to tell them. Years ago, when Jenaro told me that it was unlikely that I would walk again, I sent him to the devil. But if he hadn't told me the truth I might still be in bed waiting to walk again.

"When a child arrives unable to walk, and leaves walking with braces that we have made for him, I feel really good. A few months ago a ten year old boy was brought by his parents for a consultation. He had polio and his legs were contracted. All his life he got around on his hands and knees. When we examined him we saw that there was a possibility that he could walk. But we would have to correct the contractures. We put his legs in casts and stretched them slowly. We then made braces for him. In a short time he was walking. He was so happy that he said that we were witches. Why? Because he never thought that he'd be able to walk.

"There was another child who used a wheelchair when she arrived. She was able to walk just a few steps with difficulty. She had a lot of back pain. I worked out a physical therapy plan with Claudio to do exercises with her to stretch her spinal column. As Claudio and I were talking I noticed that she

was looking at me with some distrust. You could almost hear her thinking, "this woman that says she's going to help me is worse off than I am!" Claudio followed through and did the exercises with her each day. When the exercises has stretched her spinal column sufficiently I told her to try walking a few steps.

"She walked across the room and said, "I don't feel any pain!" She began to laugh and then to cry from happiness. Tears started down my face too as I watched her. "You are the best," she said. "No, its not that we're the best," I said, "but that we simply did something that made you well." And she left here walking as if she had been doing this all her life. These are the satisfactions. People have come here looking for "the witches who cure children." Its not that we practice witchcraft, nor are we better than the doctors, its nothing like that. Its simply that sometimes we are more conscientious. We work with the people to help them, not to leave them even worse off financially. We are not interested in having them come back every few weeks so that we can charge them for consults and medicines. I'm not saying that all the people improve, but most do.

"There are times when we are not able to do anything for the child. Often people with spinal cord injuries come with hopes that they will walk again. These are the times, especially when they are quadriplegic, when one feels the bad, when one is unable to help. But for me the most discouraging, painful, consultations are when a child comes with advanced Muscular Dystrophy. They are children who, well, who will not have a long life. This hurts. A woman came who had five children who all had Muscular Dystrophy. She brought three of them. They came all the way from Cosalá. When they arrived, what could I say? Simply the truth. She already knew, but she came

with the hope that we would say that they didn't have Muscular Dystrophy. But I couldn't say what isn't true.

"Many people arrive here and don't recover completely, but there is a change in their life. They are physically equal to when they came, but they have gained confidence and the desire to make their lives work. Other people just stop. They stagnate. Perhaps we have made mistakes in working with them. Or perhaps they have simply given up. There are times when I leave a consultation crying because I was not able to help. Other times, I am able to help people simply with a talk. The consultations have brought me smiles and they have brought me sadness. Like everything in life, one thing compensates for another."

As we left the *consultorio* I asked Elena why Camilo had emphasized self-reliance when going over the Quilá agreements with Francisco and José at this week's meeting. "I was in the kitchen today with Rosa," she said. "Francisco was a foot from the table and waited there patiently until Rosa was able to come over and push him. He has full use of his arms and upper body but is unwilling to do anything for himself. His family did everything for him. They even spoon fed him. Claudio and I had him turn over by himself in the therapy room. He's been disabled five years and this was the first time he had ever done this! He wants to walk. He's obsessed with this. I don't think he has much of a chance. But he can learn how to care for himself and be much more independent. "

When I arrived at Quilá that evening Francisco was waiting for me outside the men's house. I pushed him to his cot. He then led me through his nightly routine. He grabbed on to my neck and had me lift him and move him to the cot. He was a heavy man and the transfer was a little rougher than

we would have liked. I helped him lie on his side with his legs slightly bent. "Now put this pillow behind my lower calf to hold me in place," He then said. "Good. Now bring the chair over here by the bed and put the bucket on it." From its odor it was clear the bucket was for urine. "Can you put the glass right here by the cot." I gathered that the cup was to collect the urine which he would then pour into the bucket. Francisco then asked me to fill his water bottle and put it on the table by his cot.

Many people at the project have similarly elaborate nighttime routines. A visiting prosthetist from the United States who had himself lost a leg said that he found that, "...the thing that is most striking about being disabled is how much more time everything takes. How much I have to plan ahead." We were just about to make lunch together and he used that as an example. "If I'm not wearing my leg I have to plan every move. I have to think about how I'm going to get the pot to the water, put the water in it, and get the pot on the stove. Everything takes more thought, everything takes more time, and everything takes more energy."

On my way back to Goyo's I passed the house of the young man who had been shot that afternoon. Men were sitting on wooden benches in front of the house, eating pumpkin seeds, and talking quietly. Manuel and Enrique were at the edge of the gathering. Several women were in the parlor with the casket. The young man's father, a small man in his early sixties, moved from bench to bench offering a plastic jug of *mezcal* and coffee in plastic cups. He appeared to find some refuge from his grief in these small acts of hospitality. I overheard Jenaro say "por nada,"* which seemed to describe the young man's death well. Jenaro might have been speaking about something

* "For nothing."

altogether different, because a sentence or two later the men close to him laughed quietly.

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Project Quilá opened in 1980. Over the last fifteen years the project has served over two thousand children and adults. The disabilities of people seen include juvenile rheumatoidarthritis, cerebral paralysis, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, polio, spina bifida, and spinal cord injuries.* Those with pressure sores often stay for an extended period for treatment. People in need of braces, prosthetic legs, wheelchairs, or special seating often stay only long enough to have their equipment made for them in one of the shops. The craftspeople who do the work are all disabled. Elena and Socorro are the only ones who have completed high school. The people in the shops generally serve their clients with sensitivity and care, but have on occasion provided substandard services and orthopedic equipment. Through my observations and interviews I tried to isolate the variables underlying this discrepancy in the quality of services provided. Personal competence and commitment to the work seemed to be most important. Educational background seemed irrelevant.

Andrés is an example of the ideal. There seemed to be nothing he could not fix. The people of Piaxtla brought their shoes, stereos, bicycles, and watches to him for repair. He was quiet spoken, conscientious, and wore a white cowboy hat that went with his Earl Flynn like good looks. Andrés grew up in El Caballo, a rancho high in the Sierras, and contracted polio as an infant. He was one of the steadiest people at the project as well as one of my

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* People have also come to Quilá with tuberculosis of the spine, club feet, burns, oseteo gentica imperfecta, down's syndrome, osteomyelitis (bone infection), amputations, and developmental delay problems.

closest friends. He agreed to my requests for interviews only to help me out. Few of the interviews lasted more than thirty minutes. He felt his talent was in his hands rather than in his way with words. We did the following in the prosthetics shop after the project had closed:

"I first met Samuel about twenty five years ago. He used to travel through the ranchos in this part of the Sierras and often stayed with us in El Caballo. At the time I got about on all fours. I was able to climb up ravines and tall trees. I helped my father and brothers clear the fields for planting and carried firewood in from the forest. I did everything my brothers did, with more difficulty, but I did the same work they did. Samuel brought me a pair of crutches but I didn't like them. I fell a lot.

"When you have a disability from a young age you don't really notice it. I felt like I was normal. I wasn't embarrassed going about my hands and feet. All the people that lived on the rancho were family. They didn't stare. As with all families, my brothers and I fought a lot. It was the law of the jungle, the strongest ruled. My brothers were older and stronger, and so they won. But I defended myself well. I would get in my blows.

"I only started having problems when I entered school. The families in the area paid a woman from a nearby rancho to teach us how to read and write. I was about eight years old at the time. Each morning I would arrive at school with my hands and clothing filthy from climbing up the trail on all fours. The teacher would scold me and sometimes send me home. I'd get pissed off because I knew of no way of arriving at school cleaner. Later, after Samuel gave me the crutches, my father would yell at me for not using them. I refused to do so because I'd fall every few feet. I finally started holding pieces

of wood in my hands as I went to school so I could arrive with my hands a little cleaner.

"By the time I was twelve all my friends in the ranchos had girlfriends. I realized that if I kept walking on all fours I would never get a girl interested in me. I started using the crutches and little by little I learned to walk with them without falling. Everyone was really supportive. When they saw me walking with crutches they say, "hey, you've begun to walk."

"Samuel arranged for me to go to Shriner's Hospital in the United States. They operated on me several times and taught me how to walk with crutches. When I returned, Samuel spoke with my father and arranged for me to go to school in Piaxtla. I lived with Jenaro and Norma. I went to school in the mornings and helped at the clinic in the afternoons. I cleaned up and made those little spoons you use to make the oral rehydration drink. When they held health worker trainings I would attend after school. I finished primary school and started working at the clinic full time, helping with the vegetable garden, the chickens, and other community projects. After more training I went back to my rancho in the Sierras to work as a health worker. There was a woman nearby who had been a health promoter for some time. When I wasn't sure about how to treat someone I sent them to her or down to the clinic.

"After a couple of years of this work Samuel invited me help with a rehabilitation program that they were starting in Piaxtla. I didn't even know what the word rehabilitation meant. They sent me to learn to make braces in two orthotics shop in Mexico City. At the first shop I learned to make metal braces, at the second I learned to make them from plastic. I stayed for two months and returned to Piaxtla. I started doing what I could with the little

that I had learned. I ran into problems as there was a lot that I didn't know. I asked for more training and was sent to a shop in the United States.

"By the time I returned I knew more or less how to make orthopedic braces. Orthotists from the United States came to teach here, so I was able to keep learning. I like it better when the teachers come here. I feel more confident. When I'm in someone else's shop I'm afraid that I'll break something or make a mistake. Also, when I worked in the shops outside of Piaxtla I didn't get the opportunity to practice very much. I learned what I could by watching. You have to be a little aggressive and ask questions every few minutes. If you don't ask no one will explain. Most of the teachers who come here are patient and you feel free to ask questions. The only problem is that they come for such a short time. After awhile I began teaching Moisés and others at Quilá what I had learned."

"How did you teach Moisés?" I asked.

"He began as my assistant. When you make the mold you always need another person. As we worked I'd let him place the foot and correct him if he needed. I explained everything as we went along. The most important thing was for him to learn to take the measurements well, and to learn how to make the plaster of Paris mold which we call the negative. Then I showed him how to make another mold from the negative which is equal to the original leg. When I saw that he more or less knew how to do one of these steps I'd back off a little and let him see what he could do. At first this was with small things, but as he gained skill and I gained confidence in his work I let him take more responsibility with the patients."

"How was this different than how you learned?

"I explained everything as we did it. When I was in the shops they never did this. When I had prepared Moisés to take over the orthotics shop I

switched to wheelchair making. I wanted to learn to weld. Once I was able to do that there was all sorts of work for me at the project and in the community. I worked on wheelchairs, made gates, and whatever else people needed. Valentín was in the prosthetics shop at the time. When I didn't have any work to do I'd help him. I became interested in this work. When a prosthetist would come here to teach I watched carefully and soon spent most of my time helping to make artificial legs. When Valentín left I took over the shop. Now Socorro is helping me out like I helped Valentín.

"I remember when I was first starting out here a girl named Claudia came for braces. She was about two years old. Now she's fifteen. She grew rapidly and her parents had to bring her often to have new braces made. When I moved to the prosthetics shop her parents continued to insist that I work on her braces. They won't let anyone else touch them. Sometimes they bring me small gifts like a kilo of apples, or bread.

"There was another girl who came shortly after. Her parents had just had braces made for her in one of the professional shops in Guadalajara. They were very expensive but were heavy and nearly useless. The biggest problem was that the measurements had been poorly taken. I told them I could take the braces apart and remake them with the proper measurements, but that it would be cheaper for me to start all over and make a new set from scratch. The braces I made fit well and were lighter. It felt good to know that I was able to do superior work than someone who had his own shop and had gone to school for many years. The professionals can make many different kinds of braces and artificial legs. The day a new idea comes out they know about it. We are isolated here. But I try to make sure that the brace or leg I make works well and that the child or adult is happy with it. Some of the professionals just knock out their work and could care less if it fits or is useful.

"I feel comfortable here, like I'm with family. I'm not the only disabled person here, almost everyone has one kind of problem or anther. It's that we are pushed to one side. Employers shut us out. You feel more at ease when you're working with someone who has the same problem as you. But it would be difficult if everyone here was disabled. We need someone who is not disabled to help us do the things we can't do, like climb up into the loft and bring down supplies. We need a balance."

"Any thoughts about what you'd like to be doing in the future?"

"One day I'd like to have my own shop. I'd continue doing the same work, maybe together with a few other disabled people, but the shop would be independent."

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Every afternoon I took a long walk through the ejido lands that surround Piaxtla. One afternoon in mid July I set out a little later than usual. I got as far as the river when I heard thunder from the Sierras. I asked a woman who was packing up her wash if it was going to rain. "Yes," she said, "it'll be bad." A row of dark wispy clouds came in first. A sweet wind came up from the river. Then the breeze became colder, less inviting. I followed the woman as she hurried back to the pueblo. Gusts of wind stirred up small spirals of dust on the dirt streets. I made it back to Goyo's. Looking out from the loft I could see women pulling clothing from the lines and Jenaro putting chairs inside the pharmacy he had recently opened in one of the storefront rooms of the clinic.

Two giant veils of rain, looking like sheets of gray tinted glass, moved down the valley. The tress swayed. There was a bright flash and then the crack of thunder. A soft rain began to fall. The smell of wet earth came next.

The rain gained in intensity. The sound of the drumming of the rain on the tin roof of a neighbor's chicken coop mixed with the dull patter of it hitting the packed earth of Goyo's patio. There was lightening on all sides. Each time thunder echoed through the village I could feel the pressure in my ears. Two boys in black shorts jumped and danced under the torrent of water spurting from the rain spout from the clinic roof. The alleyway by the clinic had become a fast moving stream which emptied into the street below. It's cobbled surface created a series of small rapids as the brown water passed over. The rain diminished to a drizzle by early evening.

As I went to Lucila's to eat, the pueblo was cast in a greenish light as the fading sunlight passed through the clouds. The next morning I interviewed Claudio at the project. Claudio was about thirty-two. He was tall, had strong shoulders, and had hair the same shade of sandy brown as Piaxtla's dirt streets.

"I had polio when I was three years old. My grandmother and I lived in a small rancho deep in the Sierras. One day my grandmother went down to the river to do the wash," Claudio recalls. She left me sleeping on a patch of sand. As I slept I came down with a fever. I was still asleep when we returned home. That night my fever grew. I cried and cried. My grandmother gave me food, she gave me water, but I wouldn't quiet down. She didn't know what to do. She went to the midwife, but she said she knew nothing about such diseases.

"After the fever passed my legs no longer stood equal. One leg shriveled and my thigh doubled-up. As I got older people began to stare at me. I felt ashamed. I'd climb up into the corn barn and pass the days there. At mealtimes my grandmother would come looking but she could never find

me. Finally, one morning, she climbed up into the barn to get some *nixtamal.* * She found me there, sleeping. We talked a little and she cried. She said, "Who are they to laugh at you? Who are they to say such things?"

"I was first sent to school when we moved to San Juan. I was fourteen at the time. I learned to write, sign my name, and read a little. But the school boys, the strong and healthy ones, hid my crutches, dumped my books, and taunted me. "Did a tree fall on you? Did someone wallop you?" they asked. Finally, the teacher pulled me by my ear and said, 'we don't want cripples here.' I ran out of the classroom and down the street. I passed through a park and saw a boy crossing in front of me. He was on his hands and knees, on all fours. It came to me that I had nothing to feel bad about. I had a wooden crutch. I could walk. If people wanted to stare at me, I would stare right back.

"My teacher came to our house that evening. I was afraid that he had come to drag me back to school by my ear. He said he was wrong. He apologized. I wanted to tell him that I was stronger than him and that I could do more things than him. But I just said, 'I feel bad about what you said. I'm leaving school. But don't think that it's because I'm afraid.'

"A few weeks later I saw my grandmother come out of our neighbor's house with a plate of food. The food was for me, so that I could have something to eat. I realized that she had been asking the neighbors for food for some time. That evening I left for Culiacán to look for work. I slept in the bus station. In the morning I had a taco and a glass of water, and went to a gas station and started sweeping up. The station attendant told me to stop. "I feel bad about this,' he said, 'but you can't work here. There is oil on the ground and gasoline. I can't pay if you slip and fracture your leg.'

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* Corn processed for making tortillas.

"As I left the gas station he called to me and said, "I know of some work that is lighter and less dangerous. Go down this street. You know how to count? Pass five streets. Can you read numbers?" And he gave me the address of a house. A woman answered the door. I told her that I was looking for work. She needed someone to take care of her garden and offered me five pesos, food, and a place to sleep. Every week I brought my grandmother this money, but she saved it all for me, to start a little business. Well, time passed, and I heard about Project Quilá. I told my grandmother about it. 'What are you going to do there?' she asked. 'Well," I said, "its run by some Americans...' 'No, my child!" she said, "Don't you know that Americans go about grabbing people and putting them in prison?" "No," I said, "I met a woman who, told me that she has a child with problems, and that they treated her well there." So, I left for San Ignacio. From there I got the bus to Piaxtla.

"I got off the bus at the clinic. Jenaro was standing in front and we talked for awhile. He asked where I came from, what I came for, questions like that. He offered me a cigarette. He still smoked in those days. I knew no one in town and was nervous. So when Jenaro asked if I smoked I said yes. I lit the cigarette, and puffed on it, but didn't inhale it. It calmed my nerves.

"I met Samuel the next morning. We talked for awhile and he asked me a number of questions. He examined me and said that the contractions in my leg could be alleviated with an operation. He asked if I had any family. I said only my grandmother in Culiacán. He told me that the van was leaving the next day take kids to Shriner's Hospital in the United States. I told him that I didn't have a passport and didn't bring any identification. He said Kiko Manjarrez, the justice of the peace, could do all the paperwork.

"We left for the United States at seven in the morning. Moisés was in the van with me. We spent five months there. They operated on me then slowly straightened the leg using plaster of Paris casts. They then made me a brace which allowed me to walk without crutches.

"I was received well when I returned to Piaxtla. I walked without crutches and was really proud. The only problem was that the brace was uncomfortable and I finally stopped using it. Moisés and I were invited to a meeting with Jenaro, Andrés and Valentín. Samuel explained that they were going to start a new project for disabled kids. He asked us if we'd like to work with them. Samuel had bought the land for the project from Salvadór, Goyo's son. At the time there was only the mango grove and Salvador's adobe house. Samuel showed us books with drawings of swings, a carrousel and other playground equipment all made from materials that could be found near Piaxtla. So we went to the woods and brought back thin logs and started building the playground. We then helped build the orthotics shop, the wheelchair shop, and the kitchen.

"After a few months I received word that my grandmother had died. I went to the wake in Cosalá. I felt awful. I had been traveling all over the place and had left her alone. When I returned to Piaxtla I was really depressed. I stopped working at the project. A friend from the pueblo saw me sitting on one of the benches in the plazuela with my head down and asked me what happened. I explained. He was drinking and asked me if I'd like a beer. I said no. At that age I still didn't drink. Nothing. He told me that alcohol helped you forget your problems. Instead of feeling sad you felt like singing and dancing. He gave me a beer and I drank it. He gave me another and I drank it too. I hadn't eaten breakfast and by the fourth beer I was pretty drunk. I felt better. I no longer felt the pain that I had been feeling. So I

started on my first *borrachera*, my first drunk. Afterward the people from Quilá invited me to come back to the project. "We care about you," they said. "We all have our pain. We all have our unhappiness. And we all drink. But not one beer after another. You're killing yourself." I'd nod my head, but paid no attention. Finally I came around and started drinking less. I started to work again and was given more responsibility.

"I began helping with physical therapy and attending the consults. It was my turn to practice taking medical histories the day Francisca came. When she came in I picked up the form and asked her name, her age, why she had come. As I was doing this I noticed that she was staring at me. Each time I looked up from the form I'd be looking right into her eyes. I finished the questions and then left when they began the examination.

"I saw her again in the afternoon in the orthotics shop. They were making the molds for her braces. I went in but didn't say anything. I was afraid she'd reject me. The next afternoon she was in the wash area doing her laundry. I thought that if I had a few beers I would have the courage to talk to her. So that's what I did, but I still couldn't get up to the courage to talk with her. She kept looking at me. I'd look back and our eyes would met. This is how it went for five days. Valentín finally said to me, "talk to her, man, tell her something." So I sent her a note. She answered and we met that afternoon. I asked her why she kept staring at me that first day when I took her history.

"Aren't you a man?" she said.

"Sure I am"

"Well, I think a man knows what it means when a woman looks at you like that."

"Sure we know."

"Then why did you ask me," she said.

"We started spending a lot of time together. I kept asking her about that first day until she finally told me that when we were in the consultation room she imagined that I was a Gringo. She said she thought to herself "this Gringo is going to be mine."

"Every afternoon she'd come to Quilá to do her wash. I'd walk her back to Lucila's where she was staying with her mother. I should say that I walked her as far as Jenaro's, because we didn't want her mother to see us together. We first kissed in Jenaro's doorway. Then she went to Lucila's because her mother was waiting.

"I now had enough confidence to tell her what I was feeling. I told her that I needed a woman. Someone to cook for me. Someone to care for me. She understood. We started spending all the time we could together.

"I was living in the loft above the consultation room. One day after her mother had returned to Mazatlán, I told her that I wanted her to come up that evening. We sat up talking until everyone had gone to bed. We then made a bed of blankets and spent our first night together. The next day I borrowed a mattress and some boards built a bed for us. We passed the time up there and were happy.

"Every year during the rainy season I went up to the Sierras to help my relatives plant their corn fields. I knew that she would have a hard time going up there. The mountains are really steep. So she stayed her and I went to the sierra. When I returned to Piaxtla I found out that she had been with another man. She then told me that she was pregnant. I said, "maybe its not mine. When you went into the streets and messed with that guy, maybe that's what got you pregnant." She said no, she was sure that it was mine. I told her that it would be better for us to separate. She would go her way and I

would go mine. I went up again to the Sierras. I thought about her a lot, but she had failed me.

"I received a telegram saying that Orlen had been born. I came to Piaxtla. I wanted to see the baby, to look at her face, to know if she was mine. I arrived at night and only the pick-up truck was free. So, I slept there. The next evening Francisca came down from the loft and got into the pick-up truck. I got out and found another place to sleep. She banged on the door half the night. I could hear the baby crying from up above in the loft. Finally, a friend came in and asked me what the problem was. I told him everything. He said that if I loved her I had to forgive her. Later that evening I climbed up to the loft. Francisca was there and we spent the night together. We started living together again up there. But it was difficult carrying the baby up and down the ladder. So we finally left the loft and found another place to live."

The following day Elena and I interviewed Francisca, Claudio's wife. Francisca had a soft face, long black hair, and rode an ancient Everest Jennings wheelchair which was held together by wood and wire placed at strategic joints.

"Would you tell us about your childhood, adolescence, and your courtship with Claudio?" asked Elena.

"I was raised by my grandfather and his wife Panchita," said Francisca. "My mother abandoned me when I came down with polio at infancy. It was Doña Panchita who took me to the children's hospital in Mexico City all those years. She sold popsicles, soft drinks, and candy to raise money for these trips.

"I lived a pretty cloistered existence. This became especially difficult when I reached adolescence. When girlfriends came to the house mama

Pachita watched us carefully. I was never allowed to go to a movie with friends or to a dance. I wasn't even allowed to go out on the street alone.

"Plenty of young men wanted to ask me out, but Panchita said no, she never permitted it. She said that all they wanted to do was to take advantage of me. Sometimes she used really strong words when discussing this. Words I can't really repeat here. Things like, 'what do you have to offer a man other than big breasts? You'd be worthless as a wife. Marriage is hard and struggling with children is no easy thing.' I carried these words with me, and came to believe that no strong, healthy man would want me.

"Couples used to meet under our stairs to cuddle and kiss. I watched from above, and had these feelings, feelings that were beautiful, and at the same time awful. I wanted the love of a man, but my mother was stubborn, and insisted that no, I couldn't have this. I started having, *sueños humedos*, passionate dreams in which I was making love to a man. But they were nothing more than dreams.

"My parents loved me, and provided me with everything. My mother was, and still is, a hard working woman, even though she's now old and frail. My father, with all his vices, is also someone I'm proud of. He drank and had other women which left him with a bad heart. But he's honest and a hard worker. I'm thankful that they're both still alive. But how can I put this? They weren't able to fill the emptiness that I felt inside.

"I don't know if the majority of people who have polio go through what I went through. Awakening at night, crying, yearning for someone to caress me, someone to take me in his arms, wondering what would become of me. From an early age I found myself clutching on to whatever attention I received from a man.

"I had my first boyfriend when I was fifteen. We of course hid this from my mother. He treated me well and respected me, but eventually moved with his family to the United States. My second boyfriend was a drunk, a drug addict, and abusive. His drinking was worse than Claudio's. I began to see that nothing good would come from being with him. He got this girl pregnant, and had to marry her. So they too went to the US. and I was free of him. But I still had this emptiness, this loneliness that no one could fill. I just sat there day after day looking into my parent's faces. It was just the three of us, my mother, my father, and me.

"It was about that time that I found out about Quilá and nagged my parents to bring me here. My braces were really heavy, and were difficult to walk with. Though I swept and mopped the house, cleaned the dishes, cooked, and made tortillas, I wanted better braces that would help be get around easier. Also, I felt that there must be something else that I needed to learn to prepare for life. Deep inside I felt that something was going to happen there, that my life was about to change. I put myself in God's hands, and my parent's brought me here for a consultation.

"I first saw Claudio as we entered the project. He had just bathed and his hair was still wet. With his green eyes and long brown hair, I thought he was an American. I felt drawn towards him, struck by the arrow, as we say. I thought to myself, "this Gringito has got to be for me." But I never imagined that things would go so far between us.

"My parents and I entered the consultation room with Valentín, Jenaro and Elena. We talked for a few minutes and then Valentín asked me to take off my pants. "What?" I asked. "Would you take off your pants," he said, "so we can see your braces. As I did I grabbed my mother's sweater and wrapped it around my waist. "Francisca," said Jenaro, "we need to see your legs up to

your panties." "Aiiy mama," I said. "Don't be embarrassed," she said, "your father and I are right here." So, finally they convinced me, and proceeded with the consultation.

"As they were examining my legs, Claudio wanted to come in. But Elena, Jenaro and Valentín wouldn't let him enter. After the consultation he gave my father a pamphlet that told about the program and the people who worked there. My father suggested that we go to Lucila's for lunch. My mother followed him out. I held back a minute, and as I left I looked back at Claudio. He stood there, looking as if he wanted to say something to me, but remained quiet. At that moment I knew that something was going to happen. I didn't know what, but something.

"At Lucila's I desperately looked through the pamphlet. I found Claudio's picture, and below it there were a few paragraphs about him. His story was identical to mine. Well, not exactly like mine, for I never suffered from cold and hunger like he had. After I closed the pamphlet I thought "Claudio is a woman's name, maybe it isn't him." I looked again and saw that yes it was him, and felt something quite beautiful.

"They invited me to stay and have a new set of braces made and work with the group. I was delighted and said yes. At the time I did a lot of needle work. I embroidered table cloths, knitted children's clothes, what have you. So I returned home and hurried to complete all this work that I had started, collected the money I was owed for this, and came back to Quilá with my mother.

"By the time I returned he was no longer there. I was disheartened and disappointed. But after two or three days he showed up. At first it was difficult to pull a word out of him. He was really timid. But gradually he became animated and open. We seemed to have the same thoughts at the

same time. After a few days he said that there was something that he wanted to tell me, but that it was hard to put in words. I asked him what it was but he kept talking in circles. I knew what he wanted to say but wouldn't to say it for him. But finally I said, "All right. I like you a lot, and you feel the same about me. That's what you're feeling, isn't it? If we understand each other, great, and if not, so be it.

"That evening we were sitting by the water tank by Lucila's when I pushed him a little further. "I'm starting to wonder if you're really a man," I said. "What are you talking about now?" he asked. He seemed a little irritated. "Well, you haven't touched me, or kissed me, or anything." Right then and there he put his arm around and kissed me. And that's how we began our courtship. The next day we went down to the river. He had a lot of laundry to do, a whole lot, and I helped him wash it. I mended, ironed, and folded it all for him, neat and orderly.

"They made me a new set of braces, which were much lighter and more flexible, like the ones I have now. Every morning I practiced using them on the parallel bars. Elena also had me practice maintaining a sitting position on the examination table. I had difficulty keeping my equilibrium at the time and this helped me learn to keep my balance.

"I learned a lot about sharing with others here at Quilá. When I arrived I was grand, haughty, given to stubborn whims. I had everything as a child and felt that I was somehow better than those who had nothing. At Quilá I had that arrogance knocked out of me. Claudio helped me with this. He came from a poor family, and had nothing, and I had everything, and in that sense we shouldn't have been together. But we were starting to care for one another a lot. Our courtship went quickly. After a few more days we went

beyond being boyfriend and girlfriend. We hardly had time to get to know one another."

"You had sex with him after only six days?" asked Elena. I looked over at her and was to about say something to soften the bluntness of the question. Though we had talked about this time and again, Elena's interviewing technique had the subtlety of a bull in a China shop. But Francisca seemed used to Elena, and started to answer without any visible signs of irritation, so I sat back and let it go.

"The first time was the tenth of May. I had decided to make my life with Claudio. Or at least to find out whether it was love we were feeling, or if this was just a passing affair. I had never slept with anyone before. Claudio was the first. Even though I had two boyfriends, they both respected me, and didn't demand anything. They didn't ask for proof of my love, like sometimes happens with other girls.

"I took the initiative in regards to intimacy with Claudio. He was still timid, and I guess I was more daring. That night in Quilá, I decided that what would happen would happen, and that I would face the consequences. I said to myself, "If not now, then never." I was twenty-four years old and could no longer contain my desires

"We spent our first night together on the patio outside the consultation room. There was a warm breeze and we weren't cold at all out there. It wasn't everything that I had hoped for and I didn't feel much satisfaction. I felt ashamed. I felt remorse. I was afraid, and ambivalent, and at the same time I felt something beautiful, because like a normal woman, I had dreams that took me far away, emotionally and spiritually. I believed that he would protect me, support me, and take care of me.

"Lying in this cot away my home, and out from under Lucila's protection, I realized that I had to get on with my life. My mother and father were getting old and had lived their lives. Lucila didn't understand me. I was going to show my mother that I could do it. If it was God's will that I have a man, a home, and a family, then that was what I was going to do. I knew my friends at the project would understood, because many of them were also sleeping with their lovers.

"After that, whenever Claudio and I desired one another, we would go off quietly and meet in different parts of the project. I would slip out and he would find me, or he would go first and I would find him. We did this to avoid suspicion, although everyone knew. You know that nothing stays hidden here. But no one ever bothered or disturbed us.

"After a few days I decided to move from Doña Lucila's. It was clear that she didn't like me going out with Claudio. She said he was a drunk, irresponsible, a lost soul. By that time I was sure about what I was doing, and saw Claudio very differently from the picture she was painting. My parents had entrusted me with Lucila, so in leaving her house I was also breaking with my mother and father. I felt like a dog without a master. I felt alone, afraid, and thought, "Now that you've gotten yourself into this, and wanted this, *siguele,* get on with it."

"We moved into the loft above the *consultorio.* It was a full of supplies that had been sent down from the United States. There were cardboard boxes, mildewing books, braces, a total mess. Everything was in disorder and covered with dust. So I put everything in one corner, and cleaned, swept, and watered down the floor with pine sol. Claudio had a small cot which I put by the window. I put up curtains and hung some of my embroidery on the walls. I was like a bird making her nest.

"After fixing up the room I rested awhile and went to the kitchen to help Chayo clean up. I finished the dishes in a hurry and told her that I had to leave as he might be waiting for me. "You're like newlyweds," she said. I wiped my hands dry and said, "You're just jealous because you too are burning with desire." "Of course," she answered.

"I bathed, made myself up, and dressed especially for this evening. About eight thirty he climbed up to the loft, and saw the transformation the room had undergone. We began to kiss. Soon the heat began to rise. I felt peculiar. It wasn't like the first few times. It had been several days since we had made love, or had any kind of physical contact. I guess it was for that reason that I was so susceptible. He kissed me here and there, caressed me, bit my ear, and I began to feel a woman's desire. That's when I began to respond. I opened myself to him, without restraint, without a single fear that someone would see us. We were alone in our own room. I surrendered myself to him completely. It was very pleasurable and I felt even more love for him.

"That night he told me that he wanted a woman who would support him with all her heart. Someone who would take care of him, his clothing and his meals. He understand that it wasn't easy for me to leave my home and adapt myself to a new life, especially when I had all the comforts. He said he was poor, and had little to offer me, but he would do the best he could to take care of me. I asked myself, "my God, am I able to do this? I'm not normal. Will I be able to take care of a home and a man?" But I kept this to myself. I asked for God's help, and threw out the water; what else was I to do?"

"You threw out the water?" asked Elena.

"I decided to gamble it all, to bet everything on him. I said that even if we had to live under a tree I would stay with him. My answer was firm, I was ready, but my parents were still an obstacle. They would balk at the idea of us

being together because of our physical problems. But whatever might come, I was determined to make a life with him. During the following weeks we were very carried away by passion. We would bother each other all night long.

"The summer rains began. This is the time in when I'm happiest and most romantic. During the rains Claudio got off work earlier than usual and would come up to the loft soaked, and hug me. I loved the feel of his wet clothing against my body, and the smell of the damp earth coming through the window. This is still the time of year when we are closest. Like most couples we certainly have our problems, but during the rains we try to let nothing stain our moments together. Its the only thing we really have left to enjoy.

"Claudio loves to sing. He fills the project with his voice when he sings. I'd hear him and sometimes leave my work to find him and snuggle in his arms. We'd stay there like that for sometime. He'd sit there, leaning back, and I'd sit between his legs, with his arms wrapped around me. I felt protected and sheltered and as if my life were complete.

"I savored our nights together the most, because then I had him completely for myself and didn't have to share him with his work or with his friends. As he climbed up to the loft he'd say, *"Mi viejita bonita, viejita fea,"* are you there?" We were like two birds in their nest, or in our case, our bed. I would knit and he would do those, what do you call them, crossword puzzles. Or we would play La Loteria. Sometimes he'd play dominoes, but I don't know how, I don't like the game. When it was hot we would climb down and bathe in the therapy pool below. In the mornings, as soon as he woke up, he'd roll over and look at me, and then hug me, kiss me, and we'd start making love once again. Those are moments I think a couple never

forgets. To this day, every morning he wakes up, turns over, and hugs me, and plays with the children. Later, when we'd fight, when he'd leave me, all the beauty we had created would shatter, though I tried to keep it, conserve it, deep inside of me.

""My mother came to take me from his side. My father was very sick, she said, I had to go home immediately. When I arrived in Mazatlán I found my father in robust health, *gracias a Dios*. It was all a hoax. A trap that my mother had laid out. Lucila had suspected what was going on between Claudio and me, and sent word to my mother. My mother never liked Claudio."

"Why?" asked Elena.

"The people in Lucila's house had told her that he was irresponsible, lazy, and a drunk. He did drink, but not as much as in recent years. Anyway, my mother hated him. She said he couldn't work or take care of a family. Her greatest fear was that he would go out to the street and entertain himself, and leave me shut up in the house, whether or not we had children. She didn't like him from the beginning. Even now, she can chew him, but she can't swallow him, as we say. She puts up with him for the children.

"I stopped eating, hardly slept, and cried all the time. When my father wanted to take me to the doctor to see if I were still a virgin, my mother became furious. She said it was clear that he didn't understand a thing that was happening. "Can't you see she's changed," she said. "She's not the same. She's wasting away and cries all day for that man. She's lost her innocence. We have no choice but to let her go. And we don't need a doctor to tell us that."

"My father became quiet. He asked a few questions and I answered him honestly. That evening he said the door was open if I wanted to go. I knew

what I had to do. I was no longer the girl they had left in Piaxtla. I knew I was hurting them, as they had hurt me. It was a weapon that I was using to free myself. Doña Panchita never had children of her own, but she raised my mother, my uncle, and a number of children from her side of the family. There were twelve of us in all. I was the last one and the one that caused her the most grief. I guess this hurt her all the more, the fact that she had struggled and fought so for me.

"I told her that I was leaving all the jewelry that they had given me, the rings, bracelets, and earrings, and would take only the clothing and make-up that was most necessary. I didn't want to go and give to Claudio what they had worked so hard for. If he really wanted to make a life with me, he would have to buy the little I needed. It would cost him, not much, but it would cost him.

"I returned to Piaxtla but Claudio was no longer there. He had gone to the sierra. I went up to the loft to see if he had left any of his things. There was a pile of dirty laundry and a suitcase full of his clothing. I cleaned up the loft, for it was a disaster.

"A few months later my mother returned to Piaxtla to tell me that my father had been admitted to the social security hospital. Unfortunately this time she was telling the truth. I returned home and stayed with them for about six weeks. But before I left Piaxtla I shut up the loft and put all of Claudio's things in the *consultorio.*

"While I was in Mazatlán my mother stuck the knife into me, you could say. "I haven't taken care of you all these years for some jerk to come along and make a fool of you," she said. "He's deserted you and yet you still adore him." To make things worse, I received a letter saying that Claudio had married, had a family, and no longer wanted anything to do with me."

"Who wrote the letter?" I asked.

"It wasn't signed and had no return address. I told my mother that the letter was from a girlfriend at Quilá calling me back to the project to work in the kitchen. I returned to Piaxtla and once again cleaned up the loft and rearranged all the things that been shipped down from the US while I was gone. But this time I did it without much enthusiasm and not very well. Efrain came up to see me shortly after I arrived. He was very young at the time and was just beginning with Socorro. He said he had recently been to Cosalá and had spoken with Claudio. He told me that Claudio had married was living there with his new wife. I felt really bad, worse than when I received the letter. When I read the letter I thought it might be a prank. But hearing it directly from Efrain was really hard.

"I wrote to Cosalá, Culiacán, and Concordia but received no answer. I thought about him all the time, but heard nothing more about his whereabouts. I started hanging out with this woman who worked at the clinic. When we were together we drank, smoked, and strayed from the project rules. We got drunk on Christmas. Then New Years. I did things that Claudio still hasn't forgiven me for. When he's drunk he sometimes throws it in my face. This is why we still have problems. You know of what I'm referring to."

"You don't want to talk about it?" asked Elena. The room was still for a moment. I had been staring at the polished cement floor, and now looked up at Elena and then at Francisca. I was about to speak, but before I could put the words together Francisca broke the silence.

"No. It hurts each time I think about it," she said. "Well, you could put it this way. Suppose you leave three or four thousand pesos out where people

can find it. If people like you and respect you they'll leave it alone for a few days. But if time passes and you still don't go get it, what will happen to the money? Something similar occurred with me. I was left alone, without Claudio's warmth and protection. And what happened? I looked for others.

"I wasn't like one of those women who go with one man then another. I wasn't made that way. But he left me just as we were beginning. Despite the fact that he cared for me, gave me a roof over my head, filled me with affection, this deep need of mine still wasn't satisfied. Given the life that I had lived all those years, I needed more time with him before he left. He still doesn't understand this. When Efrain told me that Claudio had married, well, that settled the matter. I needed love and affection and I guess I was weak. With Claudio gone, and the environment at Quilá as it was at the time, I did things that were wrong. I began to give myself to others.

"When Claudio finally returned to Piaxtla I fixed up the loft like I did the first night we spent there together. I did a thousand little things to help forget the shame. But that night I couldn't bear it anymore. Earlier I had asked him if it was true that he had married, and he said no, that if he had married he wouldn't be there with me. He said that he had been working in the Sierras, trying to get together some money to start a life with me. And what did I do, I paid him back in the worst way. I felt like I had been walking all over his feelings. So I said, "what would you do if I told you that I had failed you." I would have been better had I said nothing."

"Why? What was his reaction?" I asked.

"He grabbed me by my hair and made me tell him exactly what I had done, with whom I had done it, and where. I thought he was going to be sick. Then he started slugging me. We struggled and I knocked him back onto the

bed. When people came up to see what was going on, he flew down the ladder in a rage. For a few pesos he would have killed me.

"I stopped working, eating, and hardly slept. Time and again I went to talk with him and followed him around the project. He just turned his back on me.

"He wouldn't talk to you?" I said.

"Not a word, Daniel, nothing.

"He moved out of the loft. I continued up there alone. There was no lack of sons of bitches who found their way up there and tried to sleep with me. I said no. I put a stop to it. I realized that I was hurting myself, that I could get some venereal disease that no one can treat. I was through with that kind of behavior. So I told them all to go to hell.

"Elena invited me to come sleep with her and Socorro. "You can't continue sleeping up there alone," she said. "You've done what you've done, and now they are going to be all over you." She was right. I was now considered an easy woman. So I moved down from the loft.

"That evening I walked out past the wash area to the cliff by the river. I went to the edge, the part that's now fenced in. My mind was blank. I didn't know that Luis was over by the mangos, keeping an eye on me. When it looked like I was about to jump off, he ran over and grabbed me and shook me, and shouted, "what are you doing!" "Nothing matters anyway. My life has been cut short," I said. I saw tears in his eyes. "You're a fool," he said. "For this *cabrón* your going to kill yourself?" He took me to Elena's room and he and I and Elena talked. I told them how desperately I loved Claudio. "If you love him, why did you sleep with all those men?" she asked. I explained everything to her. She seemed doubtful, so I showed her the letter I received in Mazatlán. I told her to speak with Claudio and ask him where

he had been all that time, and to ask Efrain about the lies he had told me. By that time Efrain had admitted that he had been joking with me. A pretty brutal joke, I'd say.

Elena made sure that day and night there was always someone with me. When she felt certain that I was once again strong enough to be on my own, she agreed to let me return to the loft. "But do me one favor," she said. "wall yourself in up there." She arranged to have a gate installed and gave me a padlock for it. I made a set of heavy curtains and hung them over the gate.

"One night when Claudio was drinking he came by and wanted me to let him in. I refused. He stayed away for a week or so, and then once again when he was drinking, he came up to see me. Again I told him to leave. This went on for quite some time. Finally, one night I said to myself, "I have this desire for him, and yet I keep sending him away. I have already slept with him, lived with him, spent those wonderful moments with him, so why not let him come back?" He was sober the next time he came by. We made love and spent the night together. But the next day was nowhere to be found. He got drunk a few days later and wanted to spend the night with me. We started to fight and he threw all of my mistakes back into my face. He hadn't forgiven a thing. He started hitting me. That's when the group decided that we had to work things out or one of us had to leave.

"One morning, in the midst of all this despair, I sat on the edge of the cot and said, "God, if it is your will, please give me a child." These words seemed to come from someplace very deep within me.

"You both wanted the child?" asked Elena.

"I wanted her."

"Despite the fact that you didn't have a good relationship with Claudio?" said Elena.

"I thought that if I had a child Claudio would come back. I thought that it might make our relationship more stable. That's what I wanted."

"What did you have to offer this child?" said Elena. "You two had all these problems." I shifted in my seat. Had this been a courtroom drama I would have objected that Elena was badgering her own witness. As it was I held my tongue, and listened to Francisca's answer.

"We didn't think about this," said Francisca. "Well, look, maybe this was the biggest mistake that we made. I was the one who desired this. He hadn't really said that he wanted a child. He often asked what we had to offer a child. "How are we going to manage it?" he'd say. "I earn too little to support a child. Imagine all the cans of milk, the diapers, the bottles, and the medical bills. I have one good leg. I'll be hobbled with a child in my arms. How will I get around?"

"I was stubborn with this desire to have a child. But I said nothing more about it. I began vomiting and had headaches, and became weak. I didn't feel like working and was sleepy all the time. I asked Claudio what he would do if I were pregnant, and he said he didn't give a damn whether I was or wasn't, because the two of us were through. I went to Jenaro. He put a few drops of a liquid together with some of my urine, and after two hours it turned brown, like an egg, which meant I was pregnant for sure. He was worried that with my narrow pelvis delivery might be difficult.

"I left the clinic full of joy. I almost ran back to the project. Claudio was in the workshop. When I told him the news he said, "I could give a damn. Its not mine. Go talk to the others." "But how could that be," I said. "I promised you that I would never fail you again. And I've kept my word." Your word isn't worth a damn," he said.

"I began to knit clothing for the baby, and put it all in the suitcase that he had left in the loft. When he found out what I was doing he grabbed the suitcase and threw it out down onto the patio below. I began to see things more clearly now. I had a life inside of me and I was alone. I became frightened. I didn't know what I would do. I became very ill. My blood pressure went down, my stomach became swollen, and I started hemorrhaging. Elena went to Claudio and said, "Can't you see how bad off she is. She's a mess. Do you want to lose the baby?" "It's not mine," he said. "It's not yours? *cabrón!* " she said. "How in all hell could it not be yours!" Since you returned she's been with no one else." He said nothing, and just walked away.

"I was packing my things when he arrived. He came up and put his arms around me from behind.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I don't want to live alone up here any longer, and you don't want anything to do with me," I said. "As soon as I earn enough money I'm leaving Piaxtla. I'll have my child somewhere else."

"No," he said. "You're not leaving."

"You're not giving me orders." I answered. "I'm alone now."

"You're not going to leave," he said again.

"I sat down on the bed and he sat down next to me. "I forgive you," he said. "But if you do this again, watch out. Next time I'll kill you." When I was three months pregnant, and still sick, he wanted to take me to Culiacán to live with his father. He said he'd work in on one of the large commercial farms so that I would be eligible for the social security hospital. I was reluctant, as I suspected he might take off and leave me alone again. And what would I do there, without money, or work, or anything. The project

lent us the money to go to Culiacán and we went to live with his father. His father's house was hell for me. I was getting big, and throwing-up constantly. My legs were swollen andI could hardly see, and every time I got up I'd get dizzy and fall back onto the bed. Then the water broke and I started hemorrhaging. He didn't have any money and they weren't able to admit me to the social security hospital because Claudio still hadn't arranged anything. He began to despair. His father was mean and sarcastic and said, "Poor little birds. They're so helpless and sick that all the world has to serve them."

"You know what Claudio did? He took me to my parent's house in Mazatlán. He left me with my mother and father and said he'd brought me because he couldn't take care of me like this. "So now she's useless to you," said my mother. "But it appears that she certainly served you well before. And now you come and dump her here. You get her pregnant and think you'll leave her with the old folks." He acted as if he didn't hear her and turned around and walked away.

"My mother told me that though I had hurt her deeply, she wouldn't throw me out into the street or take the baby from me when it was born. If I wanted to continue with Claudio, she would agree, but she wanted me to understand what this was doing to her. She had hoped for other things from me.

"When Orlen was born, Claudio was nowhere to be found. My mother wrote to him, I wrote to him, even my sister wrote. My mother hung a painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe in preparation for Christmas. I begged the Virgin that the baby look like him, even the eyes, so that he would finally accept the child and find a new love for me. When they brought me the baby I knew that Claudio could no longer doubt that she was his. She looked just like him. Especially her eyes.

"Orlen's birth brought me happiness. But at the same time, I didn't feel like holding her. When they handed her to me I took her, but without enthusiasm. My parents helped and we got by. My mother and father used all their savings to pay for the hospital, cesarean, medicine, food, and clothing.

"The neighbors passed through the house all day long. They brought me a piece of chicken, tea, or some *atole*. They were trying to ease my unhappiness. Unfortunately, it didn't work out like that.

"I went from town to town looking for him, not spending more that a night in each place. I finally learned that he was in Cosalá. I found him there at his aunt's house. He didn't want to hear anything about the baby.

"He said that the baby wasn't his?" asked Elena

"Yes, that the baby wasn't his. I guess he had some right to say this."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because of what I had done. But she looked just like him. He said he'd have to see the baby to know if it were his. I said, "Claudio, I'm telling you the truth. Come to the house and see for yourself." He refused. This time it was me who got angry. I started shouting, "you and I were raised without mother or father. Is this how you want our child to grow up? If she needs something, don't think that I'll come running to you to beg for it. You don't love her, well fine, but you know you'll carry this in your conscience."

"I went back to Mazatlán, crying the whole trip. When I arrived at my house I tried to calm myself, but my mother saw that something was wrong. "What happened?" She said. "You went to look for him didn't you?" I said no, and made up a pile of lies. I told her that the bus almost went off the road. "No," she said, you went to look for him. You can't fool me. Sooner or later I'll find out." That's how she was. Sooner or later she always found out.

"When Orlen was four months old I returned to Piaxtla to have my braces fixed. I brought her with me. My mother started crying as I packed. I understood how she felt. She had spent all her savings on Orlen and me, and now I was taking her away. As we came down the final hill and into Piaxtla, I saw Claudio crossing the street in front of us. He turned and saw me, but then kept walking. Kiko, the bus driver, honked and told him to come and get me. Claudio paid no attention. "Your daughter's here," Kiko said. Claudio stopped, but after a moment, continued on towards the espendio. When we arrived at the project Claudio was standing there, leaning against the shop wall. He must have flown down the hill to get there so quickly.

"Lupita, Ruben's sister, was out in front of the project when we arrived. She took the baby as I got down from the bus. Everyone wanted to hold the baby. She began to cry and scream. Lupita went over to Claudio with Orlen. She told him to sit down. "Why?" he said. "Sit down!" she said, "and take your daughter." "She's not mine," he answered. "How in *chingados* could she not be yours! She looks just like you." Those were the words she used. She held the baby up to let him see her face. He tried to turn away, but Lupita said, ""take her, *cabrón,* she's yours." He took Orlen in his arms. He started caressing her. I could see the emotion his face. His eyes were wet with tears. I stayed quiet, but was feeling the same emotions. Orlen was still crying so he began to rock her in his arms. Over her wails I could hear him say, "*mijita chula.*," my precious.

The Land Struggle
Chapter Six

The division between the staff and the young men who volunteered at the project nearly led to the collapse of the program. To understand this conflict adequately one needs to place it in the context of the decline of maiz-based agriculture in Piaxtla, regional unemployment, the drug trade, patterns of masculinity in the Sierra Madre Occidental, and the relationship between alcohol availability, abuse and violence. Chapters six through nine explore these themes through personal accounts and a discussion of the larger historical context in which these accounts took place. This chapter comprises a discussion of land tenure in Piaxtla by presenting two contrasting points of view of the long struggle for control of the pueblo's agricultural and grazing lands.

With *las aguas,* the summer rains, the pueblo turned tropical. The days were hot and humid and the fruit trees were in season. There were fewer birds. The migrating flocks had long since passed through. Now one found moths with day glow eyes and giant grasshoppers. The rains spawned armies of toads, scorpions, and crickets. I ran into tarantulas on the trails around Piaxtla, and even found a turtle in the middle of a path. Elena once woke up to find the street in front of her house carpeted with small black beetles. She said they gave off a bittersweet smell when she ran over them in her wheelchair on her way to the project.

I moved from Don Goyo's to a small house next to Doña Eva's. I shared my patio with a family of tree frogs. Spiders were everywhere. My kitchen floor was stained by piles of iguana droppings. Black and red and filled with guava seeds. In the evenings I could hear gunshots as a drunk emptied his

pistol into the ground. As the night progressed, only the wind could be heard, and the occasional thump of a guava as it fell to the earth.

I found Doña Petra out in front of my house one morning, hacking at the plants that had flourished with the rain. "You've got a breeding ground for pests and vermin," she said. Up the street Jenaro sat with friends in front of the clinic. The men fanned themselves with their cowboy hats as they leaned against the adobe wall. Across from them Jandina the taco lady diced tomatoes. Her red hair, green eyes, and tight silk blouse drew occasional glances from the men.

During the long dry season the vistas were wide open. One could literally see through the barren thorn forest. Now the world was enclosed by the burgeoning shrubs and a canopy of leaves from the guava, papaya, tamarind, and other village trees. The hills and ravines surrounding the pueblo were carpeted with a mat of green. Only the distant jagged ridges were recalled the desolation of the dry season. The tall *cardon* cactus, so prominent just a few weeks earlier, was now draped with vines and covered by leaves from nearby trees. Flowering creepers, which had hung dehydrated and lifeless throughout the dry months, now flourished. They climbed up telegraph poles and cascaded down rock cliffs into the ravines. It was as if their competition for sun with the cacti and thorn trees, in suspension during the dry season, now resumed where it had left off.

As I walked along the trails of the ejido a few months earlier I wondered how life could be supported in such a barren environment. At the time, the men were clearing the land they would be farming later in the year. The fields were then left to dry so that by May they could be burnt. Now trees and shrubs framed the irregularly shaped plots of corn. The air was still and humid, as if inside a hothouse. It seemed as if anything could grow in this

environment. Every form of insect and plant seemed to be flourishing. There was layer upon layer of life.

Tall grasses covered the abandoned fields from the previous year's slash and burn agriculture. In the early evenings the grasses turned lavender against the pink sunset. One such evening I passed two young men from the pueblo on an ejido trail. They wore Levi's 501s and long sleeved shirts. They were hardly the romantic image of the campesino in white *manta* from revolution era photographs. They were most likely returning from a marijuana field in the mountains. I then came to the field of a man who worked for Virgilio Manjarrez, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Piaxtla. This man's corn was less than knee high. Small patches of watermelons and cucumbers had been planted off to one side.

"Caminando?" he asked.

I nodded.

"It looks like you got your corn in late," I said.

"I've been helping someone else," he said. One planted the fields of the patron before his own.

"Do you think you got it in on time?" I asked.

"I planted on July 12th. If you don't get it in by then, you won't have a harvest."

The steeper hills were seeded with planting sticks and weeded by hand. Those with mules and parcels of land on the river plain plowed before seeding and were now turning the earth between the rows of corn. Just days earlier I had seen this same man working Virgilio Manjarrez's milpa in this way. The mules pulled the plow down the narrow rows without damaging

the plants. The earth's surface was crusted and sandy, but when turned up by the plow it revealed a softer and a darker brown.

Virgilio Manjarrez died before I could interview him, though I did have the chance to talk with him a few times in passing. One time I found him in his corral directing one of his men as he shoed a horse. The man working was massive and dwarfed his patron. He pulled the horse's leg on to his thigh. "Whooa cabrón!" he said when the horse moved. The horse's leg seemed delicate against the man's thigh.

There were about twenty cows in the corral. I asked Virgilio about his business, buying cattle in Piaxtla and trucking them to Culiacán for resale.

"We don't make that much money, Daniel, but we make a living," he said. "There used to be thousands of head of cattle in this valley. But with the ejido you'd be lucky if you could find a nine hundred now."

"How many head do you have," I asked. Later that I learned that this was not a question one asked a cattleman.

"No more than a hundred head," he answered, grossly underestimating the size of his herd. "But we work hard and we get by. We never grew drugs. None of that. If you tested my blood you'd only find beer and mescal. Nothing more."

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I went to see Doña Bella one afternoon to learn about Feliciano Roque. Feliciano Roque was an Indian chief who ruled Piaxtla's river plain in the latter part of the 19th century. As it is told in the pueblo, his story appears to be part legend, part history, and part political commentary. Most native Piaxtlans know of Feliciano Roque, though there are many versions of his tale. For some of Piaxtla's poorer campesinos, he was the Indian leader who first faced the might of the Manjarrez family. To the Manjarrez family and

other large landholders, the account of Feliciano Roque is simply a quaint tale of Piaxtla's past.

I was told that Don Goyo had researched the life of Feliciano Roque and that he might be my most informed source on the topic. Unfortunately by then he was quite senile. I also learned of a very old woman named Doña Bella. She lived in a charming two room adobe house on the edge of the pueblo. I knocked on her door and introduced myself. It was immediately clear that she was nearly deaf.

"You have a beautiful house," I said.

"What?" she asked.

"I like your house very much," I said, raising my voice.

"I've paid my water bill." The village had a pump by the river. Each household had to pay a monthly fee for the use of the village water system.

"Your water bill?" I asked.

"I already paid my water bill."

"Oh. I've come to ask you about Piaxtla's past."

"What?"

"Do you know the story of Feliciano Roque?"

"What?"

"Feliciano Roque. I've come to ask about Feliciano Roque."

"I'll show you the receipt." She went back into the dark of the adobe house to get her water bill.

Later that afternoon I told Camilo about my talk with Doña Bella. He said that one had to speak very loudly with her. He also said that even if I had yelled she probably wouldn't have understand my Spanish. That evening he spoke with her and returned with the following account of Feliciano Roque. I

suspect that this version Feliciano Roque's life is a composite of fragments that Camilo had learned his mother who was a storyteller, Doña Bella, and Camilo's own additions, for he was an able story teller in his own right.

"When the Spanish first crossed the Sierras from Durango they passed through Piaxtla on their way to the coast. The valley was inhabited by a confederation of Indians. To this day outsiders still speak of the village as "Piaxtla Pueblo de Indios." Feliciano Roque was the last of the great Indian chieftains of the region. He was born in Aguines, a small rancho near Piaxtla. His father was the chief warrior of the confederation. Feliciano Roque inherited this position and became a famed warrior in his own right.

"When the French invaded Mexico the government called on the Indian tribes to help defend the country. In response, Feliciano Roque blew on his bull's horn and his warriors came down from their corn fields and gathered in Piaxtla. Feliciano and his warriors twice expelled the French from the region. The first time they pushed the French back to Noria. The second time they burned Noria and drove them to the sea.

"Years later President Porfirio Diaz gave title of the valley to a Señor Manjarrez, who was very influential in San Ignacio. From the top of any hill in Piaxtla you can see the vastness of the river basin, and Señor Manjarrez wanted it all. Porfirio Diaz provided him with several squadrons of federal soldiers to take Piaxtla. But Feliciano Roque had spies who alerted him of Manjarrez's plans. Once again he blew on his bull's horn and his warriors came down from their corn fields. They fortified the cliffs above the Carrizal creek with piles of rocks and placed barricades across the path.

"The warriors ambushed the federal troops as they passed below. Feliciano Roque's warriors cut down the entire squadron. So much blood was

let that it flowed down the dry arroyo and into the river. Only one soldier was spared. He was sent back to San Ignacio to let Señor Manjarrez know what happened.

"Porfirio Diaz refused Manjarrez's requests for more troops. For many years Piaxtla and the other villages along the river basin were essentially independent from Mexico and governed by Feliciano Roque. There are many tales from this period recounting his deeds and wisdom. One such account tells of a midnight clash, in which Feliciano defeated the devil in a colossal sword fight and banished him from the valley.

"Señor Manjarrez was unwilling to give up his claim to the territory. He turned to treachery and paid Feliciano Roque's compadre to kill him. "Los pesos lo mataron," as some tell the story. With Feliciano dead the confederation disintegrated. Señor Manjarrez was able to enter Piaxtla with a handful of soldiers and take possession of the flood plain. "La Palma," Feliciano Roque's rancho, remains to this day in the hands of the Manjarrez family. The Indians began to disappear. Each went his own way. Some moved higher up the valley or left for Durango or Chihuahua. Others were killed. There were many mysterious deaths. A few stayed and their descendants can be found in Piaxtla and the outlying pueblos."

Members of the Manjarrez family tell a very similar story, except that it ends after the battles with the French. When asked how the Manjarrez family acquired their lands, they contend that they bought their lands from the Indians.

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Rosa Mercado Bastidas was Piaxtla's schoolteacher for several decades. Both Rosa and her husband Arsenio Bastidas Manjarrez were both descendants of those members of the Manjarrez family who first came to Piaxtla. Their sons were the municipal president and the village síndico at the time I first interviewed them. Rosa was eighty two years old, very bright, and very active. She wore a powder blue dress that resembled a cotton nightgown. We sat at their long wood dining table.

"Who was the first Manjarrez to come to Piaxtla?" I asked.

"Estéban Manjarrez was the first to settle in Piaxtla," she said. "I heard him spoken of when I was a child. He married a woman named Joséfa, I don't remember her family name. They had three sons, Felix Manjarrez, Adolfo Manjarrez, and Leopoldo Manjarrez, and three daughters, Gavina Manjarrez, Maria Manjarrez, and Lucia Manjarrez.

"Where did Estéban Manjarrez come from?" I asked.

"San Ignacio."

"What did he do?"

"He owned a tannery"

"So he had money."

"Not a lot. But he worked hard."

"Was he of Spanish ancestry?"

"No, he was of mixed ancestry. I don't know with what. My grandfather, who was a Mercado, was the child of a Spaniard. We are all of mixed blood now. They used to speak of the Indians of Piaxtla, but now there are hardly any left."

"When did Estéban Manjarrez come to Piaxtla?"

"Ooy.. I don't remember."

"More or less a hundred years ago?"

"More than a hundred years. My mother was Gavina's child, Esteban's granddaughter, so it must have been about a hundred and fifty years ago."

"What did Estéban do for a living here?"

"He had a *tienda,* farmed, and traded in livestock."

"Do you know how he came by his land?"

"It was free at the time."

"Free?"

"It was up for grabs. Free to whoever wanted to farm it. There weren't *potreros* * or anything. He fenced in the land and farmed it."

"What was Estéban Manjarrez like?"

"He was a peaceful man. He was a good man. The Indians loved him. They called him padre Estéban. They'd come to the *tienda* to buy meat and say, "padre Estéban, how about some beef on credit to roast for my wife who just gave birth." Estéban would kid them and say, "These Indians drive me up a wall. They act as if their birth were something important." But his daughter would say, "father, stop kidding and let them have it." He was full of humor, and wasn't bad, nor were his descendants."

"Do you know much about Esteban's sons?"

"I know almost nothing about Adolfo. He died young. Don Felix built a house with Indian labor. You can still see the ruins over there behind our corral. I was told that when they were digging the foundation an Indian found a boot full of coins. He called out, "Don Felix, I've found a few centavos in a boot." He didn't know how much was really there. My great uncle Felix said, "I forgot that I had left it there. Leave it, and don't dig there anymore today." He kept the coins and became rich. The Indian got nothing. This is where the wealth of this side of the Manjarrez family originally came

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* A fenced in piece of land.

from. He built a *tienda,* grew corn, and raised pigs, chickens, and cattle. Don Felix had a son named Juan Manjarrez who married with Rafaela Manjarrez."

"Juan Manjarrez was tall and thin and got along well with the people. He joked a lot like his grandfather Estéban. Rafaela ran the house. She was tall and heavy-set, but she wasn't bad looking. She had very light skin. Rafaela was raised on a rancho. Her father, Antonio Manjarrez, was a cattleman. He had as many as two hundred teams of oxen.

"Two hundred teams of oxen?"

"Yes, he was rich. They lived in the woods by El Tambor. Rafaela was a rancher at heart. She could ride a mule anywhere without falling off, and could ride horseback better than Juan. One time her horse reared and she kicked it so it would rear up again, and scared the pants off of Juan. He was nervous around horses. Juan owned a cantina and a large tienda. They had a child but it died."

"So they adopted Virgilio Manjarrez, the grandson of Leopoldo, Estéban's other son."

"Yes. Leopoldo was Estéban's third son. He in turn had a son named Gabriel, who had two sons, my compadre Virgilio and Gabriel Jr."

"Gabriel died and the children became orphans, right?"

"Yes, orphans. My compadre Virgilio was Juan and Rafaela's godchild. So they took him in after his parents death. Gabriel Jr. was raised by his mother's mother."

"So that's why Virgilio inherited part of Juan and Rafaela's wealth.

"Yes he had the good luck to do so.

"How did Virgilio rise so rapidly?

"He bought and sold cattle. He used to buy them at very low prices. It was easy to fool the people then. And he loaned money. How else can someone get ahead except through inheritance or theft. My compadre Virgilio did it through inheritance."

"Would you tell me about the mines and who owned them?"

"The mines were higher up. There was only one gold mine in the valley. It was called La Cagona.* My compadre Victorio owned it. It was up in these hills. I was very young at the time. After Victorio died they no longer worked it.

"Would you tell me about the formation of the *ejido*."

"When my father was still alive the *agraristas* began to organize. Then their leader José Velasquez was killed by a group called "Los del Monte."* "El Güero," as they called him, was very poor. He organized the people and they killed him."

"Who killed him?"

Alejandro, Arsenio's father in law, on the Bastidas side, was the one who killed José Velasquez. He wasn't a bad man, but he got involved with the wrong people. They turned him bad, and he killed this poor man. José didn't want to hand over the *ejido* papers. Later Alejandro killed his step-uncle. He just went out and shot him down. In the end he really didn't have the heart to do all of this. He grew weak and became pallid and yellow. Alejandro asked my father for money for medicines. He gave him the money, but it didn't help. He died soon after that."

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* Literally, "The Defecator."
* "Those from the Woods."

A few weeks later I met with Rosa and Arsenio to continue the interview. Arsenio sat a few feet away and husked corn as we talked. He wore dark glasses and a beat-up old white cowboy hat. He recently had cataract surgery, which I assumed was why he had on the dark glasses. Every once in a while he'd look up and contribute a few comments to Rosa's account. About half way through the interview I asked about the killing of El Güero Velasquez.

"We talked before about the killing of José Velasquez," I said.

"Yes, he was killed by those they called "Los del Monte."

"They worked for the large landholders."

"I think they worked for the government, fighting against the agrarian reform movement."

"And it was Alejandro Bastidas who killed him?" I asked.

"Who killed El Güero?" Arsenio interjected.

"Yes. Wasn't it Alejandro Bastidas who killed "El Güero?"

"Alejandro, no!

"No, that *chingado* Torbingo from Carrizal killed "El Güero," said Arsenio.

"So Alejandro wasn't involved?" I asked.

"No," said Rosa, "Alejandro killed someone else."

"Not 'El Güero?" I asked.

"No," said Rosa.

"Though it was Alejandro who killed "El Güero," I said.

"No," she said.

At dinner I told Lucila and Chema about the interview and my confusion about who killed "El Güero." I said I must have been in error, and that I

would check the tape that evening. My Spanish was such that I could have certainly misunderstood Rosa the first time we talked about the killing.

"It was Alejandro Bastidas who killed him," said Chema.

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I was there." said Chema. "It was about the twenty-fourth. No, the tenth of June. My uncle and I were on our way to give water to the oxen. We heard shots. Then we saw Alejandro and a man called El Toringo Sánchez shooting at "El Güero." We were about fifty feet away. They didn't see us. "El Güero" had a machete in his hands. They both had guns and kept shooting at him and finally hit him. Then they walked up to him and shot him again."

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The following are excerpts from Samuel's mimeographed journals titled Report From The Sierra Madre.

January 1, 1966

Last night the people of Piaxtla saw the Old Year out and the New Year in. As elsewhere there was much laughter, dancing, drinking, and fighting. The main dance was held in El Salón, and there people of all ages danced to all hours. As everywhere the little girls danced with each other. There was much drinking and blubbering and embracing. Goyo was there, and climbed a tall ladder against the wall to get a better view. Shortly before midnight, having reached my saturation point, not of liquor but of turbulence, I made my way out through the crowded doorway and into the moonlit street. There I met Tatino, thoroughly borracho with a group of other young men. He staggered up to me and offered me to join in the drinking. I laughed off his

invitation saying that I didn't need alcohol to get drunk. A worried look came over Tatino's face and he begged me "No diga nada a mis jefes" (his parents). I assured him I would say nothing.

When I returned to the Casa Chavarín it was well after midnight. The half moon had set behind the hill but the rocky trail stood out clearly in the star light and I made my way back without stumbling. At the portal of the casa a small group was gathered, talking quietly. José Vidaca had returned from Verano in the early evening, and was handing out oranges from a huge burlap sackful. None of the men were drunk except for Tatino, who at the moment was asleep on the "catre."

I sat for awhile listening to the conversation. It was apparent that the family had found out about Tatino's activities and were displeased, not so much with his drinking as with something else he had done, which I had difficulty in making clear.

Eberaro in his characteristic sign language informed me that he was going to bed; I followed suit. The abuela Micaela, as was her custom, had already laid out my sleeping bag. I unrolled my sleeping bag, slipped off my pants, and climbed in.

At that moment Tatino, whose cot was next to mine, made the mistake of waking up, and immediately everyone's attention was turned his way. He was still drunk, and it seemed to me pointless to reprimand him at that point, but everyone began to scold. After a few minutes Jesús (Chuy) Alarcón, "the wise one" and a close friend of the family, was tacitly appointed to talk out the affair. He sat on the edge of my cot, facing Tatino, and embarked on a long lecture which dealt with honor and duty, pride and insult, and the breach of trust of his parents and family. Several times he pointed out that whatever Tatino had done with "them" was no big thing to him personally, but that it

was a disgrace and discourtesy to his family. Jesús' voice was stern, but his tone always mild, almost gentle. Occasionally Tatino blubbered a meek apology or excuse. I wondered more and more what Tatino had done. And I wondered who could be the "ellos" so frequently referred to with hostility, but never named. When at last Tatino again fell asleep--in the middle of Jesús' lecture--my curiosity became too great, and sticking my neck out of my sleeping bag I asked what the fuss was all about.

Micaela quickly replied, "Nada, nada," and the blind Ramón echoed, "Nada." Unsatisfied, I stuck my neck out further and asked, "Quien son ellos?" Jesús turned to me, a look of surprise on his face, and said, "Pues ya no sabes tu!... Ellos son los que tienen; son los ricos." and thus started a discussion which extended on into the night and was continued in the kitchen the next morning.

On the surface Piaxtla is a quiet village sleeping in the sun on the banks of the Rio Verde, isolated from the trafficked world by miles of prohibitive dirt "road." The traveler, stopping for only a few days, as I have done before, sees little sign of friction, tension, or hostility. He sees only laughter and singing, and sickness. People greet each other as they pass through the streets, or stand in small groups under the ceiba trees talking. One has the sense of friendship and peace. And if one asks casually if the village has any special problems or struggles, the reply is apt to be, "No, nada," or at the most "Es muy pobre aqui." . . . For some reason the village is reluctant to expose its most vital conflict to the light of day.

The village of Piaxtla is split into two factions. The one is comprised of the rich landowners, whose domains go back as far as 300 years. The other is comprised of "campesinos" or poor farmers, who traditionally have worked as peasants, oppressed and controlled by the landowners. Theoretically this

feudal system was eliminated over 50 years ago with the Mexican revolution, but the results have been slow in reaching the remoter areas.

In Piaxtla almost all of the best land--namely that of the alluvial flats in the river valley--is still in the hands of 7 or 8 families, who have a variety of crops, orchards, and up to 500 head of cattle. The vast remainder of the families live on a subsistence level, going out into the hills surrounding Piaxtla to clear and plant patches of corn on the rocky slopes. They seldom harvest more than to barely supply their own family, and frequently not even that. Some of them have part time traders which bring in a few pesos, and some seek employment on the "ranchos" of the wealthy, at 10 pesos a day. But even at the best they never earn enough to feed and clothe a large family properly, and their families are invariably large.

...If the summer rains are not adequate and the corn crop of a campesino does not feed his family until the next harvest, or if he has to obtain more grain for planting, one of the wealthy landowners like José Célis or Ricardo Manjarrez will loan him what he needs. But the interest is a bit steep: the following year the campesino has to repay 3 costillas of corn with everyone he borrowed. So he repays, in triplicate, with the result that he runs out even earlier the subsequent year, and must borrow so much more. The debt compiles, and when the point is reached where the poor farmer cannot return the corn due on the given date, what few animals he has are confiscated.

If the poor campesino wants to buy food or clothing on credit, this he can also do, at the store of Raul, brother of one of the big land and cattle owners. But at the end of the year he has to pay back his debts, with 100% interest!

...It is not that the rich are cruel or heartless persons. I have been in many of their casas, have eaten at their tables, have treated their children and seen

how they love them. It is simply that they have grown up with things as they are, and have come to accept them without questioning. They do not regard their treatment of the poor as exploitation, but as good business.

...the laws to change (this system of land holding) have long since been passed. Piaxtla is an ejido , and in an ejido each family supposedly has equal land rights. The system of ejidos was originally established some 35 years ago by Lázaro Cárdenas, then President of the Republic. Its intention was to redistribute the land among the poor by establishing government-aided villages, called ejidos, in which the usable land was to be parceled out equally to each family. Provisions were also made to aid ejidos with loans and certain farm equipment, etc.

In theory, the system had much in its favor. But the application of it has encountered endless snags. The biggest barrier to making the ejidál system effective has always been graft and greed: greed on the part of the wealthy to perpetuate their status, and greed on the part of corrupt officials to get their hands on fistfuls of the wealthy's money.

In Piaxtla, the villagers petitioned for status as an ejido as early as 1930. Provisional consent was granted in 1938. "Presidente Ejidál" was chosen, but when he tried to proceed with applications for "restitucion de tierras" he was met with great resistance from the "Latifundistas," (those who were lords over large tracts of the good land). In 1940, the "Presidente Ejidál," José Velazquez, was assassinated, and an attempt made to terrorize the other leaders of the "nucleo Ejidál," with the result that most of them fled. When later that same year, a "comisión" arrived to redistribute the land there was no one left to speak, or who dared to speak, in favor of the land change, and the commission returned to its headquarters, leaving things as they stood.

And so things remained, without protest, until, in 1958, Jesús Alarcón himself spearheaded the organization of the "Comité Ejecutivo Agrário" the function of which was to further the "Via Ejidál." (All this time Piaxtla had remained, technically, an ejido , although in effect it is a feudal village.) To counter and try to squelch the "Comité Ejecutivo Ejidál" the Latifundistas organized the so-called "Nuevo Centro de Población Agrícola" testifying their documents with the signatures of those who were working in their service. So doing, they managed to put into office and receive Federal recognition for their own "Presidente Ejidál" ... whose purpose is, of course, to deter rather than to further the equalization of land.

Jesús Alarcón showed me a letter, signed and thumb-printed by 56 heads of family in Piaxtla, which he had written to the President of the Republic explaining and protesting the above. He also showed me the reply telegram he had receiving saying that an investigation would ensue. That was the last he heard. He wrote letter after letter without result, and has made several trips to Culiacán (capital of Sinaloa) to protest. Twice now government representatives have come from Culiacán to investigate, but have both times been met by spokesmen for the Latifundistas, and convinced, with the aid of a few thousand pesos, that everyone was happy with the way things stood in Piaxtla, and no investigation was necessary.

I asked Jesús if his own life was not in jeopardy, considering what had happened to José Velazquez. He smiled his gentle, laughing smile and said, "Pues, si! Tengo que tener cuidado." And he and José Vidaca proceeded to tell me of some of the recent violence.

Three months ago one of the leaders in movement for land reform, a poor campesino, who had worked for many years to acquire a team of mules with which he earned his living, arose one morning to find all five mules

poisoned to death... The mule of José Vidaca which I had injected twice with penicillin, I at last found out how it had received its injuries: it had been clubbed in the face and the mouth on two consecutive nights, for José, too, is one of the leaders of the "campesinos."

"You mean the landowners have doné these things themselves?" I asked.

"No," replied Jesús, "They pay others to do it." And he proceeded to explain how the poor people of the village were split down the middle, a part struggling for the land rights guaranteed them long before by the government, the other part preferring to remain in servitude and win the favor of the wealthy landowners. This latter group, who, as Jesús puts it, "les gustan barbear a los ricos," are mostly the employees of the landowners, whose jobs depend upon their subservience. The campesinos regard these poor servants as traitors, as cowards, and the servants are equally resentful. The "dos partidos" do not associate or even talk with one another... This then, is the reason why, when I suggest to some families that they go to the casa Chavarín for medicines they wave their finger and say, "Nosotros no hablamos con ellos!" or "Estamos enojados."

Several nights ago "ellos" poisoned one of José Vidaca's dogs (or at least "ellos" were blamed). Both José and Jesús Alarcón have to take special care in traveling alone. When José returned from Verano he left in the mid morning. When I asked him why he left he said so that he would arrive in the dark.

"Por que?" I asked naively.

"Porque ellos no..." and he finished the statement by pointing an imaginary gun at his head and pulling the trigger; and he laughed.

Jesús went on to tell me many accounts of how the wealthy manipulated and took advantage of the campesinos...How if, unsatisfied with the land they

already had, they decided they wanted the small plot of a campesino for one reason or another, they simply moved in and told the campesino to move out. Nor could the campesino complain to the "síndico" (Ejidál politics) for the syndico is "con ellos," nor to the "Presidente del Municipio" in San Ignacio, for he, too, is "con ellos." Nor will it do him much good to go to the state government, for there, too, the officials listen to money. ...

Thursday, January 6, 1966.

When I had arrived at the casa Chavarín I had to pass through a group of campesinos, obviously upset, talking in low, bitter tones. Among them were José Vidaca and Chuy Alarcón. José asked me if I had heard about the murder of two men in San Ignacio that same afternoon.

"Y porque los mataron?" I asked.

José and Jesús glanced at each other and then Jesús replied, "Por la misma razón de que hablamos antes."

Ramón Valverde, one of the men killed, had been the major force behind the land reform movement in San Ignacio and the entire region. He had spent much of his time traveling from one pueblo to the other, helping to organize the campesinos and encourage them to struggle for their rights. He had been for the Municipio de San Ignacio what Jesús Alarcón is for the village of Piaxtla. He had no official position with the government, yet he was feared and respected by government officials and wealthy landowners alike, for his voice was that of thousands of struggling and angry campesinos. His murderers remain undetected, but there is not one ounce of doubt in the minds of the campesinos that the assassins were paid off by one or another of the wealthy landowners in the area. One rumor has it that Jesús Vega, the

wealthiest landowner in Piaxtla, gave the mandate, but Jesús Alarcón suspects that this rumor was started by other landowners, who are angry with Jesús Vega because he has sometimes showed sympathies with the campesinos. No one knows for sure... Everywhere I go the remorse expressed for Ramón Valverde is enormous. He was much loved, and evidently had loved much in return, for he left behind 28 or 30 children (no one is quite sure) and five widows, one of whom was "legítima" and the remainder of whom are "naturál."

May 10, 1966

How often do we see a man as good because we see only his good side, or bad, because we first see his bad. Whenever we speak of someone as being "a good person" or "a bad person", it is, perhaps, because we do not know him. Coins have two sides; persons, many.

As we were loading in San Ignacio the enormous load of medicine and clothing which Bob and Margaret Wallace brought from the U.S., a thin, spidery young man, well dressed and with a neck tie, approached me and said, in a rather stiff, school English, "Excuse me, please. Do you play chess?"

When I replied that I did, his face lit up, and he at once invited me to a game in his house across the street. He introduced himself as "el licenciado" Francisco Chavez Nieto, recently appointed lawyer and judge of San Ignacio. It would be a good idea to get on his right side, I thought, and agreed to accept his invitation as soon as we had finished unloading. He left, and a few minutes later returned, inviting us to a beer.

We accompanied him into his home, an elegant building at the end of a long, narrow courtyard. We took seats in the spacious portal, beneath a very

high roof, and proceeded to drink Coca Cola and Cerveza. Although rather discourteous to young Goyo, who was with us, he treated us Americans with both chivalry and charm. We learned that he had been dispatched by the Federal Government in Mexico City.

"And what sort of functions do you perform here?" we asked.

"I'm going to put in prison this President of the Municipio here," he replied.

We looked at each other with amazement and asked him, "Why?"

He replied that there were "too much gangsters" in San Ignacio and that the Presidente of San Ignacio was in league with them. He (the lawyer) had come to San Ignacio a month before with the project of investigating the murder of Ramón Valverde and his colleague and already he had learned a great deal. He said he was determined to "clean things up."

We were delighted to at last have found, apparently, an official with a conscience, a much needed friend! ..It was not long before we began to get a glimpse of the other side of San Ignacio's lawyer and judge. Impressed by our passion for social justice, he proceed to inform us of his. He disliked communism, and was pleased to find out that we were not communists. The United States of America, he informed us, was a nation of sheep... Roosevelt, he informed us, had been a Jew and Kennedy, a Communist. To prove his point he told us to look at the Kennedy 50 cent piece, on which was clearly visible a tiny hammer and sickle at the base of the portrait.

"I am a Nazi," he announced to us next. "You do not mind?"

Oh, no, we didn't mind at all. Every man to his own ideas. ...The judge had (been) consuming more than his share of beer. The pile of empty cans on the table was growing and he sent Goyo out to buy more. By this time, the

unhappy man had shed much of his graciousness, though still not his tie. He proceeded to pour out his assertions, doubts and hatreds.

"You do not believe I am a member of the Nazi Partido?" he asked, suddenly drawing from his pocket a car, initialed by George Lincoln Rockwell, which bears the lawyer's photograph and á statement which says, "Francisco Chavez Nieto es miembro activo del Cuarto Reich. Fundador Adolph Hitler." It also said something about the group being "anti-bolchevique."

The game of chess continued and the pile of empty beer cans grew. The judge drew out of his jacket pocket a letter. "With this letter," he cried, "I am going to arrest the Presidente of San Ignacio. It gives me the authority." He waved the paper about. "Here I have the authority to arrest the three men who killed Ramón Valverde. Here are their names..." and he read off three names, one of which was Ignacio Espinosa, the others I cannot remember. "I was to arrest them," he said, "but the Presidente told me `Let them go free'. And now I will arrest the Presidente. He took 5,000 pesos for to protect them."

"How do you know?" we asked.

The lawyer hesitated. "How do you say `paredes'?" he asked.

"Walls."

"Yes...well...the walls have ears!" And he smiled wisely.

The judge's heart was not in the game now and (I) seized his rook. ...He turned to Goyo who sat, subdued for once, to the side of the room.

"Muchacho," he ordered, "Que le busca los musicos y digalos venir pa-aca."

"Si, señor!" replied Goyo, and took off to fetch the musicians.

"Ah, Teresa!" he said, suddenly, when he was very drunk, "Do you know Teresa!?"

"No," (I) said, sleepily. "Is she in Mexico City?"

"Yes...yes," he sighed. "She is too beautiful, but too cruel..."

In a later journal entry Samuel reports that the Judge's house was shot-up one evening. The man spent rest of the night under his bed and left San Ignacio the next morning.

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Crecencio Velasquez was "El Güero's" brother and Valentín's adoptive father. I interviewed Crecencio and Valentín together in Crecencio's house. He was in his early eighties at the time. Crecencio was a small man with a still muscular body. He brought in a chair for me and closed the wood door to the room. Valentín explained that I wanted to know about his life and about the struggle for Piaxtla's ejido lands.

"I was born at the time of the Mexican Revolution," said Crecencio. "In those days everyone lived under the rule of money. If you wanted to do something you only had to get close to a rich man and you could do what you pleased. If you were poor and didn't have the protection of a patron you suffered.

"My father had a piece of land in the hills outside of the pueblo. He contributed 15 pesos when him and his friends first fenced in the land. Fifteen pesos was a lot of money in those days. He told me that when I got older he would pass this on to me. When you're young you don't pay attention to such things. But I've been farming that piece of land for all these years.

"We were poor. We didn't eat well. Sometimes just tortillas with a little salt. Maybe a little coffee. My mother took in wash to make a few centavos to buy coffee and salt. Actually, instead of money she would get pieces of cardboard with a number written on it. The revolution had thrown everything into disorder and these pieces of cardboard served as money. After that came the copper centavo pieces. The larger coins were made of silver. For three centavos you could buy coffee and sugar.

"My mother would go out to do the wash in the morning and in the afternoon we'd have tortillas with just a spoonful of refried beans. We planted up there on the slope, but only five or ten liters. The *cacique's** on the other hand, had teams of mules and fifteen or twenty workers planting for them.

"I worked for a time for Juan Manjarrez as a *sanatero,* I chased away sanates, the black birds that eat the corn crop. I also guarded his orchard so that people wouldn't walk off with the fruit.

"How old were you?" asked Valentín.

"Sixteen," said Crecencio. I earned twenty centavos a day. After 22 days I earned four pesos and forty centavos. Juan Manjarrez sold me a blanket and a pair of pants. He really wanted to get those pesos back. He had you coming and going. The pants were made out the fabric they used for bed sheets, except that in this case they made pants out of it. Later I cleared and planted his fields for thirty centavos a day. He had the best land, a corral full of mules, and fifteen or twenty laborers. And we hardly had enough to live. We'd plant five or ten liters of corn out there on the hill."

"Were you able to eat the fruit when you tended the orchard?" I asked.

"No," he said. "What hope did I have of eating a piece of their fruit?"

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* The powerful landholding patrons.

"It was like the garden of Eden," said Valentín. "The fruit was prohibited."

"But what about when they weren't around," I continued, missing the point they were making.

"Faustino Manjarrez, a relative of Juan Manjarrez, accused me of stealing from the orchard. "Oye, Chencho," he said, "I see you're spending a lot of money these days." I asked him what he was talking about. "You're selling the limes, aren't you." he said. I denied this, but they weren't going to pay me. This was when I left Juan Manjarrez' patronage.

"When you were young the Manjarrezes were the *caciques* in Piaxtla?" I asked.

"There were also the Vegas," he said.

"But they're interrelated," said Valentín. "We call them the Vega-Manjarrezes."

"Yes, the Vega-Manjarrezes," said Crecencio. They bought animals but not land. They just fenced it in. Or they'd buy a small field from a poor family and then grab whatever more they wanted around it. Some called this practice walking fence posts. Who was going to say anything? They had money and power and took what they wanted. Who could stop them?"

"The Manjarrez family came from Spain," said Valentín. "They married with other people of Spanish blood of equal power and money."

"The campesinos worked together to fence in the plain across the river to farm it," said Crecencio. "They chose a representative who had overall responsibility for the land. As the years went by this position passed from person to person until it fell into the hands of Ruperto Fernandez. He wouldn't let the others use the land. Only he had rights to it. Finally he sold

the land to Juan Vega. Juan died and he left the land went to his son Chuy Vega."

"Did the Manjarrez and Vega families also have power up in the Sierras?" I asked.

"They had cattle up there," said Valentín.

"They'd leave their cattle in the hands of the people up there," added Crecencio. "The people were poor. So they'd say, 'take care of the cattle and you can milk the cows.' One of the *caciques* left his cattle with a campesino up in Colompo. At one point thirty of his cows had calves. He came and took the herd without even a thank you. The campesino asked for a calf, but the *cacique* said, 'No, I've already given you access to the milk all this time.' The man had cared for the herd for all those years and the son of a bitch wouldn't even give him a calf.

"How did you get involved in the land struggle?" I asked.

"I had just gotten together with this woman," said Crecencio, nodding in the direction of the porch where his wife was sitting, "when my brother José came by to invite me to help organize an *ejido* in Piaxtla. 'What do I know about ejidos?' I asked. 'Emiliano Zapata's revolution gave us the right to form an *ejido* ,' he said, 'and this is what we're going to do. I'll teach you all you need to know about the laws giving us this right.' My brother was a mason before he got involved in all of this. Across the street you can still see the remains of one of the houses that he built. He also built Virgilio Manjarrez' house. People liked him and nicknamed him "El Güero," because he was light skinned. Just the opposite of Valentín and me," he said with a smile.

"In 1942 José was chosen as *ejido* president. When he took the reins of the *ejido* they decided to take the land back from the *caciques*. It was our

right and the right of our children to farm this land. They began to invade the *cacique's* potreros. My brother led the take over of Juan Manjarrez' land. To destroy the *ejido* the *ricos* * had to kill its president and burn the documentation. And this is what they did."

"Who did the killing?" I asked.

"They brought in men from the outside, from Carrizal and Limon," said Valentín.

"Do you know which of the *caciques* arranged this?" I asked.

"Virgilio Manjarrez sent a letter to a man from Limon de los Castañeda asking him kill my brother," said Crecencio. "His name was Toribio, but they called him Toringo. Toringo hired the man who actually did the killing. There were always plenty of people willing to do this if the money was right. We told 'El Güero' to hide. 'They're going to kill you,' we warned him. 'If its my time, so be it,' was all he would say. He was out plowing his milpa when they killed him. The oxen and plow were just left there in the field. I was on my way to Durangito that day. There on the trail they told me. They carried 'El Güero' back home. When I arrived my mother was sobbing. "They killed my boy," she said. 'They killed him and just returned to their ranchos as if nothing had happened.' Virgilio, this Virgilio, was responsible for this."

"Virgilio Manjarrez?" I asked.

"Virgilio Manjarrez," said Crecencio. "Also Juan and Rafaela Manjarrez, and José Celis who was the son of Ruperto Fernandez. Those are the four that I know of. They were the ones who paid for the killing.

"Fifty pesos, that's what it cost them to have him killed," said Valentín.

"I've suffered a lot because of this Virgilio," said Crecencio. He was he one we mistrusted the most. When they killed my brother they destroyed the

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* The large landholders. Literally - "the wealthy ones."

movement. There was no one to lead it. The land returned to the domination of the *caciques.* Twenty years later Virgilio ordered the death of Ramón Valverde for the same reasons. I just waited and farmed my potrero. I wasn't about to let them force me off of it. They never did. They knew well that they could take it only if they killed me too.

"After my brothers death Virgilio came to my house with two or three others to get the *ejido* documents my brother had obtained listing the land that we were entitled to. 'What do you want these papers for? You want to be next?' he said to me. They took all the documents and left me with no proof or anything. I heard that he burned them.

"A year or so later, Goyo Alarcón's brother Chuy and I decided to renew the struggle."

"You were living at Goyo's weren't you?" asked Valentín.

I nodded.

"We parceled out a piece of land to each person, but they left the fields unused," Crecencio continued. "Rafaela Manjarrez' men ran them off the land. Not me. I kept my piece of land. They threatened me, but I paid them no mind. I never let them get to me. For the next ten to fifteen years Chuy and I kept fighting, doing what we could do to try to get the land back.

"Chuy suggested that we go to the agrarian reform offices to see what could be done. But those who had the centavos had all these officials in their pockets. We went to San Ignacio and to Culiacán and it was always the same. We'd speak with the officials and they'd say, "yes, yes," they always said yes, but did nothing. They didn't hold us in very high regard.

"Once Roberto and I made an appointment with an official in Culiacán. Roberto is my adopted son, I raised him like I raised this one," said Crecencio as he nodded his head at Valentín. "The *caciques* found out about the

meeting and arrived before us. There was Virgilio, Benigno, Arsenillo and four others. The official invited us all into his office. He looked at me and said, "You people are trying to take other people's land. You just can't do that. They're working the land, not you."

"How are we supposed to work the land if they've grabbed it all," I said. "We have to get each campesino a piece of land, and we'll keep fighting until we do." The official finally agreed that we were in the right. He said he'd do everything possible to help us. Then there was silence. "Well, then its settled," he said, and ushered us out of the office. The *caciques* stayed behind. As Roberto and I walked down the hall, I decided to go back to say a few more things to them. As I approached the door I could hear them talking inside. I put my ear to the glass and listened. The bureaucrat was speaking to them with the greatest of respect. He said that he had done what he could, now it was up to them. They had brought money and that was what mattered.

"We then tried to speak with someone in the Governor's office in Culiacán. We waited thirteen days to speak with him. Each morning we had to go out to find work in order to eat. By the time we got to the office they'd say we arrived too late to see him, or that he hadn't come in yet, or that he was in a meeting. Finally we had to return to Piaxtla without seeing him. That's how it was in all the government offices. Roberto an I were demoralized. All this talk of justice was only words. Money is what kicks ass around here. After that I never went back.

"Chuy kept struggling like this until about 1958 or 60. Then Ramón Valverde started working with us and things took off. He was a good man and a strong ally. He encouraged us and gave us spirit. With his help we reached the stage of organization where we were able to take the land by force. And that's why they killed him."

"What was he like?" I asked.

"He was tall and dark. Estéban, his pistolero who he hung out with, was short. He was an agrarista and helped those who needed it. He was a real man." He had a ranch in San Augustine. It's down the river from San Ignacio where the river makes a loop.

"Ramón told us, 'look men, if you want the land, they sure as hell aren't going to give it to you on a platter. And don't expect help from the government. The land is legally yours. So, if you have the courage lets go in and take it. If need be we'll take it by force.' And that's what we did, we went in and took it. We were at the mouth of the creek from Carrizal when José Celis, one of the landlords, passed. 'Where are you going,' he asked. 'To Tamborillo,' I said. 'If you put one foot across that fence...!' he said. 'We'll see,, was all I answered. We were organized and ready. We had thirty five, thirty eight men, all with machetes.

"We took all the potreros in one day. We first went Virgilio's fields by La Ernita. From there we took José Celis' near Tamorillo. Then to Ricardo Manjarrez' potrero, the guava orchard, and the river plane. Once the land was in our hands we divided up. About four or five or six men were sent to guard each potrero and to start clearing and planting.

"What was the reaction of the landowners?" I asked.

"*Los ricos* brought in pistoleros. About eight or ten. They were all gunmen for Aurelio Espinoza. They surprised us and tried to run us off the land. But we were to many for them. They said they were going to kill us but they lost their nerve." We kept it the land for two seasons. Then they killed Ramón and everything fell apart.

"Ramón Valverde went to San Ignacio with Estéban, his pistolero. They were waiting for them in a deserted house in front of the Cantina de Pispí. As

Ramón and Estéban cut down through they alleyway towards the cantina they gunned them down.

"What year was this," asked Valentín.

"1966. It was bad. Its clear that the government was involved. The rich people from Piaxtla, the "victims" whose fields had been taken had bought off the politicians. These are things that make you feel bad. All this suffering for nothing. We've always been poor because they don't allow us to organize. Every time we do they kill our leaders. The *ejido* fell apart. Chuy Alarcón, the *ejido* representative, left Piaxtla. I didn't leave. Why should I?

"They were starting to rise up," said Valentín. "They even had their own cooperative store to provide an alternative to the sharp practices of the *cacique's* stores. But all of this wasn't in the interest of *los ricos.* They were about to lose their cheap labor. To end this threat they had to kill the leaders. We have a saying, which is very Mexican, "kill the dog, and you get rid of the rabies." So by killing Ramón Valverde they knew they would shatter the movement. When Ramón died the cooperative store collapsed, the *compañeros* fled the pueblo, and the organization fell apart. Everything ended up in nothing. Roberto started drinking too much and let slip all sorts of confidential information. This also helped bring about their downfall. Ten years later Jenaro and I revived the struggle. All their grief and all their failures served us well, in the sense that we avoided stumbling in the same ways."

"How so?" I asked.

"I was in Los Angeles in 1979 when my compadre Jenaro came to see me," said Valentín. He told me that he and a group of campesinos were forming a farmer's union to see if they could recover the land. He invited me to come

back and help him because he felt that I had the makings of a leader. But how was I going to help these people if I don't know anything about agrarian law, organizing, or politics? I told him I couldn't do it.

"This man here raised me," said Valentín as he looked at Crecencio. "For all intents and purposes he is my father. I grew up hearing about the struggle, our right to land, and the murder of my uncle. I inherited all of this. Even though I had no experience, at heart I was an agrarista. So the next year I returned to Piaxtla and joined the farmers union. You could say that I started with my eyes closed. But I began to learn from the others. Jenaro loaned me books."

"Which books?" I asked.

"The first book he loaned me was called Community Organizing for Campesinos. I started to get into the habit of reading. One by one I bought all that you've seen on my bookshelf. I spent a lot of evenings burning my eyelashes as we say. At that time our movement was still very weak. Simon Castillejos, a friend of ours, was helping us organize. He was a leader of the Revolutionary Workers Party (El Partido del Revolucionario del Trabajador). He talked to us about Marx and Lenin, and Fidel Castro. I became frustrated and said, "when you talk about the Russian revolution people don't understand what you're talking about. I don't understand and I've done some reading. The people here know about Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa from the old ballads. They'll catch on more quickly if we talk about land, liberty, and the ideals of the Mexican revolution.

"I became even more disillusioned when he took me to his house in Mazatlán. It wasn't a house, it was a mansion, with a garage, air conditioning, and fine furniture. It was a palace in comparison to what we have here in Piaxtla. And this is the man who wanted to lead a struggle for the poor? He

invited me in, but I said, 'I didn't want to dirty your floors. As far as I'm concerned you no longer have a place in our organization. I still consider you a friend, but not an advisor.' That's when I decided to take the reigns of the farmer's union.

"Jenaro and I began by exchanging ideas. From there others joined us. We held secret meetings in the woods for about a year. The way it worked was that I would invite someone to one of these meetings. If he liked what we were talking about, what we were struggling for, then we'd ask him to bring another two friends to the next meeting. This continued until we had about 160 people.

"We talked about land, politics, the *caciques* , and how we could overcome these problems. We always asked for suggestions from the others. It's vital to take this into account. I learned that the ideas of the most humble campesinos are more important than those of the most cultured people. They are they ones who have the problems, so to understand the truth of the situation you have to listen to what they say.

"You held these meetings, and then what happened?" I asked.

"We started taking the land. We cleared and planted the fields. But not one or two people at a time. Forty or fifty men went with the person who was to take the piece of land. Now this land is part of the *ejido*.

"The *caciques* didn't do anything?"

"They tried to frighten us. They'd leave notes at our houses at night that said, 'continue and you're dead.' Or, 'Cochi Loco's going to kill you,' and things like that."

"We held a meeting in town. Everyone came, even the *caciques* . I said, "times have changed since you murdered my uncle. Things are different

now. We're not assassins but you'd better learn to respect us. We know who you are. If you kill just one of us, four of you will die.

"They brought a government official from Culiacán to look into the problems in the pueblo. The landlords had complained that we were trespassing on their land, that we were anarchists, almost guerrilla fighters. They said that Jenaro was an outside agitator, and that I was a good friend of Samuel who was importing revolutionary ideas from Central America. They said a lot of things but nothing came of it."

"I think that we were successful because I always tried to work from inside the system, though I'm sure that Jenaro wouldn't agree with this analysis. I worked my way inside and from there I kicked their asses. Now about 60 percent of the land is in the hands of the campesinos. We are still short of our goal, but we'll complete the struggle. I'm the municipal representative for two ejidos and am about to be appointed to a position in the municipal government.

"It isn't easy working with the men who paid for your uncle's death. They constantly try to take advantage of you. They invite you out to eat and ask, "how much will it take to get you to drop all of this," meaning the land struggle. I've had to compromise at times. I've done this with the intention of avenging my uncles' death, to insure that his death was not in vain, and that their struggles and downfalls will finally bear fruit. Little by little this is what is happening.

" Jenaro abhors the politicians and shudders at the thought of my working with them. But if you want to be out there in the ring and fight the bull, you have step out front with your cape, and find out what you can do. This is my strategy. I say "sí, sí, sí," but then go behind them and give it to them up the ass.

"This is what we have been doing all along, only Jenaro doesn't realize it. With this approach we'll eventually take back the rest of the land. If we took it all at one time they'd take it back at gun point. You have to navigate the political channels first, and then make your move. This is my political strategy. Jenaro and I disagree on this, but the two of us have the same goals.

"Where other people in the clinic involved in the struggle?" I asked.

"Samuel always knew what we were up to and gave us moral support. Once we got the land he helped us get loans to buy pumps, barbed wire, the threshing machine and these kinds of things."

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Cipriano Castro worked with Projects Piaxtla and Quilá. He was in his early thirties.

"My grandfather lived in San Miguel, a pueblo off the highway between Culiacán and Mazatlán. He wasn't a rich man, but somehow he believed that his interests were the interests of the rich people. His father had left him a lot of land but his mother didn't know how to manage their holdings and lost everything. After much effort the family was finally able to buy back the land. Then in the 1940's the agraristas tried to take it away. My grandfather and his brothers guarded the land. And there were killings. He always told me that he had never killed anybody, but his brother might have. They felt that they had worked very hard to keep their land and that it was very unfair that the agraristas wanted to it away from them. He thought that anybody who was an agrarista was just lazy.

"My grandfather didn't have a political program, but he really loved his land. So he sided with the *caciques* . He didn't need anything from the rich

guys. He was fully self-sufficient. But when Ramón Valverde was going about organizing my grandfather helped bring him down. He stored the weapons that were used to kill Ramón Valverde in his house for a few days until the plan was ready."

"Who gave him the weapons?" I asked.

"Probably Braulio Aguirre who was then the most powerful man in the region. Braulio Aguirre was a good friend of his."

"Why Braulio Aguirre? Why would he care about what's going on all the way up in Piaxtla?"

"At that time Ramón Valverde seemed like a danger (threat) not only to Piaxtla but to the whole municipality. There were a lot of big landholdings, so everybody who owned land felt threatened. And as I told you, in the 1940's they tried to take my grandfather's land away. That was the same wave of agrarismo that Crecencio's brother was involved in. My grandfathers antagonism came from back then. Braulio Aguirre had a very good friend in San Miguel. His name was Raul Palacios. He owned thousands of hectares of land all over the municipality. Braulio Aguirre's land was concentrated in El Colite. But because he was into drug dealing, you know, he had connections all over. It was like a favor to Raul Pallacios I guess. I have a gunman if you need him.

"This was the mid 1960s. He was into drug dealing that early?"

"Yeah. I don't know how it worked then, but it had started already. In Piaxtla, they mentioned some guy by the last name of Vivanco, I think, who introduced these things to Piaxtla, but I don't know much about it. Vivanco must be Italian? Yeah, I think it's an Italian name.

"My grandfather never talked about this with me. I heard about it from the old agraristas in San Miguel and from my aunt. Right before he died I

tried several times to speak with him about it. By that time he wasn't as reluctant to discuss these things, but the lady that he was living with was. We'd start talking and she'd jump up and say, "Paco don't talk about these things. All this happened years ago. You don't have to talk about it anymore." He would just laugh and say, "well, he's my grandson. He's not going to do anything to me." But she'd get upset and change the subject. So he didn't give me a lot of details.

"They only had one big room in the house. Everybody slept there out on the porch. My aunt told me that he hid the guns under an old couch. She was sure that he knew what they were for. After a few days a car came early in the morning. Grandfather went in and got a bundle out from under the couch and gave it to the men in the car. Later that day they heard that Ramón Valverde had been killed in San Ignacio. That's when my aunt put everything together."

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The following is Jenaro's perspective of the land struggle.

"When the *caciques* were strongest the last thing they wanted was an *ejido* in these parts. The land belonged to three or four families, and that was it. The campesinos didn't have land, they didn't have anything. At that time they were ignorant. They didn't know about their rights, the agrarian laws, or even what an *ejido* was. Most important, they weren't able to organize, to unite with others to improve their lives. But in 1940 José Velasquez, Raul Melchór and a few others started to struggle for an *ejido*. They called a meeting in which 107 people attended. A delegation was sent to Mexico City.

They were received at the presidential palace and applied for governmental recognition of the *ejido*.

"But the *caciques* saw the *ejido* and its president and directorate as a threat. In 1942 they had the *ejido* leaders killed. After that nobody wanted to join the *ejido* or sit on the directorate. The movement fell apart. The lands officially remained as national lands, but were in fact under the domination of the *caciques* .

"Years later, in 1958, the wealthy families held a meeting in town to organize an *ejido* of their own. There were now several ejidos in the vicinity of Piaxtla which were threatening to encroach on the lands the *caciques* . So they got a large number of signatures and went to Mexico city to apply for recognition as a Centro Población Agricola Ganadero, which was something like an *ejido* , but which emphasized cattle production instead of subsistence farming. No more than ten men in Piaxtla owned cattle. The names of a number of campesinos were included in the application form for appearance sake, to fill the legal requirements. These campesinos were members of the new Centro Población Agricola Ganadero, but in practice had no rights to the land. The *caciques* rented them this land, even though it was legally theirs. They were working their own land and paying rent for the right to do it.

"About that time Ramón Valverde started working with the campesinos to build a farmer's union. He had charisma and was an excellent organizer. But he also had personal problems. He ordered the death of two wealthy ranchers. One was Cruz Lafarga from Acatitlán, and the other was Cruz Arreola from Campanillas, a distant relative of mine. Apparently he had borrowed money from Lafarga. Lafarga charged him an exorbitant amount of interest and he couldn't pay it back. So he had Lafarga killed. People say it was Lafarga's sons who killed Ramón Valverde.

"So it wasn't for political reasons that he was killed?" I said.

"I think the two were mixed, his personal and political problems, together they got him killed. As I got more deeply involved in the clinic and in the problems of the people we were seeing, I became interested in the question of land distribution. At that time there were about ten wealthy families in Piaxtla. Of these there were two that were especially well off. Chewy Vega and Virgilio Manjarrez. They were the *caciques*. They had the best land and plenty of pasture. Virgilio Manjarrez had several hundred head of cattle and Chewy Vega had perhaps two thousand.

"These families here were wealthy by inheritance. Their grandparents and great grand parents had money, and it was like that all the way back. Who knows how they got it? Exploiting the poor? Taking their land? Virgilio Manjarrez inherited houses, land, and cattle from Don Juan Manjarrez y Doña Rafaela, his godparents, who had no children of their own. Virgilio took additional land from the campesinos. Eventually he and his cousin Jenaro owned all the land on the other side of the river, and ran their cattle in the corners where the plain met the foothills.

"At one *ejido* assembly I heard that Virgilio Manjarrez had taken the land of twelve poor men. This isn't right, I thought. But what were we going to do? How were we going to change things? I began to read more about the agrarian reform laws and took an interest in the trainings offered at the clinic by people from Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Honduras. These people were sincere and committed to their struggle. They meant what they said, and had a great influence on me.

"I began meeting secretly with my father-in-law, his brother, and several other old men. I gave each a copy of the agrarian reform laws. We studied them and discussed how they related to our situation. As far as we could see

the laws guaranteed that each of us had a right to piece of land on the *ejido*. This was what so many people died for during the Mexican revolution.

"We always worked within the law. We struggled with the agricultural code in one hand. We helped start ejidos in Piaxtla, Guillapa, Carrizal and los Amapas. We met with people all the way up the river. We were strong up there. We realized that we all had the same problems and the same struggle, to recover our rights to the land.

"I invited my compadre Valentín to join us. He had stopped drinking by that time and we became good friends. We held clandestine meetings outside of Piaxtla in the night. When we began about one hundred people attended. We talked frankly about what we were going to do. We said that we didn't have land because the *caciques* had it all. We wanted to recover the land and divide it among the people. If they wanted to do this they needed to follow this work through to the end and not desert us when things got tough, or go about telling others what we are going to do. Many feared the *caciques* and left the farmer's union, or left Piaxtla altogether. In the end we were left with about 38 or forty people.

"We examined the problems that earlier farmer's groups had faced. Each time their leaders were killed the organizations fell apart. This time we didn't want to have power concentrated in the hands of a few leaders, but rather disperse responsibilities amongst us.

"When we were well organized we held a meeting in the *ejido* hall in Piaxtla. Everyone attended including the rich. By that time they knew what we were doing. They criticized us at the meeting and said that we were lazy, that we wanted everything done for us. "You just want to come and sit at the table with everything already prepared," they said. I answered that if we had been lazy in the past, we certainly weren't now, and we would do what we

had to get the land. But I added that we didn't want their money, their houses, or any of their possessions. These things were legally theirs. I said that if that in anything happened to any of us, they would be held responsible. We would declare a massacre. In the end we'd end up killing one another, and where would that lead us? All we wánted was the return of the land which was rightfully ours.

"We later heard rumors that they were going to kill us and that Victor Rios was behind this. Some of the *compañeros* waited for him by the trail to Durangito. They grabbed his horse, and told him that he ought to be careful. If one of us should be killed, you'd better leave," they said, "for we'll kill all of you, even the dogs in your houses. And this was the truth.

"The clinic had an old ford pick-up. We nearly ran it into the ground going to government offices in Culiacán, Mazatlán, La Cruz, and San Ignacio. These trips were expensive. We had to pay for gasoline, flat tires, repairs, and food. Many of these men were poor and were giving up a day of work to come with us. The least we could do is provide food.

"The money that we used, well many times it was money from the consultations at the clinic. When I was at Quilá I also used project money. This was a problem I always had with them. I never kept records or saved receipts and they thought that I was pocketing the money. I just took the money and used it, and that was wrong.

"In the end we won because the people weren't afraid. We acquired about half of the land. We got the best land. I say the best because it is on the river plane. It isn't necessarily the most productive, but it is flat. We divided this land among those who needed it. There were many acres, and we had struggled hard for them."

"And the other half of the land was still in the hands of the wealthy families?"

"Yes, about half of the land is still in the hands of the rich. Actually, I think we have a little more than half. Its the better half. Much of the other half is by the hills and is only good for raising cattle. But with the rewriting of Article 27 of the constitution, *ejido* members are now allowed to sell their land. And this is what is starting to happen. You could say President Salinas de Gortari has done away with Zapata's legacy. The wealthy are starting to buy up land again. In the end the people will sell. Some will sell when a family member gets sick and they need the money. Others from problems caused by their involvement in the drug trade. Others will sell their land to buy an old car, or other consumer items that are carried down from the United States. So much blood was spilled for this article during the revolution. But in the end many will sell and we will be back to where we started."

"Why did you stop with the recovery of just half the land?"

"Once each person got their piece of land they left the farmer's union. They didn't want anymore problems. We had begun to hear rumors again that they were going to kill us, that we would disappear. Many of these people are passive, they conform. They just didn't want anymore trouble. I always said that the land was not everything, that we needed to stay united. We needed inputs and credit to produce on the land. We needed mules, plows, pumps and a good irrigation system to make it produce.

"But the people stopped struggling when they got their land. We started to argue amongst ourselves. The *ejido* president was co-opted and given a post in the government in San Ignacio and lost the trust of the people. After

that I left. I had a family and had to work to support them. You don't get paid for political activism."

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Inés Rodriquez was a school teacher in San Ignacio. He was about to retire when I spoke with him. He had written a number of articles for local historical journals and had strong family ties with the Manjarrez and Vega families in Piaxtla. We were talking about the ejido when he made the following comments.

"The great majority of the men in Piaxtla are lazy. They hang around the pueblo all day. Play billiards. Drink beer outside the expendio. In the days of Virgilio Manjarrez and Jesús Vega things were different. They were men of accomplishment. Jesús Vega alone gave work to at least twenty families. Between them the cattlemen of Piaxtla owned twenty thousand head of cattle. Now you'd be lucky to find two thousand. Why? Because the people divided up and fenced in the lands of those they called *caciques*. This led to the ruin of Piaxtla."

"But now the majority of families in the pueblo have land to plant on."

"They have the land but what do they produce? In the past people from Piaxtla brought down cheese, chickens, and eggs to sell. Now that's what they buy here in San Ignacio to carry back up."

"What happened?"

"In a word, indolence. They found that they could grow and sell marijuana and then let everything else go to ruin. What happened in Piaxtla wasn't a social struggle. What you've been hearing is a myth. You tell me how many of the men are working the land they were given."

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In early September a small figure of San Jerónimo began traveling from house to house in preparation for *El Dia de San Jerónimo,* the fiesta for Piaxtla's patron saint. After a night's stay, the emaciated but kindly saint moved to the next family, until he passed through every Catholic home in Piaxtla. The fiesta for San Jerónimo came at the end of the hungry season. Corn on the cob and squash was ready to pick. Fruit was plentiful. And the year's major marijuana crop had just been harvested.

A week before the fiesta began Socorro told me that her three year old daughter Camelita had been up all night with bronchitis. Throughout the night Camelita talked about *los caballitos.* From Socorro's description I gathered that *los caballitos* were mechanical horses like one often finds outside a North American supermarket. A few days later men started asking me if I was going to dance at the fiesta. As they asked, they would stretch one arm out, hold the other to the chest as if dancing with a partner, and do a little jig. Then small bands -- a bass, a guitar, and an accordion -- began strolling through town playing *"musica ranchera"* in search of a paying audience.

The day before the festival began two large trucks rolled into Piaxtla with three worn out carnival rides; a Ferris wheel, a merry go round *(los caballitos!),* and bumper cars. I found myself sitting in the village plaza with about thirty children watching as they set up the rides. The most dramatic moment came when they put the lights in the Ferris wheel. A man climbed up into the wheel and moved from spoke to spoke as he screwed in the bulbs. The Ferris wheel turned as did this, bringing to mind the image of a two legged hamster slowly spinning in its wheel. A large covered pavilion and stage was set up across from the rides. By evening the plaza had come alive

with music, the rides, and food and curio booths. The town had grown to several times its size as people came down from the Sierras.

The main centers of activity were the pavilion, the rides, and the streets. The dance floor was mostly for the young, though from time to time a few of Piaxtla's more mature couples joined in. The couples danced something called *el caballito,* which was like a bouncy western fox trot. Dressed in emerald jackets, flowing green gowns, or in strapless black, the women were exquisite. Their clothing and hair were worthy of the finest big city Salsa clubs. Isolated in the foothills of the Sierra Madre, these young women had stashed away three completely different sets of clothing, one for each night of the festival. The men, in black Levis' 501s, their best shirts, and new white cowboy hats, appeared enviously confident. Their hats bobbed above dancers. Each man had to pay 50 pesos to enter the dance floor. An older woman from San Ignacio watched the dance floor like a hawk. Each time a new couple entered she sent her assistant to collect their money and staple a blue dot on the man's collar.

The band played both *musica tropical* and *musica ranchera.* The musicians wore white Levis and white leather jackets. The singer, a young blonde woman with a clear voice, was dressed in tight black. Socorro, Elena and Cecilia sat at a table close to the stage. Their men were sitting nearby. Elena offered me a beer and I sat down with the men. Every few minutes Moisés or Efrain would put another beer in front up me. As the cans started piling up untouched in front of me a young man from the pueblo sat down with us and started asking if I were a man. A few minutes later he leaned over the side of his chair and threw up. I later asked Claudio what he did for hangovers. His solution was simple. He said he didn't get hangovers. He just started drinking again the first thing in the morning.

Ruben, Manuel, Adolfo and Enrique sat outside the pavilion on the edge of the crowd. Their location was symbolic of their social position in the pueblo. Elena and Socorro were about as far in as a disabled person could get, while the young men were on the margins. Claudio went back and forth between the two groups.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the square, the children were squandering away their share of the family money. The rides were three pesos each. All but the poorest children were spinning around on the Ferris wheel, merry go round, or bumper cars. I walked over to take a look and soon became intoxicated by their excitement. I spent over a hundred pesos taking children I knew (and a few I didn't know) repeatedly on the rides.

I was worried that the Ferris wheel would collapse and leave us trapped beneath wire and metal. I seemed to be the only one with that concern. An older man, chubby, with a thin mustache and generally kind face (or so I hoped), ran the ride. There was a shabby ticket booth, but they never used it. Andrés figured that they had set it up to add to the effect. A squad of judicial police armed with automatic weapons stood watch at the edges of the plaza. Behind them small bands moved along the streets looking for customers. Following each was a collection of drunks, arm in arm, shirts out, and beers in hand.

In the midst of all of this activity a crew from the BBC filmed interviews with people from Quilá. They had arrived the day before to do a short piece on the project. They worked frantically through the evening getting film of "disabled Mexicans socializing with the non-disabled town folks." Earlier they had interviewed Ruben about his accident.

"How did you become disabled," asked the journalist through an interpreter.

"I fell off the bleachers at a baseball game," Ruben answered.

"That doesn't seem that far down," said the journalist.

"It was far enough," said Ruben.

They filmed the interview outside of Doña Eva's house. Half way through one of their lamps blew one of Eva's fuses. The producer, speaking through an interpreter, asked Eva's husband Ramón to go to the store to buy another fuse. He returned five minutes later and said that they had fuses at the cooperative store. The producer was non-plussed for a moment, and then asked him if he would go and buy two. Ramón shuffled off and returned a few minutes later and said that they cost two pesos each. The producer, again taken back, gave him the money and Ramón went of to buy the fuses.

The morning of the second day of the fiesta Ruben called to me as I passed by the alleyway next to the project. He was drinking with Adolfo, Manuel, and Enrique. Ruben asked me if they could have a 50 peso advance on the bookshelf Manuel was making me. We all knew that the money should go to the project. When I said no he gave me a hard look and turned away. That evening, the final night of the fiesta, Ruben called to me across the crowd. "Thirty pesos for beer?" he asked. This happened several more times during the evening. His tone of voice became increasingly nasty. "Look Ruben," I said. "If all you want is money for beer..." "I don't want shit from you!" he said. He was very drunk and his eyes were contemptuous. A few hours later Ruben called to me again. I ignored him. He called out again, this time louder. I turned around and he motioned for me to go over to him. He said he wanted help getting back to the project. I pushed him back to Quilá. Efrain and I lifted him into bed. As I started to leave he held out his right hand, and we shook hands. We said goodnight and I turned out the light.

I went to Francisco's room and helped him through his nightly routine. The clear voice of the band's lead singer echoed through the project. I went to José's room but Alberto was already there. Alberto was holding José's wheelchair steady as José grabbed on to a rope that the two men had hung from the roof. José pulled himself up from the wheelchair and then over to his bed. Alberto then went over to his own bed and made his transfer with ease.

On my way out of the project I passed by Pedros' room. In recent weeks his relentless demands had tapered off. In the past, when I asked him "Cómo estas, Pedro?" he answer was invariably "mal!" However, that morning when I asked him how he was, he said "bien, bien." This was followed by a moment in which we both sat silently in the morning sun. Then, as if waking up from a reverie, he turned to me and said, "Papá, something to eat? Something to drink?"

Pedro slept alone in a small room in the men's house. The room was empty but for his tilted cot and an orange crate. He slept curled up in a warn grey blanket. His wheelchair was parked in the next room. When left near his bed he would roam through the house at night knocking over furniture and creating havoc. When I looked in on him that evening he was already asleep. Tossing and turning under his grey blanket, Pedro seemed so painfully alone and abandoned.

"Los Agraristas" and "Los de Monte"

Chapter Seven

When Governor Francisco Cañedo gave his yearly address before the Sinaloa state legislature, he would begin with the words, "Señores diputados," and then in a lower voice, "My beloved friends and esteemed *compadres*" (Carton de Grammont 1990: 255). These men were the proprietors of the state of Sinaloa at the turn of the century. They were the *hacendados,* the mill owners, and the merchants who controlled the state's political apparatus through a network of family power that began in the municipalities and culminated in the state capital (Carton de Grammont 1990). These men were the backbone of Porfirio Díaz' support in the state. They were also the principle beneficiaries in Sinaloa of his long regime.*

During Cañedos seven terms as governor, which covered virtually all of the "paz porfiriana,*" foreign investment in the state grew significantly. Capitalist agriculture in Sinaloa first took off during this period with the two crops that to this day remain key for the region, the cultivation of sugar cane and the production of vegetables. North American capital became increasingly involved in the production and cultivation of sugar cane. The United States Sugar Company built the state's most modern sugar mill in Los Mochis. Much more modest at first, but decades later to be of tremendous importance, was the production of vegetables by small producers. By the end of Cañedo's rule investors from the United States controlled some of the finest agricultural land in the state through their participation in the

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* Porfirio Díaz was elected to the presidency in 1876. He remained in power until 1911 through a combination of deft political maneuvering, intimidation, and outright repression. Díaz' presidency came to an end with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution.

* Francisco Cañedo was Governor of Sinaloa from 1877 to1909).

financing and marketing of export crops (Carton de Grammont 1990). Foreign mining companies were given rights to claims in San Ignacio, Culiacán, Cosalá, and other municipalities in the foothills of the Sierras.

As was true throughout the republic, the prosperity of Cañedos "beloved friends and esteemed *compadres*" and their foreign partners did not extend to the rest of the population. Indigenous people had their land expropriated and given to North American enterprises and local landholding estates under the pretext that the properties were uncultivated wasteland. A disciple of President Díaz' politics of "mátalos en caliente," Cañedo resorted to violent repression, the assassination of his opposition, and the manipulation of elections when he felt these measures to be necessary. (Conde 1995: 14).

"Bandit-heroes" like Jesús Malverde "El Santo de Culiacán," won popular sympathy, even adoration, for their acts of generosity to Sinaloa's impoverished majority. The legend of Jesús Malverde has it that Cañedo himself ordered his death. Feliciano Roque is also said to have been killed during Cañedo's rule.

Cañedo died in 1909 by which time 97% of Mexico's land was in the hands of less than one percent of the population (Esteva 1987: 29). The nation's populace was first displaced from its land by the Spanish land grantees, then the land companies of the liberal reform, and finally by the hacendados of the Porfiriato. Popular discontent led to the Mexican Revolution in which nearly ten percent of the population died. Many who fought, especially those in the peasant army of Emiliano Zapata in the south, struggled under the banner of "Tierra y Libertad."* The Constitution of 1917, which was a product of the conflict, provided for the partition and redistribution of large land holdings.

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* "Land and Freedom."

In the years following the revolution the commercial landowners, industrialists, and bankers who had prospered under the Porfiriato reemerged to once again dominate the economic system (Hamilton 1982: 102). In Sinaloa they were joined by the new "capitalists of the revolution," the young generals of petit bourgeois background who were more interested in political power than the destruction of the hacienda and redistribution of land (Carton de Grammont 1990: 101).

The first post revolution governors in Sinaloa were influenced by Alvaro Obregón Salido, Plutarco Elías Calles, and the Sonoran group who held the Mexican presidency from 1920 to 1936. Following the model of the North American homestead, they looked to the agricultural entrepreneurs, the "self-made men" represented by Obregón, to modernize the nation's agriculture (Carton de Grammont 1990: 115). The new regime worked to eliminate those aspects of hacienda agriculture that limited modernization, but did no move to reform the overall structure of land ownership in the country. As long as the hacendados demonstrated that they were enterprising and able at business, the Sonoran group and their followers in Sinaloa saw no need to restrict the quantity of land they owned (Carton de Grammont 1990: 101). In order to retain peasant support, Presidents Obregón and Calles responded to their demand for land by carrying out limited agrarian reform, though most of the land redistributed was idle and of marginal quality (Hamilton 1982: 25).

General Angel Flores, the most prominent of the early post revolutionary governors of Sinaloa, believed that to modernize along the lines of the North American model, his state had to not only acquire North American technology, capital, and markets, but also had to adapt its customs, urbanize, and acquire a 'civilized' look. In short, Sinaloa needed to destroy all reminders of the state's Indian heritage. The Governor prohibited production

of the traditional wide-brimmed *sombreros*. Factories in Mazatlán were ordered to manufacture hats with narrower rims. However, the *sombreros* went unsold as contraband traditional sombreros were smuggled in from the neighboring state of Nayarit (Carton de Grammont 1990: 92).

Governor Flores ferociously defended the rights of private property against even the most limited efforts at land redistribution (Padilla 1993: 17) He openly confronted the National Commission on Agrarian Reform (Comisión Nacional Agraria) and blocked the processing of land claims from village committees. The state agrarian reform commission was in the hands of the landlords and state officials sympathetic to their interests. The army also supported the landlords. The revolution thus had few immediate effects on the structure of agricultural land holdings in Sinaloa. The haciendas modernized and shifted from the production of corn and beans to commercial crops such and sugar cane, cotton, and garbanzo beans. Shortage of land was not as acute in Sinaloa as in other parts of the republic. Smaller commercial growers were thus able to expand and soon became the most dynamic agricultural sector (Carton de Grammont 1990: 29-30).

In 1942, when El Güero Velasquez went to Culiacán to petition for the recognition of Piaxtla's ejido, the city was a backwater state capital. It consisted of a few square blocks of colonial style buildings dominated by the state building and the cathedral. Cane was still being planted less that five hundred meters from the city center. The town had a theater, the Apollo, and one "proper" hotel, the Rosales. Travelers of means generally preferred to stay in Mazatlán. The Hotel Rosales had the only restaurant in the city and had a cantina "with pretensions of being a bar, where ranchers, commercial farmers, government officials, and at times even the governor, came to drink periqueño's or chacaleño's, drinks with a stiff kick made from maguey

(Carton de Grammont 1990: 92). The valley surrounding Culiacán was a vast thicket of short thorn forests much like those that still stand near Piaxtla.

Peasant mobilizations increased with the world economic crises of 1929. When President Lázaro Cárdenas came to power in 1936 agrarian reform finally received strong government support. Under his leadership the more progressive factions of the ruling party, allied with the increasingly vigorous and peasant movement, were able to pursue land distribution more aggressively.

President Cárdenas gave new life to article 27 of the 1917 constitution and redistributed more land than all the preceding presidents combined. He authorized the expropriation of commercial agricultural estates and some of the most productive land in the country (Hamilton 1982: 102). Much of the land was taken from foreign owners or local landlords who had been allied with the government of Porfirio Díaz (Carton de Grammont 1990: 260).

Cárdenas believed that agrarian reform would provide land to the multitude of peasants while simultaneously diminishing the political power of the agricultural estates in rural Mexico. This would provide the basis for a more equitable social order and reverse the fragmentation and dispersion of political power, much of which at the time was in the hands of landlords and municipal politicians. Cárdenas also wanted to break Mexico's dependence on the United States through the development of dynamic forms of production adapted to the needs of national consumption rather than export (Hamilton 1982:186; Carton de Grammont 1990:).

Land was redistributed through rural communities called ejidos, "a form of land tenure based on the traditional communal holdings of the pre-Hispanic Indian villages" (Hamilton 1982: 68). The reconstitution of the

ejidos was one of the major demands of the peasants during the revolution. (Esteva 1987: 31). Community members, *ejidatarios* , work the land collectively or in family plots. Land can be passed down from one generation to another, but until recently could not be sold, rented, or mortgaged. Cárdenas saw the ejido as a means of liberating peasants from the exploitation of the traditional land owning class in the countryside. The ejido was also to be the base upon which the nations agricultural and economic development was to be built. Collective ejidos, modernized and using economies of scale, were to feed the nation and provide the initial capital for industrialization (Hamilton 1982: 180).

Peasant and worker mobilization was an essential precondition to these reforms, given the widespread opposition of the local elites to this social restructuring. Land expropriation and redistribution was most often preceded by the organization of the workers and peasants who were to receive the land. Cárdenas encouraged and endeavored to control this mass mobilization through the creation of such organizations as the National Confederation of Campesinos (Confederación Nacional Campesina) (Hamilton 1982: 166).

Though the workers and campesinos of Sinaloa had been unwilling to abandon the custom of wearing wide-brimmed sombreros for Governor Angel Flores, many were now actively involved in a profound social transformation that was changing the nature of Sinaloan society. Miners, sugar mill workers, and sugar plantation laborers were all in the process of unionizing. Even the salaried workers of the larger haciendas cultivating cotton, maguey, and garbanzo beans were now organized (Carton de Grammont 1990: 92).

Local committees were formed in communities across the state providing the base, cohesion, and organization for the agrarian reform movement in

Sinaloa. Upon receiving land these committees transformed themselves into ejidos (Ochoa 1996: 3) At the time there did not exist in Sinaloa a strong campesino movement, as was the case in other regions of the country. Cárdenas turned to the unions of agricultural laborers, especially those of the sugar plantations, for the mobilization and social support needed to carry out agrarian reform (Carton de Grammont 1990: 260).

The local agrarian committees thus supported by an alliance of workers, campesinos, and rural teachers. These committees were the "point of the lance" of agrarian reform in Sinaloa. They faced an oligarchy which considered land reform an offense to the motherland and a symbol of chaos, anarchy, and communism, and which was willing to use all means at its disposal to prevent agrarian reform from taking place in Sinaloa. (Padilla 1993: 7, 56).

While Culiacán in the 1930s still had the sleepy feel of a provincial state capital, the city of Mazatlán with its harbor and foreign capital was a dynamic economic center of banks, factories, commerce, and agricultural related industry. The city's oligarchy owned land throughout southern Sinaloa. They planted cotton, sugar cane, maguey, and tobacco which supplied their textile factories, sugar mills, distilleries, and the cities four cigarette factories. Cattle, another source of the Mazatlán's wealth, was often pastured on unlawfully held parcels of the village communal lands. In addition, during the Porfiriato large landowners took advantage of homestead laws meant for small property owners, to expropriate communally held village lands under the pretext that they were idle or uncultivated. (Padilla 1993: 23-26).

A loose knit grouping of thirty three of the wealthiest families in Mazatlán, known as "el grupo de los 33," led and financed the anti-agrarian reform forces in southern Sinaloa. The group of thirty-three was closely

related to the Unión Social Nacionalista Sinaloense (USNS) an anti-communist organization whose mission was to defend Mexico from the "agitators and traitors," who they believed were responsible for country's economic misery (Padilla 1993: 43). The members of the USNS were known as "los dorados", from the shirts they wore in imitation of Germany's brown shirts. Not all of the families in the "group of 33" were members of the USNS, but most sympathized with its strong anti-agrarian reform platform.

When Cárdenas signed a presidential order prohibiting meetings of the USNS in 1936, they continued to meet clandestinely in the woods outside the villages of Sinaloa, thus coming to be known as "Los del Monte," or "Those of the woods." The rank and file became the private paramilitary force of the "group of thirty-three" and the leaders of the USNS. Most of the members of "Los del Monte" were involved in a client-patron relationships with members of Mazatlán's economic elite. Some joined the paramilitary force to defend their small private plots which they believed were threatened by agrarian reform. Others were simply professional gunmen. They were organized into semi autonomous local commands. Jesús Sandoval, "El Culichi," Rodolfo Valdez, "El Guitano", and Jesús Tirado were the most prominent leaders of the local units. The "group of 33" provided "los del Monte" with modern arms, money, and protection from the police and military (Ochoa 1996: 4).

In one of the groups first actions a unit assaulted the offices of the agrarian committee in the pueblo of Agua Caliente, in the municipality of Concordia. They killed the secretary general of the of the committee and burned the office archives. When a new secretary general whose chosen a few days later the paramilitary unit murdered him also. As the agrarian reform movement spread through Sinaloa, so did the violence of "Los del

Monte" (Padilla 1993: 45). They killed campesino leaders "in the name of the defense of small property, individual liberty and against the communist threat that was threatening to destroy the nation." No mention was made of the large property owners, who were at the heart of the dispute and who organized and funded the paramilitary gróups (Padilla 1993: 55). The military command in Mazatlán maintained remained passive. They provided security only in the city itself, and allowed the paramilitary units to pass through Mazatlán with impunity (Ochoa 1996: 3).

When two sergeants and major were wounded in Agua Caliente the governor and the agrarian reform authorities responded by redistributing the land of the pueblo. The men of "Los del Monte" responded by unleashing a reign of terror. One after another they killed ejido presidents and other local officials until finally local leaders of the agrarian movement throughout the region resigned in mass. As the struggle reached its peak, President Cárdenas created the *Defensas Rurales,* (Rural Defense Militia) consisting of a squads of ten men who served as reservists. They were given antiquated arms of different caliber, insufficient ammunition, and little or no military training (Ochoa 1996: 3).

When the Defensas Rurales proved to be ineffective in providing protection in the pueblos, the *agraristas* * decided, without the consent of the military or civil authorities, to form their own armed group. The group consisted of fifty men, two from each committee, and was headed by Ramón Lizarraga, "El Borrego." Every time an ejido president or official was killed, "El Borrego and his men carried out a reprisal (Padilla 1993: 58).

In 1938 they killed Alfonso Tirado in the cantina of the Hotel Rosales of Culiacán. They accused Tirado, the former municipal president of Mazatlán

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* Members of the agrarian reform movement.

and a landowner with connections to the USNS, of being behind the assassinations of many of the campesino leaders. The gunman claimed self-defense but Tirado was not armed at the time of his death (Padilla 1993: 62). Tirado's murder lead to another cycle of violence in which the members of "Los del Monte" went beyond the killing of individual agrarian reform leaders. In the village of El Quemado they executed eleven members of the agrarian reform committee. They then burned the pueblo of El Espinal in the municipality of San Ignacio. In 1938 alone, 216 people were killed in these conflicts (Ochoa 1996: 6).

As the violence spread throughout the country Cárdenas and his advisors feared that their restructuring of Mexican society had deepened the division between the social classes to the point that they ran the risk of bringing the nation to the brink of a civil war. In the final years of his presidency Cárdenas tried to reign in the unions and *agraristas*. The amount of land redistributed declined dramatically as Cárdenas decided to consolidate the gains they had won rather than push further (Hamilton 1982: 237). Though many of the agrarian committees and workers' organizations began as autonomous organizing efforts, they had slowly fallen under the domination of the new structures of state power. This now greatly limited the independence, spontaneity, and activism of the agrarian movement (Padilla 1993: 56). Cárdenas chose as his successor Avila Camacho, a moderate who he believed could unify the party.

In October 1939 the government offered an amnesty to the members of "Los del Monte". Two years later Avila Camacho returned 222 parcels of land in southern Sinaloa to their original owners in the pueblos most affected by the violence, including Agua Caliente (Padilla 1993: 78). The domination of "Los del Monte" and their leaders in Mazatlán came to be almost absolute in

the region. With time the relationship between the landlords and 'Los del Monte' became more problematic as the latter found that they could earn more money trafficking in narcotics, cattle rustling, smuggling, and paid assassination (Ochoa 1996: 6).

In the conflict between *'Los del Monte'* and *'Los Agraristas'*, the agraristas were almost always at a disadvantage. The aid they received from the state and the unions was irregular and usually insufficient. Their main support came from groups of workers and rural teachers who often accompanied them to their tragic destiny. In contrast, "los del" had the strong backing of the regional elite who equipped them with arms, funds, and legal impunity (Padilla 1993: 82).

The election of 1940 marked the end to the Cárdenas project and the decline of agrarian reform. However, the struggle did achieve the partial reduction of the power of the land holding elite, who lost many of their privileges, and gave the ejido an important place in Sinaloan agriculture.

In the early hours of February 21, 1944, during the Mazatlán carnival, the Governor of Sinaloa, Rodolfo Loaiza, was shot dead in the patio of the Hotel Belmar by Rodolfo Valdéz, "el Gitano.*" The Governor was a former *agrarista* and Rodolfo Valdéz a leader of *"Los del Monte."* After his capture nearly a year later, Valdéz was taken to Mexico City where he met privately for more than an hour with former President Cárdenas, who was then serving as the Secretary for National Defense. Rodolfo Valdéz did not deny killing Loiza, but told Cárdenas that the man behind the murder was Pablo Macia Valenzuela (Astorga 1995: 48). One year later Pablo Macia Valenzuela became Governor of Sinaloa. He along with "other state politicians of high

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* "The Gypsy"

office, merchants, and industrialists" were soon being accused of involvement in the trafficking of opium. The Mexico City newspaper "Ultimas Noticias" accused Macías of owning four small aircraft for use in the smuggling operation (Ultimas Noticias 1947 as cited in Astorga 1995: 49).

During the second world war campesínos in the Sierra Madre Occidental were encouraged to grow opium. The amapola poppy was needed for the manufacture of morphine for the United States armed forces which were cut off from their traditional Asian sources. After the war many continued cultivation as Governor Macía and his associates helped supply the North American heroin market. As the opium trade grew and increased in profitability, Miguel Alemán, the President of the Republic, is reported by a former Attorney General of Sinaloa to have said, "Pues, es que produce divisas. Que produce divisas...* " (Lazcano Ochoa 1992: 208).

* "Well, its that it generates foreign exchange. It generates foreign exchange...."

Es Verde La Vida*
Chapter Eight

With the arrival of young men with spinal cord injuries caused by violence associated with the drug trade, Quilá's democracy was brutally tested. Violence became a common occurrence at the project and the use of drugs and alcohol dramatically increased. This precipitated a bitter power struggle between the project founders and the young "mariguanos." The next two chapters will place these difficulties within the larger political and economic context. Drug related violence is not unique to Quilá. It is endemic to much of the state of Sinaloa. Unemployment, deteriorating yields from ejido lands, and the chronic disinterest of the government in the development of new sources of income, have left many campesinos with few alternatives to the drug trade.

When I arrived at Lucila's this evening she and Chema were sitting alone at the dinner table playing cards. "We're playing 'la loteria' like the children," said Chema. Lucila won and laid down her cards. Chema was confused, so she explained her hand. As Lucila went into the kitchen to warm up my dinner she asked me if I had heard about Gabriel Manjarrez. "He didn't return home last night," she said. "He was last seen crossing the river on horseback." Lucila carried out a plate of refried beans, her hand trembling a bit from age and diabetes. Her grandchildren then flooded in with Norma, Lucila's daughter. They brought a package of cookies and a liter carton of milk. They ate and then went to their house next door to go to bed. Lucila

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* Life is Green

cleaned up a little, straightened the dining room chairs, and locked up the house.

The next morning Gabriel's family received a ransom note. A woman found the note on a trail outside of Chilar, a village several hours up from Piaxtla. The kidnappers had blocked the trail with two crossed branches on which they hung Gabriel's shirt and hat. When she picked up the hat the note fell out. The kidnappers were demanding that Virgilio Manjarrez, Gabriel's brother, deliver four hundred thousand pesos to a location near the village of Guillapa. Gabriel Manjarrez was a small, wiry man, in his sixties. He had several hundred head of cattle and a second house in Culiacán. I often saw him leaving on horseback from the large iron gate behind his house. Some speculated that the kidnappers were really after Gabriel's brother Virgilio. Unlike Gabriel, Virgilio rarely left the pueblo alone. None of us was surprised when we heard that he had refused to deliver the ransom.

The following morning at breakfast Lucila told me that Jacinto, Gabriel's son, went up the previous night with the money. The kidnappers weren't there and on the way back his truck broke down. His family and friends spent much of the night looking for him. I passed him about ten in the morning in the alley by his house. He looked haggard. Stubble covered his round face. He was usually clean shaven. I asked him if he had gotten any sleep. He said no. He got back about five in the morning and tried to sleep, but said he always had a hard time sleeping during the day. I suggested that it was probably also difficult to sleep with all these problems. He said yes, especially with the thoughts that were running through his head. He touched his finger to his temple for emphasis. I later found out that a friend had gone up to get Jacinto's truck. On his way back six armed men stopped the friend,

slugged him, and gave him a second note. It said that Jacinto should bring food and the money at five that afternoon to a ravine near Guillapa.

Jacinto was in his twenties, warm natured, and had little of the emotional hardness of his father and uncle. He was short and had light skin. On hot days he rolled up his T-shirt exposing his round belly. His wife, Chayo, was also very round. They had four children. When I first came to Piaxtla my Spanish was limited. Many of the men Jacinto's age would lose patience after a few awkward words and turn away. But Jacinto would start conversations with me and listen carefully as I slowly constructed my broken sentences.

I passed his house in the afternoon as he was getting ready to leave again. I saw him hug his children, look up with a sigh, and then walk toward the truck. I gestured good-bye. He nodded back, his eyes sober and dignified. That was all. After project Quilá closed for the day I went for a long walk. On the way home I passed a couple of lone burros by the side of the trail. Cattle usually roam in groups, but the burros tend to be solitary. Jenaro once told me that the old ones were left to wander and eventually die of hunger when their teeth fall out.

I stopped by Valentín's house on my way back from the walk. At the time he was the new village *síndico.** Valentín was charismatic and was agile with words. Jenaro he led the land struggle that finally forced the redistribution of the village *ejido*. Until that time the land was in the hands of Piaxtla's five wealthy families. I asked Valentín when he thought that we might hear news about Gabriel and Jacinto. He said probably not until later that night. We talked about the kidnappers for awhile. Most in town already believed that they knew who was involved. In a town as small as Piaxtla people's first

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* Government representative in the village.

guesses often proved true. Luis Chávez' name came up most often. He came from a poor family from Chicuras, a rancho about an hour by foot from Piaxtla. Luis was involved in the drug trade like many other young men his age. Valentín sent his son Chapo out for cokes as we talked about these young men and about why many in Piaxtla didn't show much interest in working the *ejido* land won by the campesino struggle.

"I'm disillusioned, Valentín said. "You could say we won the struggle. We won land for the campesinos. But what's happening? They aren't responding. Before they didn't plant because they didn't have land. Now they don't plant, well, I don't know why, perhaps for lack of support."

"People say 'el maiz no paga,' that the land doesn't give back what you put into it," I said.

"Their ways of working the land haven't changed much in forty or fifty years. The more you work the land the more tired it gets. If you don't feed the earth, only take from it, well, you kill it. This is what's happening now. It's tired, used up. There are those who started using chemical fertilizers. But now they have to use more and more of these chemicals to get the same harvest they got four or five years ago. As you said, the land doesn't pay back what you put into it. If I grow corn, I know I'll get a harvest, and I know I'll be able to sell it. But the price of corn is really low. I won't make enough to buy clothing, food, and make repairs on my house. The money just won't go that far."

"If you keep your harvest for personal consumption, how long will it last your family?" I asked.

"It will last until the beginning of the next growing season. But during the three months of the growing season you'll have to buy your necessities on

credit at a store. And after the harvest you'll have to pay back the tienda with interest."

"So people have to find other sources of income?"

"Exactly. After the harvest I'll have seven months free so I can go to the coast and look for work. Manual labor is cheap here. They pay you fourteen pesos a day. A kilo of meat costs fifteen pesos! A kilo of beans costs 5 pesos. Tomatoes can cost up to 10 pesos a kilo. You pick tomatoes, cucumbers, squash, all those things that the Gringos like to eat, for 14 pesos a day! I won't be able to send back anything to my family. I'll spend most of it just on subsistence. A man with a wife and four or five children just can't make it this way. Even if you're able find work in Piaxtla you'll get the same wage and have the same problems.

"There are just no viable sources of income. So, what do you do? You borrow a hose, or buy one on credit, and go up to the Sierras to grow marijuana or opium. A kilo of marijuana sells for eight hundred pesos. You can live well this way, but its a lot of work. You have to get up at three in the morning when no one will see you and start for the mountains. You leave very early and arrive late at night. Or you sleep out there for days at a time, and come down only to get more food. And this is how it goes until the harvest. Everyone knows when the harvest is in. Men are walking about with six packs of beer in hand and hiring musicians."

"Is a hose and the food you eat really your only investment?"

"To grow marijuana you only need a hose. You find a spring or a pond and draw the water down to your field with gravity."

"How much can you make in a year doing this?"

"You can make yourself rich."

"In a year?"

"A campesino can grow about two kilos of opium which this year is worth about thirty thousand pesos. A kilo of marijuana sells for about 600 pesos, and one person can grow 50 or 60 kilos. That comes to about thirty to thirty five thousand pesos. So in a year you could make enough to live very comfortably indefinitely, if you know how to use your money.

"But that's the problem isn't it, using your money well?"

"Exactly. Imagine that you are poor, very poor, that you have nothing. Any *cabrón* can kick you in the ass, humiliate you, and do with you what he wants. You have to take it because you are poor and have nothing to defend yourself with. Well, you harvest your marijuana and now you have some money in your pocket and you feel powerful. You get drunk and say, "lets go looking for that son of a bitch". So you find him and ask, "what was it that you said to me the other day?" From there the trouble starts, which can eventually lead to feuds between families. Or you take your money and instead of using it to leave the drug growing business and live well with your family, you go with your friends to the brothels in Mazatlán. I know men who have spent twenty or thirty thousand pesos in a night."

"In a night?"

"In a night. With friends, paying for musicians, women, alcohol and cocaine. Cocaine isn't produced here in Mexico, so it costs 150 pesos per gram. In the morning, you come back home and beat your wife, because you are broke, without a peso. Only three men out of a hundred know how to make use of this money well. But even if you do there are dangers in this way of life. The first is that you end up in jail and your children and wife are left abandoned. Or the soldiers spray your neighbors crop, and he comes and steals yours. What can you do to make him pay? So you kill him. The

soldiers are another danger. As you've seen, they patrol the Sierras and have beaten and killed people they find in the fields. But people know the risks."

"I've wondered about that. Don't the growers have lookouts or hear the soldiers coming?"

"Sometimes they are careless. Other times the person who's supposed to be watching gets scared and runs instead of warning his *compañeros*."

"And what happens?"

"The soldiers shout, "move and you're dead." If you run they shoot."

"And if you don't move?"

"Even if you don't move they might beat you. I know of a man, who is honest and hard working. Six months ago the soldiers found a marijuana field near the spot where he kept his cattle years ago. They grabbed him and beat him. They pinched his testicles with pliers to make him admit that the field was his. Now he's in jail. All this so that our president can tell your president that we are doing something about drugs.

"In the past people came down from the mountains with corn, beans, chickens, pigs, and wood to sell. Now they bring down kilos of marijuana and buy their beans and corn here in Piaxtla. They also buy cots, chairs, dressers, even solar powered refrigerators. The campesinos who grow the marijuana and opium don't know about the harm that these drugs cause. They are simply trying to meet their families' needs.

"Recently some of the buyers have been trading cars, cocaine and automatic weapons for drugs, because they don't have available cash. The people here don't know how to process the opium, so they have to sell it before it goes bad. And marijuana, no matter how well you store it, it eventually loses its magic power. So the people take the guns in the hope

that they can sell them. So more automatic weapons come into the area and this leads to more violence."

"Are the buyers from around here?"

"No, hardly any of them are from the Sierras. They come from below, from Mazatlán and Culiacán. About fifteen years ago Manuel Salcido Uzeta, or "Cochiloco*," began drug trafficking in southern Sinaloa. He became very powerful in the drug scene. He became like an emperor. And from this emperor grew other narcos, and from these others. The drug trade is from hand to hand, it's not direct. And all these people unfortunately are from Sinaloa - all the strongest drug traffickers.

"The question of the drug trade is a question of government and international politics. But the blame always falls on the campesino. Its the small time cultivator that is beaten and arrested. If there weren't drug traffickers, if there weren't so much poverty, there would be no growers. The government, instead of pretending to combat the drug trade should combat hunger and need in the pueblos. They should combat unemployment, so that people don't need to emigrate to the United States, where they often don't find work, and so many end up selling cocaine there. There are a lot of Mexicans in jail there. The gringos have already executed one Mexican, and there are more on the list."

Lucila was sitting at the kitchen table when I arrived for breakfast the next morning. Her eyes were wet, tears hanging close. She said that both Gabriel and Jacinto had been killed the night before in an *arroyo* near Chilar. As the

* Manuel Salcido Uzeta, "El Cochiloco" or "Mad Pig," was born in a village not far from Piaxtla. He dominated the drug trade in southern Sinaloa until his death in 1991.

funeral had to be put off for a few days while the family gathered, the bodies were to be taken to Coyotitan where they would be embalmed.

On my way to the project I passed Jacinto's house. I could hear his wife sobbing inside. Two grim faced older men were sitting in front of Gabriel's house. Most people at the project seemed quite depressed by the news. Jacinto had often helped out at Quilá. I went into the shop looking for Cipriano. The prosthetics section was in the far corner of the open building. Artificial feet stacked about three to five high on wooden shelves lined one wall of the shop. Prosthetic legs hung from the other wall. Cipriano was at the workbench helping Andrés. He nodded to me when he saw me. I watched him work for awhile and then asked if I might do an interview with him that afternoon after work. Cipriano had grown up in the Sierras in one of the villages most involved with the drug trade. The village also had one of the highest homicide rates in the Sierras. He had worked in Culiacán and in the United States, and was able to look at life in Piaxtla with sensitivity and perspective. We met that afternoon in the project yard under the mango trees.

"People here often associate the rise in violence with the drug trade, especially with the drinking that comes when the harvest is in. What do you think?" I asked.

"There's never been a drug harvest without alcohol. The people down in Saint Ignacio who run the municipal government are also often the owners of the alcohol concessions. And they know exactly what's going on up here. Even during the years when the women got the cantinas closed, the minute people started harvesting you saw all these trucks coming up from San Ignacio carrying hot and expensive beer.

"You have to understand that being so poor and finally finding yourself with your hands full of money is very confusing," he said. "We're told that the point of having money is to spend it. You're supposed to be happy because you have all this money, and you're supposed to drink when you're happy. Soon you can't think because your mind is full of alcohol. You do terrible things. You know what you're doing, but you're not able to control yourself. So you do things like throwing away your money, or getting into a fight.

"Also, having money gives you a sense of power. This comes from being in a position of not having to go and ask anyone for your most basic needs. Even if its just a loan and you're going to pay it back, its kind of humiliating for people to ask. So just knowing that you can to buy what you need without having to ask anybody gives you a sense of power.

"When someone goes out and kills somebody, it's often because he's broke. I think that when you grow marijuana and opium poppy and you make a lot of money, and then you lose it right away or you spend it, you really crash. That's when I've seen people getting killed"

"What about when people rob one another's crop?"

"When someone steals someone's crop there's a lot of anger. And people don't know what to do with their anger. They can get into a real mess. They can face anybody. They're not doing this because they are brave. They're doing it because they're scared. It's like horses running back into the fire when their stable is burning. It's not because they want to get burned. It's because they're frightened. It's a little bit like that."

"How does domestic violence fit into all of this."

"It's again the same thing. You have all these frustrations. Who are you going to hit without getting hit back? Who is the safest target that you have?

The woman in your house or your children. Who's going to defend them? Who's going to complain? As you know, there is a lack of respect for women here. Mexico is a country ruled by rich men."

"Changing the subject a bit, you once told me that you met Cochiloco."

"Cochiloco owned a little house next to my cousin's store in San Miguel. That's where his people camped out. Saturday was like payday, and he'd show up with a wad of money. Some weekends they would run an antenna up a palm tree. All night you could hear voices coming over the radio. I suppose they were controlling airplanes coming in from Central America or Colombia with cocaine. Sometimes he and the chief of the judicial police in Mazatlán would meet there at the house. They would trade people. Many of Cochiloco's body guards were judicial policemen. At that time he based himself in Guadalajara. I think he felt safer there.

"If you didn't know who he was you'd think that he was a middle aged business man. He was chubby, wore glasses and was starting to go bald. He had a limp which they say was from the time that Braulio tortured him. He was friendly with the people that he knew. When he saw my cousin he'd wave and say, "Hey, Chema, Qúbule"?" But he didn't stop to talk to many people, though they always wanted to shake his hand or get to know him.

"People say Braulio Aguerre gave him his start in drug trafficking. This was the same Braulio Aguerre who provided the weapons for Ramon Valverde's murder in 1966. By the time they killed Cochiloco last year he controlled all of southern Sinaloa. Anybody buying in Piaxtla needed his permission first. His real name was Manuel Salcido Uzeta. He came from San Juan, a pueblo about the size of Piaxtla not too far from San Ignacio. He started like everybody else, working for some big honcho. In this case it was Braulio Aguerre. It seems that Cochiloco was ambitious and that it came to

the point where he needed to grow, and he couldn't do it under Braulio. So he made an agreement with Braulio that he would control northern Sinaloa and that Braulio would control the south. But there wasn't a whole lot going on in the north. The area hasn't been as involved with drug growing as the south. Soon Cochiloco started to move into his boss's territory. Several times Braulio tried to kill him. There are rumors that once Braulio picked him up and tortured him. And people say this is where he got his limp.

"Cochiloco's father was a bank guard. He didn't have anything to do with the business. But Braulio had him killed. Cochiloco went crazy and started killing Braulio's people. Finally he became more powerful than Braulio himself, and Braulio had to move out. He went to Mexico City and retired from the trade. He opened up a liquor store. But Cochiloco tracked him down and killed him. They left his body in Guanajuato. They called Braulio's son and told where he could find the body.

"After that it was Cochiloco who controlled the drug trade in southern Sinaloa. But he disappeared for a few years. Nobody knew where he was. My guess is that he was trading cocaine, getting involved with the Colombians. When he reappeared in 1984 he was a very powerful man in Mazatlán. He owned hotels, a bus line and a shopping complex."

"Can you describe his organization?"

"Well it kept changing because drug dealing is a continuous fight for power and control. I guess he kept involved with the big trade in cocaine, which is where the real money is. In the later years he wasn't buying marijuana that I know of, though he did keep control of the southern Sinaloa market for his friends. The drug traffickers who came to Piaxtla were there by agreement with Cochiloco. Maybe they had to pay some kind of tribute. They also had to have the blessing of the authorities, the judicial police, to be able

to move as freely as they did. All of them had machine guns and carried bags of money. But they were never stopped at the check points. They must have been paying off somebody.

"A lot these guys were very badly educated. I was up in the Sierras once at harvest time. There were these 7 men buying opium, and none of them knew how to add. So they had this 14 year old boy with them who did the accounts. At first it was mostly people from the Sierra who were growing drugs. Later as Mexico's economic crisis deepened and the people in Piaxtla felt the crunch, more of them got into growing marijuana and opium, but it took them a few years to catch up."

"Who killed Cochiloco?"

"Nobody knows. No one is saying. It might have been the government because he was getting to be too powerful. He had been hanging out with both the Governors of Colima. He claimed that they thought that he was just a rich cattleman, and he was, you know, offering to invest in their state. But I'm sure they knew who he was. I guess it got to the point where they were afraid that he was getting too powerful and they just did him in. The killing was very well organized. It was done by professionals.

In the evening I drove to Coyotitan with Efrain. We parked across from the funeral parlor, a rectangular cement structure located near the international highway. Thirty or forty men were standing in front of the building. Many others were gathered in groups by their pick-up trucks which were parked in an open lot nearby. Virtually everyone had a beer in his hand. We arrived about seven but the bodies weren't ready until ten. The mood was mixed. Juan Vega, his T-shirt torn under his arm, was visibly upset. He kept saying, *"hijo de la chingada!"*, and *"mi compadre."* Some

men punctuated their expressions of grief by throwing their cans of beer down to the ground with just enough beer left for the cans to strike the hit with an audible crack. Others talked quietly about a variety of subjects.

Jenaro was very drunk. I told him that I had seen Jacinto leave the day before and described the scene. Jenaro cried and kept saying he wanted to kill someone. We crossed the street when they finally brought out Jacinto's body to the front of the funeral parlor. Jenaro opened the top half of the lid of the coffin. A clear plastic window had been inserted between the lid and the body. Jacinto's face looked very round, though it was hard to see clearly in the dim light. There was a mark high on his left cheek and perhaps another on his right forehead, from the bullets, I assumed. Jenaro said that they shot his eyes out, but it didn't appear that way. Valentín gently got Jenaro to close the lid. Later he wanted to look again, but Valentín dissuaded him. He told me watch Jenaro if he crossed the street. When the morticians brought out Gabriel's body they loaded each coffin on the back of a truck. Then the long procession of pick-ups slowly made its way back to Piaxtla.

Upon returning to the pueblo most people parked by Gabriel's house which faced the plazuela. Several benches had been set up in front of the house. The benches were full. I found this vigil nearly unbearable, for the reality of the deaths was more palpable here than during the surreal scene in front of the funeral parlor. But the men chatted quietly, a few drinking beer, but most passing a plastic bottle of mescal. People say that for night long vigils like this mescal is preferable to beer. Its said to warm you and to help fight drowsiness. The women were inside the house consoling the family and helping with the arrangements. At two o'clock, when I went to bed, the crowded had thinned out a bit. But many were taking naps and would return in a few hours.

In the morning there were still small groups of men sitting in front of Gabriel's house and the plazuela, all chatting quietly and waiting. The street was lined with pick-ups and several sedans. The sedans meant that a number of people had arrived from the city. A máss was to be given in the house in the afternoon. The priest had asked for 300,000 pesos for the trip to Piaxtla. I passed by the clinic and saw Jenaro out front. We had planned to do another interview and I asked if he wanted to do it now.

He stretched back in his chair and nodded. He suggested we do the interview in the dental room where we would be less likely to be disturbed. As usual, Jenaro brought in two chairs from the consultation room, sat down, and asked me what I wanted to know.

"More than ten years have passed since you recovered the land. What is the situation now?"

"These are hard working, tough people, but they don't get good yields. Sometimes the crop does so poorly that after the harvest the fields aren't even good enough for pasturing animals. People are disillusioned and agriculture here has become marginal. Much of it is seasonal. The soil is eroded. It doesn't produce.

"Not everyone has mules. So if your land is flat and can be plowed you need to rent mules. Then you need to pay for food during the months that you're out there clearing the fields, planting, weeding and harvesting. So you buy things on credit at the stores. You work all through the season and often you don't harvest enough to even pay for the mules. When you have a good crop you can pay for the mules, but not the tienda, or if you pay the tienda, then there isn't enough for the mules.

"Land is of vital importance to the people here. But a campesino needs additional things to work the land successfully. He needs information about fertilizers and how to deal with erosion. Here in this region people only use one kind fertilizer, urea. With urea the plants look good, and you get a lot of foliage, but you don't really improve the yield. The land has never been analyzed to see what nutrients are missing or if urea is even really needed. There are agricultural extension services but they never come out here.

The price for corn has been low for a very long time. It just doesn't pay. Many people are thinking about planting pasture for cattle instead. Even those who don't have cattle could plant a little corn and a lot of pasture. If their land is fenced in they can rent the pasture to the cattle owners at a good price. But now the land is worn out. So the struggle for the land was not everything. We needed to continue with the struggle, continue to be as united as we were, to get government loans, extension services and agricultural equipment

The poorest families are those that work their fields less. They are strong and healthy, but prefer working for other people. They have the land but not the mules, credits, advice, and the materials they need to make the land produce like it ought to. Many get by working as musicians or laborers. Some do go ahead and rent the mules and run up a bill at the tienda, and somehow make it work. Pedrito Gracía, for example, plants corn, works his land when its time, builds houses and does other kind of work. He drinks but isn't irresponsible. He has a good house and makes a decent living.

Then there are the families that live on the edge of the pueblo. We got them land, they have their fields. They plant, but many times they don't weed, they don't care for the milpa, and don't harvest very much. They sell firewood, and their wives do other people's wash. You can see their boys each

afternoon in town with a burro load of firewood. The children are always out in the river looking for fish. These families eat a lot of fish and crayfish. Some have family gardens. They go to the woods and hunt armadillos and badgers. Sometimes they have a little corn of their own, or during the harvest their children steal it from the fields of others.

"When they need medicine they come to me. A year ago one woman brought her son in with a fever. I examined the boy and sold her the medicines on credit, which she still hasn't repaid. Now she's pregnant again. The doctor scolds her so much for having so many kids so she asked me to deliver the baby. What can I charge her if she doesn't have anything? If its a normal delivery I won't need much, just the time I'll spend there. But what would happen if one of these people were gravely ill, or needed surgery? Where would they get the thousands of pesos for the hospital bill? Fortunately, they don't get sick very often, but it wouldn't hurt were God to look after of them.

"Several of these men are irresponsible. When they have money they spend it on beer. When they don't have money they just sit around on their asses. These people seem to be going backwards. On the other hand, I don't support them, nor does anyone else. They live in poverty, but they support themselves. And what the hell, everyone has their problems.

The clinic once brought in an agricultural engineer from Guatemala. He started demonstration plots and worked with the people to terrace some of the fields and dig ditches for better drain off. They tried planting a kind of very hardy grass on the slopes. He also suggested that people begin composting the brush cleared from the fields instead of burning it. All of these practices were intended to protect the land from erosion and the results were very encouraging.

But that was the year that the Colonel came. He said he was a pilot from the governor's office. He told people that they could plant marijuana and opium and market their crops through him. Everyone went out and planted drugs and deserted the Guatemalan agricultural engineer. No one tried his methods or supported him after that.

This Guatemalan was sincere and had very good techniques, but they would take time to prove and require a lot of work. With the alternative of growing drugs open to them the youngsters just weren't going to do it. And the old people didn't have the energy for all that work. It might be hard to understand this, but for some this became a matter of pride. If they didn't grow opium they felt bad about busting their asses for half a year to make a fraction of what their neighbors were making in three months growing marijuana.

"There was a boom because Piaxtla is the main trading center for the surrounding Sierras. There was a lot of money moving through the town. People from the Sierras started building houses in Piaxtla. The tienda owners did really well. This created a few jobs here and there."

"What about assistance from the government?"

"We only see them once every six years at election time. During the present elections the candidates for PRI, the ruling party, have promised to bring in new sources of employment like machinery to exploit the minerals we have here. They're also talking a lot about public security, which with all the violence is what people are most concerned about now. And they've promised to expand the electrical and water systems, maintain the road to San Ignacio, put a radio in each community for medical emergencies, and place doctors in strategic locations. They speak with sincerity, concern, and warmth,

and some of us are still so impressionable and we believe them. But after the elections they never set foot in Piaxtla again. Their promises are never kept.

The bottom line is that we can offer little of economic value to the country. Most of the large irrigation projects were built around Culiacán and Los Mochis where the large agribusiness is. What can the campesino produce that can be exported to the United States? So we're treated like poor stepchildren.

"Even on those occasions when the government does reach Piaxtla, the low interest loans they offer usually go the to people who need them less, to those that own cattle and land. In the official reports those people who have 100, 200, and 300 head of cattle are called campesinos. But the real campesino who owns no more than a burro is rarely taken into account. What we need is more *"fuentes de trabajo,"* sources of employment. We need help developing cottage industries like tanning, small scale mining, cattle raising, and to improve what agriculture we have.

"Awhile back the government started a project to increase goat production in the region. With much fanfare they came and built corrals up in Guillapa and a house for the pastor. But the goats never came. With time the corrals fell apart and people began to carry off the wire fencing. The house was poorly built and eventually collapsed. The thing is, several ranchers in Piaxtla graze their cattle in Guillapa. They were worried that the goats would compete with the cattle for the pasture land, and that the cattle would grow and fatten more slowly. So one of these men paid off the agricultural engineers to divert the goats to another location, though they were officially registered as having been turned over to the station in Guillapa.

"The heart of matter is that not one person in Piaxtla has become wealthy without screwing the rest. They or their ancestors either stole from the others

or took advantage of their ignorance. The only exceptions are those who made their money through the drug trade and now have cattle, pick-up trucks, mules, and even houses in Culiacán.

"And who doesn't want to live a little more comfortably. When I first got married I always had to think about how I was going to get us our next meal. In the morning I'd think, "*gracias a Dios* " that we ate breakfast, but what about lunch? After lunch I'd worry about what we were going to do for dinner. If people grow drugs you can see where they're coming from. The important thing is that they spend the money they make intelligently."

"Is there less poverty now in Piaxtla as a result?"

"Yes, there's less poverty in Piaxtla. There are always necessities, but there are less than before. One of the reasons I think is the clinic and all the programs that we had before. The other thing is the drug traffic. Maybe about 70% of the improvement is due to the drug traffic, and thirty percent to the effects of the clinic. There are still plenty of poor people, but their poverty is less severe. The drug trade has left a lot of money in the communities."

"How much can a family make in a season?"

"As much as a hundred thousand pesos if you plant a lot. There are teenagers that have made sixty thousand pesos in a season. When they are lucky they can grow two crops a year. They can plant one in June, July, and August, to harvest in September and October. If there is water at the end of February they return to throw down some seeds to harvest in May or June.

"So they can grow a lot?"

"They don't grow large plots, only about a hectare or a fourth of a hectare, to keep from being detected by the helicopters. Even so people make thousands of pesos. But many don't even buy a single cow or donkey with it. Or they buy a couple of cows and spend the rest on cars, automatic weapons,

alcohol, musicians, and cocaine. After two months they don't have a dime and come and ask you to buy them a coke. Even that would be tolerable if it weren't for the violence. A man loses his head. He's got money in his pocket and money buys power here. So he carries of a woman, or starts a fight with someone who humiliated him in the past. If he doesn't get killed, he ends up in jail. How many people have I seen that have had to leave the pueblo, or have been killed, because they didn't know how to use their money?

"There has always been violence in this pueblo. They didn't have the money to buy a pistol or a rifle. But there were three cantinas in town. When you're drunk you sometimes go little crazy. Fights would start over old grudges or an insult, and people were killed with knives, rocks, or clubs, whatever was at hand. So people have always killed each other here, but with the drug trade its worse. Now people have automatic weapons.

"They go through a lot to get a good harvest of marijuana. They run up debts in the tiendas during the months you are working in the fields. They take the risk of being caught by the soldiers. If it doesn't rain the plants will be useless. The plants might go to seed, or be attacked by insects. Then there is always the chance that someone will rip-off your harvest. After all you have risked and gone through, when that happens it leaves you feeling furious and impotent. You took all these risks so some S.O.B. can come and carry off your crop. What can you do? Who can you talk to? The police? The thief? Complain to him and he'll humiliate you. Some feel that the only justice in this situation is for you to kill him. This is the law here. Steal my marijuana and I'll kill you. Steal my poppy and I'll kill you. That's how it is.

"Fifteen year old boys are already out in the woods at night planting and harvesting opium or marijuana. And don't think they won't kill you. The teenagers are the most dangerous. Around here the killers are almost always

between fifteen to thirty years old. Older than that is rare. The majority of the victims are also young.

"A lot of people have been killed this last year. It began with Camay and his wife. After that a man named Jorge. Three more were killed in Jocuixtita by the soldiers. That's six. After that camé Gabriel, Jacinto and Lionso, which makes nine."

"And the two brothers who were killed trying to steal Rigoberto's marijuana."

"Yes, the two brothers who lived down below, that's eleven. And another in Chilar -- Pablo -- who was gunned down. That's twelve people in twelve months."

"And the family that was killed in Chilar?"

"That's right. There were three more killed in Chilar. Three and twelve makes fifteen. And then more recently the other killing in Chilar. The guy who did it was a kid who wanted to be famous, wanted to be someone. If it were you and I and we were drunk and I said a few things that you didn't like, well, we're friends and we'd work this out. Even if we weren't friends, we're not going to make trouble for one another. Maybe we might stop talking to one another other, but you wouldn't go out and kill me. But this kid mixed alcohol and cocaine and got full of himself, and pum, pum, pum. He killed a man for no reason other than to say "I'm the man. I shot Fulano." The man's children were traumatized by what they have seen. Things will be rough for them. Without a father they won't eat as well, wear new clothing, or get an education. So that's sixteen, sixteen people this year, and all were shootings."

"What happened to the kid?"

"He's still walking about."

"And no one can do anything?"

"No one except the family should they decide to have him killed. But they're frightened and don't want problems."

"Did they go to the police?"

"Yes."

"And nothing?"

"If they were wealthy and had paid off the judicial police something might have been done. But they didn't have the money to pay them, so they'll find no justice there."

"It seems that the killers never go to jail."

"Never. Oh, Maico went to jail."

"Though for how long?"

"Four weeks."

"For a life. All this violence has affected our organizing. People are afraid. Better to be passive than dead, as the law doesn't mean much up here."

All of Gabriel and Jacinto's family had arrived by the following morning. They had come from Culiacán, Guanajuato, Juárez, El Paso, and Los Angeles. A little after nine Juan Vega backed Jacinto's truck up to the front door. It was a Dodge truck with wooden fencing on the back for carrying cattle. The women wailed and the men took off their hats, as Juan Vega, Arsenio Manjarrez, Arsenio Jr, and several other men from Piaxtla's powerful families carried the coffins out to the truck. Virgilio Manjarrez stood by the back of the truck and watched as their coffins were loaded. He usually stood with his mouth open, his teeth easily visible. Today his mouth was closed tightly. His wrinkled face and pursed lips displayed no sign of emotion.

The crowd followed the truck as it moved slowly towards the church. When we arrived the women went to the front. As usual, many of the men waited outside, or stood in the back. Doña Rosa Manjarrez began the rosary. "Ave Maria purisima..." At the appropriate moments the congregation responded in chorus, "Santa Maria Madre de Dios, Ruega Señora..."

I stood in the back across from Virgilio Manjarrez. He seemed to be not completely involved with what was happening. It was hot outside. I was perspiring. The smell of death pervaded the church, especially up front by the coffins. But the high beams and thick adobe walls preserved the cool morning air within the sanctuary. After the rosary Juan Vega and the others carried the coffins back out to the truck. As we went out to the cemetery the road was filled with people from the *arroyo* up to the top of the hill.

The coffins were carried up to the family plot. They were placed side by side in a concrete vault. One by one the members of the family passed the coffins. This unleashed a burst of emotion. Each of the daughters wailed as they sprinkled holy water on the coffins. Ema Manjarrez, Gabriel's wife, was silent. Her eldest daughter Estela moaned and sobbed for several minutes. Her grief was the most unrestrained. Her husband held her as she leaned over the coffins and talked to her dead father and brother. The sons struggled to control their emotion, but when it was Polo's turn to visit the grave he hit his hand against the concrete. He face was contorted in an effort to hold back his tears. Uncles, cousins, compadres, comadres and friends stood on the slope above, deeply somber, but with few tears. Ema Manjarrez and her children acted out the ritual. The others were there to witness. The family stayed by the grave as the sons sealed the vault. Small groups of people talked quietly under the shade of the ceiba trees. Up the slope a few relatives took advantage of their return to the village to visit and tidy their family plots. In

Peppers and Poppies: The Political Economy of Agriculture in Sinaloa

Chapter Nine

> It was Sinaloa's shape and contour that perhaps first attracted the agricultural engineers. The Sierra Madre Occidental runs like a spine down the east of much of the long slender state. To the west are the fertile but arid coastal plains. Eleven major rivers run down from the Sierras out to the sea, intersecting the state eleven times (Mares 1988: 123).

In 1941 the Rockefeller Foundation sent three scientists to Mexico. They were to survey the needs of Mexican agriculture and evaluate the feasibility of providing technical assistance. The team proposed a program of "scientific agriculture," involving genetics and plant breeding, soil science, and farm management (Jennings 1988: 49). Accepting the recommendations,* the Foundation sponsored the Mexico Agricultural Program, whose mission was to increase the productivity of wheat and maize in the country. The program achieved dramatic improvements in crop yields and became the catalyst for the Green Revolution.

To produce these high yields the new hybrids required irrigation, fertilizer, machinery , and the control of weeds and insects through the use of pesticides and herbicides (DeWalt 1991: 192). These requirements "biased" the

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* This proposal had its critics from the beginning. Carl Sauer, a geographer at the University of California at Berkeley advised the Rockefeller Foundation that "A good aggressive bunch of American agronomists and plant breeders could ruin the native resources for good and all by pushing their American commercial stocks... And Mexican agriculture cannot be pointed toward standardization on a few commercial types without upsetting native economy and culture hopelessly. The example of Iowa is about the most dangerous of all for Mexico. Unless the Americans understand that, they'd better keep out of this country entirely. This must be approached from an appreciation of native economies as being basically sound" (Jennings 1988: 51)

Paul Mangelsdorf, professor of plant genetics and breeding at Harvard University rebutted that "to both Anderson and Sauer, Mexico is a kind of glorified ant hill which they are in the process of studying. They resent any effort to 'improve' the ants. They much prefer to study them as they now are" (Jennings 1988: 55). In reporting this exchange, Jennings states that Mangelsdorf's trivialization of Sauer's critique appears to have reflected the general feeling at the Foundation at the time.

program towards the larger landholders who received from the Mexican government generous credits, subsidized water, inputs, machinery, and encouragement through a "broad array" of incentives (Barkin 1994). The Rockefeller scientists had early on decided that research institutions focusing on traditional agriculture "were a brake to progress." Like minded officials in the Avila Camacho and Alemán administrations terminated or reduced funding for programs that were helping poorer campesinos cultivating rain-fed fields (Barkin 1994: 4).

River basin development projects, strategically placed throughout Sinaloa, opened up vast territories of prime agricultural land in the coastal valleys. Between the years 1940 and 1979, from 70% and 99.2% of the nation's annual agricultural budget was spent on irrigation This left little funding for the development of rain fed agriculture on which the great majority of Mexican campesinos depended (DeWalt 1991: 193).

Agrarian reform had allowed the consolidation of the ejidos in Sinaloa, but it had also permitted the small and medium sized commercial farmers an opportunity to buy land under very favorable terms. Landlords preferred to auction off their land before losing it to agrarian reform. In this way many commercial farmers acquired rain-fed fields that ten to twenty years later were converted to irrigated land (Carton de Grammont 1990).

After the disappearance of the larger agricultural estates during the Cárdenas years, the commercial farms and the ejidos competed for land and for access to capital. The ejidos, after tremendous struggle, received the greater amount of land. In the end, though, it was access to credit and water that determined who would dominate agriculture in Sinaloa. Cárdenas believed that the litmus test of public works in the countryside should be their ability to benefit the campesinos. With the change of government in 1940, Manuel

Avila Camacho and the presidents who followed him redefined the politics of government investment and slanted new irrigation projects towards the needs of the private sector. In years of drought it was the commercial enterprises that gained priority over the water. Subsidized by the state and strongly supported by grants from the World Bank and the InterAmerican Development bank, Sinaloa's commercial farmers and cattle ranchers expanded with enormous force in the fifties and sixties. In 1962 a new law eased restrictions on the accumulation of land. In the irrigation districts land holdings once again became concentrated in fewer hands.

Rapid industrialization became a priority for Avila Camacho and his successors. Agriculture was to support this development through the accumulation of foreign exchange from traditional export crops, and through reducing wage demands through the provision of low cost food through price controls (Esteva 1987: 35).

Small farmers reduced production as the cultivation of basic food grains became less profitable. Commercial farmers began to look for more lucrative crops. Cuba had been an important supplier of sugar and winter vegetables to the United States. The economic blockade of Cuba in 1961 provided commercial farmers in Sinaloa with an opportunity to enter the North American market (Carton de Grammont 1990: 192). Utilizing their control over the state's irrigated water, subsidized inputs, agricultural credits, and the plentiful supply of cheap labor, Sinaloa's agricultural entrepreneurs expanded their production of tomatoes, peppers, and cucumbers. Key to this move was their access to North American capital, which from the beginning was involved in the financing and marketing of Sinaloan export crops. (Carton de Grammont 1990: 187). With this backing commercial agriculture modernized their agricultural machinery, packing houses, and refrigeration

systems, thus positioning themselves to take advantage of the expanding export market in winter vegetables (Carton de Grammont 1990: 193). A few years later a further reorientation of Sinaloan agriculture took place with the growth of livestock and livestock feed production (DeWalt 1991: 195).

Such developments created an increasingly polarized rural society. Most ejidatarios continued to produce maize and beans and a variety of other crops for domestic consumption. "Meanwhile, a highly capitalized commercial agricultural ... forged a new economy in the areas in which they operated, quickly transforming Mexico into an important participant in the international market for fruits and vegetables as well as for cattle" (Barkin 1994: 3).

The ejidos and small producers thrived in the decades following Cárdenas' agrarian reforms. Land that had been abandoned or underutilized by the large landowners was now placed into production. Though much of the ejido lands were marginal in quality, they provided basic grains for family and community consumption (Barkin1990: 16). This together with the early contributions of commercial farmers enabled Mexico to become "self-sufficient the production of maize by the end of the 1950s" (Barkin 1990: 16). Little more than a decade later the nation was on its way to becoming "one of the largest food deficit countries in the world" (Barkin 1990: 32).

Conditions for growth of commercial agriculture in Sinaloa were so favorable that in one generation the state's coastal valleys were transformed into one of the most modern and sophisticated agricultural regions in the nation (Carton de Grammont 1990: 176). This permitted the rise of a very rich and very powerful entrepreneurial class. As these new producers strengthened as a class they founded CAADES, a growers association that is both powerful, and one of the only such organizations autonomous from the

government. They also created a system of regional banks which provided financing for local agribusiness, industry, and the development of tourism in Mazatlán. These banks "grew at a par with agricultural production and could be called its shadow" (Carton de Grammont 1990: 175).

The growers began to rent fields from the ejidos when pressure from the campesino organizations constricted their ability to acquire new land. They did this illicitly at first, though in 1980 many forms of ejido land rental were legalized. The contracts usually run from five years and often involve the renting of entire ejidos (Carton de Grammont 1990: 202).

National production of corn and wheat stagnated. To cover the deficit the Mexican government purchased foreign grain, which due to modernization, economies of scale, and U.S. government subsidies to its agricultural export industry, was much cheaper than Mexican corn and wheat. The Mexican government could thus keep supplying cheap grains to the urban areas and thus keep factory wages low to attract industrial investment (Alcántara 1994: 7).

Grain imports, inefficiencies in Mexican industry, the governments inability to tax industry, corruption, and government subsidies, all drove the search for foreign capital. The international banking community was eager to provide the needed financing in the early 1970s, given Mexico's oil wealth, and the sudden abundance of capital from the OPEC countries.

In 1982, oil prices collapsed, plummeting to one-third their 1981 value. At the same the interest rates Mexico paid on its short term loans tripled (Alcántara 1994: 8). The debt crisis followed by an IMF austerity program forced a restructuring of Mexican society. Unlike the reorganization that took place under Cárdenas in which the state attempted to lesson Mexico's dependency on the United States and "achieve 'effective justice' within the

capitalist system" (Hamilton 1982: 142), the goal now was to reorganize economic life to attract foreign investment. The campesino food system was increasingly "inserted into the national system and that in turn into the international economy" (Esteva 1987: 24). Specialization for export was accelerated at the cost of production for the internal market. In preparation for the NAFTA trade agreement, in early 1992 Article 27 of the constitution was amended to allow ejido members to enter in to a wide range of commercial contracts, including the sale of their family plots.

It should not be surprising that the ejidatario using traditional farming methods on rain-fed land could not compete with the large commercial enterprises. Maize prices were just too low for the small farmer to produce for the market. In contrast to the generous flow of governmental resources that commercial farms have enjoyed over the last half a century, the ejidatario has received only sporadic and inadequate financing, little or no access to technical assistance, marketing schemes, or funding for research, and precious little access to political power.

> "The diversified *milpa* (maize complex) with its subsidiary production of beans, squash and other crops, as well as the fodder and other inputs for the household economy, relinquished its hold on the country's best lands as specialized production systems spread inexorably; in the process the social basis of small family farm was seriously compromised" (Barkin 1990: 20).

The situation of the ejidatarios was deteriorating. Employment and income levels were "unbearably low" and the "production and sale of crafts, the exploitation of the forests, small scale cattle raising, and many other complementary activities for peasants were in crises" (Esteva 1987: 39). In

many areas the pressure to produce on marginal lands has resulted in severe erosion and loss of fertility (Wright 1984: 144).

Since the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari there have been influential factions in the administration that see no viable future for the cultivation of basic food crops in rain-fed áreas. They would like to accelerate the monetization of all aspects of economic life" and leave "the provisioning of basic grains to the free play of forces with the international market" (Alcántara 1994: 13). Luis Tellez, the former Under-Secretary of Agriculture under Salinas, stated that the government intended to encourage the emigration of more than 13 million rural residents by the end of the decade. These people were not only 'redundant,' "but actually preventing progress in rural Mexico" (Barkin 1994: 5).

Faced with the fact that one could not gain a viable livelihood farming ones ejido land, campesinos in communities like Piaxtla across the Sierra Madre had to choose between picking tomatoes in the Culiacán for 20 pesos a day, migrating to the cities or to the United States, or borrowing a hose and going up to the mountains to plant marijuana.

Smuggling is intrinsic to borderlands. Especially the US-Mexican border, which "separates the greatest per capita income difference between two adjacent countries in the world (Lupsha and Schlegel 1980: 1). Over a century ago cigars, mescal, and Chinese immigrants were smuggled across the Southwest border into the United States. Some of the same routes were used again to bring in liquor during prohibition and then again for the booming marijuana trade of the 1960s and early 70s (Berke 1989).

Much of the marijuana was cultivated by campesinos in small plots in the Sierra Madre Occidental and brought down to villages like Piaxtla on

mule back. It was then sold to dealers who came up from Culiacán for about $4 a kilo, who would "moisten the gray-green leaves and flowers with sugar water, pack and re-dry them in one kilo blocks, wrap them in newspaper" and truck them north on Highway 15 to the Arizona state line, the same route taken by Sinaloa's winter vegetables (MacDonald 1988: 71).

The "brown" heroin produced from the blood-red amapola poppy grown in the Sierra Madre was in little demand at the time. The North American market was dominated by the "French Connection," through which Turkish morphine base was refined in Marseilles, and then shipped to the United States via Sicily or Montreal (MacDonald 1988: 70). When in 1972 the United States pressured Turkey into ending opium cultivation in its territory, the global industry shifted and Mexico "reigned as 'queen' of the heroin trade and a leader in supplying an ever increasing demand for marijuana" (Lupsha and Schlegel 1980: 4).

The rocky spine of the Sierra Madre marks Sinaloa's borders with the states of Chihuahua and Durango, creating what journalists have called Mexico's "Golden Triangle" of opium poppy and marijuana cultivation. The crops are planted during "las lluvias," the summer rains, as storms batter the Sierra Madre. The water, with its ashen cargo of silt and tree limbs, floods down through river valleys to Sinaloa's complex of dams, dikes and irrigation canals that ration it out to the lowland ejidos and large private farms. Culiacán lies in the heart of this fertile coastal plain. All trade, legal or illegal, moves through the city. It is a boom town. Concrete, traffic congestion, and the heat give this city of less than eight hundred thousand people the urban feel of a metropolitan area many times its size.

The Sierras have produced a who's who of Mexican drug traffickers. Félix Gallardo, Rafael Caro Quintero, Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, who along with

Manuel Salcido Uzeta came to dominate the drug trade, got their start in Tierra Blanca, a working class neighborhood on outskirts of Culiacán. The city was one of the most violent in Mexico. In 1976, an average of 2.7 people were murdered a day (Time 1977: 37). When a papal envoy made a visit "he wore a bulletproof vest and was protected at one event by 200 military guards" (Solis 1993: 1). One shrine he didn't call on was that of Jesús Malverde, Culiacán's "Narco Saint." Malverde, according to one version of his legend, was a turn-of-the-century shoemaker who turned to a life of crime. He robbed from the rich to give to the poor until Governor Francisco Cañedo placed a bounty on his head. He was hanged from a mesquite tree in 1909.

Jesús Malverde's tin roofed shrine lies beside the train tracks in west Culiacán. Out front a vender sells candles, key chains, and protective necklaces called escapularios. There are several alters inside. A portrait on black felt hangs over one. Two hundred candles burn below. The main vault features a bust of Malverde. He wears a white cowboy shirt, black kerchief, and has a mustache, and sleek black hair. With the exception of his sad dark eyes, he resembles Pedro Infante, a matinee-idol from the golden age of Mexican cinema. A collage of photographs of people he has helped covered the walls. A child's illness, a school exam, the need for money, or a job possibility are all reasons to request his aid. A framed diploma from a beauty college hangs near one of the shrines with a note from a woman thanking Malverde for help in finishing the course and getting a job.

The caretaker says that after hanging Malverde the rural police would let no one cut him down and bury him. So the people began piling rocks until the corpse was covered. Rocks are still left across the street in a parking by the McDonald's franchise, where it is believed that the hanging took place. Malverde's following has been strongest in the villages of the sierra, where

the campesinos have had a certain admiration for bandits, especially those who showed their concern for the poor. Coming from this background, it is not surprising that the drug traffickers began to request Malverde's aid when making a large deal or sending a shipment across the border. Some show their gratitude by hiring musicians to serenade the saint or by placing a plaque on the wall. One reads, "Thank God, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Jesús Malverde for assistance received. The family of Cruz Campista. Piaxtla, San Ignacio, Sinaloa."

In January 1977 the Mexican government, with assistance from the United States, launched "Operation Condor." Its goal was eradicate the marijuana and opium poppy fields in the Sierra Madre and break the prosperous drug trade in Sinaloa. General José Hernández Toledo, a veteran of the bloodshed at Tlatelolco in 1968*, was given command of ten thousand troops for the operation (Astorga 1995: 52). A report in Time gave the following description of the campaign as it was about to begin in the Sierra Madre Occidental:

> "With his cavalry riding crop, General of Division José Hernández Toledo, 55, taps at a map of the near-impenetrable 35,000-sq-mi. area that his troops intend to cover during the next four months. He outlines their objective in the bluntest terms, 'I will stay here until I have completed the mission my President gave me - rid the mountains of this curse.' Adds an aide: 'You had better advise New York that Mexican Brown is going to be in short supply from now on'" (Time 1977: 37).

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* On October 2, 1968 army units fired on students demonstrating at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the District of Tlatelolco, Mexico City. Estimates of casualties varied greatly, but it appears that at least three to four hundred students were killed in the action.

Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, Manuel Salcido Uzeta, and several of the other major Sinaloa drug traffickers moved their operations to Guadalajara. Guadalajara offered banking facilities and international communications for their increasingly sophisticated operations and business interests (Shannon 1991: 126). This loosely aligned group of displaced Sinaloans became known as the Guadalajara cartel. With Operation Condor winnowing out the competition, they were able to able to consolidate and strengthen their hold on the business.

Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo started as a Sinaloa State Police bodyguard for Governor Leopoldo Sánchez Celis. The Governor became his friend, godfather, and protector. Félix Gallardo is said to have negotiated the first agreements to smuggle cocaine for the Colombian cartels across the US border. He also invested in a host of legitimate business ventures and served as an advisor to the Banco Mexicano Somex in the state of Chihuahua. Gallardo made frequent trips to Sinaloa and maintained his close ties with many of the states economic and political elite. He appeared openly at baptisms, weddings, and other social occasions. When the former Governor Sánchez Celis' son Rodolfo was married to Theolenda López Urrutia by the auxiliary Bishop, the godparents were Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo and his wife María Elvira (Ortiz Panchetti: 1989: 7-9).

In 1981 when Governor Antonio Toledo Corro took office, Félix Gallardo was able to move about Culiacán with complete impunity. Toledo Corro ran Sinaloa like the caciques of old. The Mexico City weekly "Proceso" called Governor Toledo Corro's administration "a long night of crime and impoverishment. US customs commissioner William von Raab accused Toledo of growing marijuana and opium poppies on his 7,500 acre ranch, an estate that his family had held since 1912 (Williams 1987: 10). During his six

year term of office there were 6,500 murders in the state, the great majority of which went unsolved. The yearly production of beer during Toledo's administration rose from 72 million liters to 102 million, while the production of milk dropped from 43 to 25 million liters (Proceso 1987).

Manuel Salcido Uzeta, one of Félix Gallardo's associates, kept a much lower profile, but was also very well connected. Salcido was born in 1947 in San Juan, a small pueblo across the foothills from Piaxtla. Known as "El Cochiloco"* for his violent rages, Salcido was the least visible of the Guadalajara carte. He "had his criminal records lifted from police files" after escaping from a Sinaloa prison in 1976, and for many years "there was [but] one photograph of him available" (Cody 1991: 2). He controlled the drug trade in southern Sinaloa and is reported to have owned tourist hotels, movie houses, restaurants, cantinas, shopping complex, a water slide, and an office building from which he directed his varied concerns (Cooper 1986: 1). At the time of the economic crises of the mid eighties one businessman complained that, "the traffickers are the only ones investing in Mexico. The rest take their dollars out" (Cooper 1986: 1).

Using the name Pedro Orozco Garcia, Salcido bought a "willow-shaded ranch" in Colima state "replete with purebred Arabian horses, fragrant lemon groves and registered bulls that he lent out for rodeos" (Cody 1991: A33). On several occasions in the late 1980s Colima's Governor Elias Zamora Verduzco and Jose Luis Barragan, the chief of the state judicial police, attended barbecues at Salcido's ranch. Both insisted that they "never dreamed" Salcido was anything other than the wealthy engineer he claimed to be (Miller 1991: A6; Cody 1991).

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* "Mad Pig"

The relationship between the drug traffickers and the politicians involved mutual expectations and responsibilities. The trafficker was not only expected to share his profits, but also to provide information about his competition, especially those in the business without permission. The trafficker gains protection, the police promotions, the political party campaign funds and social control, and the United States statistics of kilos seized (Lupsha 1992: 182). But the purchase of people in high places does not provide the drug trafficker with immunity or total protection over time.

> "Regimes change, personnel are transferred, rival traffickers offer larger payments, distrust occurs. A trafficker can find himself arrested, tortured, and jailed. With luck, other bribe payments, he... may be permitted to traffic in another region, or on a smaller more controlled scale. Without luck, he is likely dead" (Lupsha 1992: 179).

After the kidnapping and murder of DEA agent Enrique Camarena Salazar in 1985 the United States placed tremendous pressure on Mexico to find and prosecute those responsible. When it appeared that members of the Guadalajara cartel were responsible the Mexican government began to act and the "big fish of Mexican trafficking and corrupt law enforcement" scattered "like minnows" (Lupsha 1992: 183). Caro Quintero was arrested. Then Ernesto Fonseca. Félix Gallardo remained at large for four years, during which time he appeared publicly in Culiacán at restaurants, a wedding, and was reported to have stayed for periods at former Toledo Corro's guest house. Finally in April 1989 in an action "personally ordered" by President Salinas,*

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* Carlos Salinas called the drug trade "the most serious threat to national security" that the country faced (Golden 1995: 2). Since the end of his presidency his former federal police commander and two of his administration's three drug enforcement directors have been implicated in taking bribes (Golden 1995: 2). United States Federal Prosecutors have filed court documents asserting that Mr. Salinas' ex brother-in-law, former Deputy Attorney General Mario Ruiz Massieu, had sent an aide twenty five times to

Gallardo was arrested in Culiacán (Berke 1989b). The New York Times reported that hours after the arrest army troops "rounded up the entire city police force - about 300 men - for questioning about possible links to Mr. Félix Gallardo... In addition, the state Public Security Director has been fired and his house seized, and the chiefs of the municipal and state police are in jail" (Rohter 1989: 14).

At noon on October 9, 1991, Manuel Salcido, "El Cochiloco" was gunned down at a busy Guadalajara intersection. At least eight gunmen "wielding assault rifles and an M-60 machine gun... blew off most of his face and left a large hole in his chest, into which the killers twisted his left foot at a grotesque angle before escaping into the outskirts of Guadalajara (Cody 1991: A33). His driver was also killed though his 20 old daughter Monica Maricela was spared. All that was known about his killers was that "they knew him well enough to despise him" (Astorga: 65).

The flow of drugs across the border did not stop with the arrest of the Guadalajara cartel. In the nineties a new generation of traffickers emerged who have innovated trafficking routes and methods. Amado Carrillo Fuentes was one of the traffickers who was most effective in profitably taking advantage of the changing situation. He was born in the Sinaloa's Sierra Madre. Building on the methods developed by Félix Gallardo, Carrillo Fuentes was able to create a "cocaine corridor" connecting the Colombian cartels to the streets of Southern California (Rotella 1995: A3). He brokered deals among his competitors, assigning a smuggling task to each, thus

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Houston, Texas, with suitcases stuffed with $20 and $100 bills for deposit in the Texas Commerce Bank. The deposits totaled $9 million dollars. The Federal prosecutors say that Ruiz Massieu obtained the money by selling protection to drug traffickers (Dillon 1996). One bribe of $4 million dollars was allegedly paid in the presence of Raúl Salinas de Gortari, the former president's brother, who is presently waiting trial in Mexico for murder and "illicit enrichment" (Althaus 1997: 7).

creating economies of scale unrealizable in the past. The resulting organization was more like a "federation than a series of cartels... in which the stature of the patrones or bosses, comes not from controlling territory so much as from the international scope of their contacts and their ability to operate across Mexico with Government protection" (Golden 1995: 1).

At first Carrillo Fuentes brought the cocaine into Mexico in converted Boeing 727s and Caravelle jets, earning Carrillo Fuentes the nickname of "Lord of the Skies" (Farah 1997). After several government seizures the jets were eventually abandoned. Instead, light planes and boats carried shipments to Central America. The loads were then transferred to refrigerator trucks who carried the cocaine to the United States "through border crossings relaxed by the" North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (Farah 1997: 9). Refrigerators are not the only means used to get the drugs through the border. Marijuana, cocaine, and heroin are brought across in sewn compartments in women's undergarments, in car trunks, tanker trucks, twin engine planes, fishing boats, and in backpacks and saddlebags through isolated canyons. With trade between the US and Mexico on the rise, and the Colombian cartels in disarray, Amado Carrillo Fuentes, among others, has been able to consolidate power at the expense of the Colombians. This represents "one of the most important realignments in the recent history of drug trafficking... and part of a larger pattern of change in the global traffic of hard drugs" (Farah 1997: 18A).

The "flip side" of the drug trade is the smuggling of guns across the border into Mexico. Ninety percent of the weapons seized by Mexico police originated in the United States. Firearms are not manufactured or legally sold in Mexico. However, there are more than 6000 gun sellers in the United States located within twenty-five miles of the border (LaFranchi 1997). The

recent assassinations of Presidential Candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio, Cardinal Juan Jose Posadas Ocampo, and PRI Secretary-General Francisco Ruiz Massieu, were all carried out with weapons produced in the United States. Like drugs, guns cross the border "one at a time, in what authorities call ant trafficking," or in large shipments of thousands at a time (LaFranchi 1997).

Mexico's decision to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) "led to the elimination of many of its prohibitive trade tariffs, leaving scores of common smugglers... with little demand for the microwaves and watches they'd been peddling. Many of them... simply turned to the drug trade... [thus providing] a ready-made smuggling network" at a time when US demand was high (LaFranchi 1997b: 8). As NAFTA removes impediments to the free movement of goods across the border the surge in traffic provides innumerable new opportunities to smugglers. Furthermore, the expansion of trade following the Cold War and the shift towards free market economic structures in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Republics has opened up new trade routes and vast new markets. Meanwhile, Russian, Albanian, and Nigerian crime syndicates are entering the North American market (Farah 1997).

Mexico's rapid integration with the world economy has facilitated the development of pockets of agriculture and industry that are as sophisticated and productive as any in the world. The costs have been high. Local economies have been destroyed and living conditions for the majority have declined. As campesino's in pueblos like Piaxtla adapt to survive, many come to participate in the world economy on terms that are less than they would desire. They can make it through the year by picking tomatoes for survival

wages or they can borrow a hose and grow marijuana. Participation in the drug trade might be a form of "perverse integration" with the world economy, but it is integration nonetheless (Castells 1989; 1997). The drug traffickers in Sinaloa are responding to the demand of international markets in much the same way as are the growers of winter vegetables. The export of marijuana and opium has fueled the state's economy and influenced its political and economic structure.

In the process, many of Piaxtla's native crafts like saddle making and masonry have disappeared. Inflation has accelerated as the village stores respond to the drug trade. When the soldiers cut one campesino's field he might go out that evening and steal another man's harvest. Suspicion, fear and mistrust develop. With easy cash, cocaine and automatic weapons, patterns of alcohol consumption and violence have become increasingly distorted and destructive.

Rather than increased homogenization, be it growing tomatoes commercially or opium poppies in small plots, many in Piaxtla would like to see the rebuilding of the village's cottage industries and past patterns of diversified production. Over fifty years ago Ramón Beteta, a close associate of President Lázaro Cárdenas, had similar hopes for the countryside.

> "We have dreamt of a Mexico made up of ejidos and small industrial communities, electrified and healthy, in which goods will be produced to meet the needs of the population, in which machinery will be employed to relieve man from heavy toil, and not for so-called over-production" (Alcántara 1976: 4).

This vision is elegant. It is also increasingly impossible. For Mexico is a country that is integrating with the world economy on terms that have not been chosen by the majority its people.

Hypocrites and Mariguanos
Chapter Ten

Project Quilá was grinding down to a halt. The days were filled with bickering. The group was caught in a power struggle between the project founders and the young men. Fewer children were coming to Quilá for rehabilitation services, since vaccination campaigns had dramatically reduced the incidence of polio in the region. Programs that grew out of Quilá were now serving disabled children in nearby cities. With the increased in drug abuse and violence the project gained the reputation as an "unsafe" place to leave children. Quilá staff blamed the young men, or "mariguanos," as they called them, for the project's decline. The young men responded that it was actually the paid staff, or "hypocrites," who were bringing about the demise of Quilá through their laziness and greed. Inequalities in education, expertise, verbal skill, and length of time spent at the project allowed some members of the staff to dominate the meetings and assume positions of responsibility. Decision-making could be painfully slow and emotionally trying.

The village was isolated and shaken. The rains had washed out parts of the road. The only transportation out of Piaxtla was a flat bed truck that left once a day for San Ignacio. During a break in the rains, Alionso Arana Martinez was gunned down with an AK 47. The bullets blew off the back of his head. I was at the weekly meeting at Project Quilá when it happened. First came four or five loud shots, then the rapid fire of the AK 47. About fifteen minutes later a boy came to get Camilo.

Alionso was Camilo's brother-in-law. He was a good-natured barrel-chested man in his early twenties. Lionso had recently bought a green Chevrolet pick-up. He virtually lived in the truck with his friends the first

few days, driving up and down Piaxtla's four dirt streets with several six packs of Tacate in the cab. Lionso lived with Camilo's sister Patricia in the family house that Samuel had bought twenty years earlier.

Camilo's son came looking for me at the project and told me what had happened. He said his father asked that I come to the house. When I arrived several men were trying to restrain Lionso's mother in the bedroom. She was hysterical and lashed out at the men. The room was hot and clammy. There were no electric fans. When she quieted down the men fanned her with their hats. Lionso lay on a cot in the parlor. He was still dressed in the blue sleeveless T-shirt, Levi's, and cowboy boots he had put on in the morning. A towel covered his face. Had I not known he was dead, I would have thought that he was taking a nap with the towel over his head to block out the light.

Camilo asked me if he and the government doctor could write and printout the death certificate on my computer. Before we left Lionso's house he took several deep swigs from a plastic bottle of mescal. "It started sooner than I expected," he said. The implication was that Lionso had been murdered in retaliation for Camilo's brother's alleged involvement in the kidnapping and murder of Gabriel and Chelne.

That evening Camilo asked me to go with him to San Ignacio with the body. From San Ignacio, Lionso's brothers were to take the body to the family home in Coyotitan. Camilo hired a pick-up. Camilo, the driver, and I rode in front. Lionso's mother, his wife, and sister-in-law sat in back with the body. Looking back through the cab window I could see Lionso' face, whitened in the moonlight, placid, and flat like a Javanese mask. Several times Lionso's mother took off the towel to talk with her son and kiss his face and stiff hands. Then, as if waking from a dream and realizing the futility of her actions, she would start wailing.

It took us nearly an hour and a half to get to San Ignacio. For most of the trip the driver went slowly to avoid getting stuck in the mud or sliding off the road. At one point the he noticed headlights behind us. "No need to worry," said Camilo. "It's keeping it's distance." The driver sped up anyway. "Just taking advantage of the straight-away," he explained. For the rest of the ride he paid close attention to the rear view mirror. The year before a truck carrying a man who had been wounded in a drug-related feud was stopped on its way to the hospital. The wounded man and the driver were gunned down.

Once in San Ignacio we parked by the municipal presidency. Though it was eleven-thirty at night there were a number of municipal police out front. Several of them came over to look at the body. Lionso's brothers, who had been waiting for us with another pick-up, wrapped the body in a blanket. With the blanket around him, Lionso looked like a woman wrapped in a shawl. They carried him to a coffin they had brought with them, as the women began to sob. After placing him in the coffin of his brothers covered his face with the blanket and closed the lid.

Soon after dark Piaxtla was locked tight and quiet. Jenaro said it was becoming a village of "pobre's and mas pobres.*" Three more of the wealthy families had left. Victor Rios received a note threatening his life if he didn't leave eighty-thousand pesos at a designated site. He moved out of Piaxtla the next day. Virgilio Manjarrez left soon after the murders of his brother and nephew, Gabriel and Jacinto Manjarrez. Five days later his house was broken into. His television was smashed, along with his china cabinet, dinning room set, and a grandfather clock. He returned to Piaxtla escorted by a truck-

* "Of poor people and even poorer people."

load of judicial police. He surveyed the damage and left town a few hours later. Gabriel Manjarrez' wife and daughter also left Piaxtla. Many of the houses on the main street were now empty. As I was talking to Jenaro one afternoon in front of the pharmacy, a truck passed by loaded with a bed, a dresser, and Jandina's white sheet metal táco. She was sitting in front and waved to us as they drove by.

Project Quilá was grinding to a halt. The days were filled with continuous bickering. The group was caught in a power struggle between the project's paid staff and the volunteers. The staff blamed the volunteers, or "mariguanos" as they called them, for Quilá's decline. The number of children coming to the project had fallen dramatically and morale was low. They complained that the young men smoked marijuana, drank openly at the project, and didn't pay for their food and lodging. The young men responded that it was actually the paid staff who were bringing about the demise of Quilá through their laziness and greed. They say that few of the staff worked a full day, and called them the "the hypocrites." As Chupón put it, "Socorro complains that we don't work and that we take drugs. Well, what about her husband. Efrain gets paid for spending eight hours a day on his ass, doing nothing, and then just like us he goes out and gets drunk."

The people with salaries tended to be older than the volunteers. In their years at Quilá they had rare opportunities for training and responsibility. Virtually all were married, had children, and had achieved levels of professional competence not often found among disabled campesinos in northern Mexico. The young men, in contrast, had little schooling and few job skills. Most came from poor families and started supporting themselves at a very young age. Adolfo was one of the first to come to Quilá. He was shot during a nighttime robbery. Manuel came to Quilá six months later. He

was shot after insulting someone at a dance. Pedro was a cop. He put a bullet in his head playing Russian roulette. Enrique was shot while riding with friends in the back of a pick-up. Chupón was from Guatemala and had also been disabled by a gunshot wound. He came to Quilá after being thrown out of the refugee camp in Quintana Roo.

Much of the group's energy was spent in the tug of war between these two factions, a tug of war that the staff would have won long ago had Samuel not repeatedly come to the aid of the young men. When one of them got himself thrown out, Samuel used his influence to get the decision reversed. Then, when burn-out and frustration led the paid staff to start thinking about leaving, he would woo them back to the project. His foundation in Palo Alto began paying monthly bonuses to Camilo and Andrés that the others knew nothing about. When Socorro wanted to leave he arranged for a grant to help her build an addition to her house. The staff was also all to aware that the job prospects for a disabled person in Mexico were dismal. They were therefore understandably reluctant to leave Quilá. So they stayed. This left little possibility for the volunteers to move into positions of responsibility. Any movement upward by one of the young men was perceived as a threat to the paid staff.

One evening I talked to Chupón, Manuel and Chemo at my house. They were the heart and soul of the "mariguanos." We sat on my patio under the guava tree. Chupón was the first to speak. "We are trying to change the project," he said, "and it <u>can</u> change, with the help of a few more people. Look at the shops. You don't see anyone working. People come and order wheelchairs, but nothing comes out. Claudio is on a drunk and hasn't worked in therapy for three days."

Manuel tossed the butt of his cigarette into a puddle and said, "When I first arrived at Quilá I went into the wheelchair shop. I thought they might say something like, 'take that tube and cut it', or 'you put a spoke in like this'. Well no. Adolfo told me to leave. He said that I would only be in the way. I never went back again."

"That's Quilá," Chupón said. "They don't want to work. They don't live at the project. All they care about is their hours, their salaries. They live well. They give orders. They do as they please. We're disgusted with these people. We have the spirit, the desire, and they don't! I use drugs, and all that, but I'm also struggling to better the project."

Chemo was back in the shadows. Only his legs reflected the yellow light from the kitchen. He leaned forward and said, "Its like they're tossing stones at you to make you bow your head. It breaks your spirit. Their tears and promises are nothing but hypocrisy. Socorro wants more children here because children will be blind, so to speak. They won't see all that's being stolen. Quilá is falling apart. Soon they will see that their problems are not coming from us."

Ruben had told me that the year before he and the young men made a drive to increase their power. Their strategy centered on gaining control of the project keys.

"I began to think about all the meetings that we had," Ruben recalled. "They were throwing people out and this wasn't right. I spoke with Katalina, and with Samuel's encouragement we organized a meeting of all the people who weren't being paid. I said we had to do what we could to help the project. We talked about different possibilities. I said, 'look, there are nine

people receiving salaries. We can do some of this work and save the project money.'

"It went beautifully the first day. The men got up early and swept the patio and raked the yard. Katalina and Inés mopped the bathrooms and the therapy room. By the time the people with salaries arrived the entire project was raked and watered. It was a beautiful. I asked if they would agree to having us record their hours. They went along with the idea. We prepared the time sheets and put down their hours as they came and left, and all went well. Next we thought about accounting, and learning about the money moving through the project. They accepted this idea also. We started taking on more responsibility We checked to see if the toy shop needed wood or if the cleaning was being done. We locked the gates at night to keep the animals out.

"We then suggested that they then give us the keys to all the locks in the project. This way we could control theft. At first they didn't accept this. But at the next group meeting they handed us the keys. They saw that what we were doing was good, and that Samuel liked our ideas. So, they surrendered the keys, all the keys, and we hung them on a rack together. We had a code for each key. In the mornings each worker would come and ask for his key, and open his shop.

"Problems soon developed. Pedro put his own lock on the orthotics shop. We broke it and replaced it with the original. He called a group meeting that afternoon. He said he refused to work under these conditions and that he was quitting. He threw his keys at us, and we picked them up. We had similar problems at the next group meeting. The workers weren't happy with the new arrangements. We had taken away their keys and were recording their hours.

"They began to say that we were robbing the catheters and urine bags. This wasn't true. At this point I made an error. I became angry and said many things. They latched on to this and said that this had gone too far. They demanded the keys back. I felt this anger and said, 'you really want the keys?' 'Yes,' they said, 'all of them, the keys to every lock.'

"At the time I was responsible for selling cokes at the project. There was some money in the cash box, so we went out front and started to drink. We ripped up the hour sheets and burned them. For several days we got drunk under the mango trees. We had lost everything. They had destroyed our work. We were drinking during the weekly meeting when they decided to throw me out for three months. But Jenaro spoke to them later and said, "He's sobered up. If you send him home he'll soon return in worse shape and be a bigger problem to you." He offered to loan me the money to pay for the cokes, and so it was decided that I could stay."

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The power struggle between the staff and the volunteers intensified. When Samuel was in the United States the staff brought up the idea of closing the kitchen. Few of the young men were paying for their meals. Ruben was reported to have told one of the new men's parents that the project was wealthy with dollars shipped down from the United States, and that they need not reimburse Quilá for their son's meals. Camilo brought this up at a meeting. With the support of most of the other members of the staff, he suggested that they close the kitchen. Adolfo, who ate at Quilá, strongly opposed this proposal. As the debate became more heated he called Elena a "common woman" and said that she was "full of shit." When I went to visit her that evening she was furious. Elena was a tough woman, but Adolfo's

insult had gotten to her. Nothing I could say could ease her rage. A few weeks later Adolfo went to the United States. Samuel had arranged for him to work at the wheelchair shop of one of the most innovative designers in the country. Before he left we did the following interview.

"I grew up in an environment of curses and blows," he began. "My parents thought that you teach a child through beating him. They separated when I was twelve. Everyone went his own way. My mother went to Guadalajara and my father stayed in Culiacán. Within a year they had both married again. He was with his new wife and she with her new husband. I didn't go with either of them. I was on my own. I worked a little but didn't like it. And anyway, when you are small, no one wants to give you work. I began to steal when I was fourteen. I really liked guns and learned how to use them. Soon I was addicted to drugs and violence.

"At the age of seventeen I was arrested for armed robbery. They had picked-up the guys who I hung out with and beat them until they told them everything that we had done. I knew that they had taken them in, but I didn't suspect that my friends had talked. So when the police came to arrest me they caught me by surprise.

"They beat me to get me to confess, but like most men from Sinaloa I prefered the blows to talking. But they already had learned everything from the others. They brought them into the interrogation room to identify me. They picked me up on the 28th of January. My eighteenth birthday was the Thirtieth of January. Because of those two days I was able to get out of jail.

"I was sentenced to twelve years in prison. My lawyer argued that everything I had done, I had done as a minor. He was stubborn, and fought for about two months until he got me transferred to the juvenile correction

center. I learned a lot from the people there. There were drug traffickers, armed robbers, killers, and I learned a little from each of them. It was like a school in which I learned how to do what I was doing better. I was out in eight months and immediately went back to the assaults and drug-dealing. I hung out with seven guys. We all had cars, automatic weapons, money. We lived well. We were important in the drug business. Then it all came to an end.

"I got into a fight at a dance. It was February 16, 1988. We were enjoying ourselves when we ran into some problems with some guys from another neighborhood. The fight got rough, but no one got badly hurt. Then the *judiciales* * arrived. They pulled out their guns and tried to arrest us. We started shooting. I was carrying only a pistol and one cartridge. When I ran out of ammunition I started running. A bullet hit me in the back and passed through my spinal column. It was from a nine millimeter pistol.

"My friends threw me into the back of the pick-up. As we left the judiciales fired again and killed one of them. My friends took me to the county hospital. My clothes were soaked with blood. The doctors didn't want to treat me. They said it was no use. They said I had no pulse. My friends were armed and told the doctors to do everything possible. They said that if I died the doctors would die too. The doctors said they would do what they could, but would give no promises that I would make it. They gave me a transfusion and an I.V. Everything became cloudy and dark. I thought that I was dying. I felt that I was going somewhere, but I didn't know where. It was as if I were out of my body looking down at myself. I wasn't afraid to die at that moment. I just didn't want to leave this world. Then they gave me an anesthetic and I slept. I woke up the next day and saw the nurses. "I'm back

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* Judicial police.

on earth, I said to myself. They couldn't move me because of my condition. I slept for ten days in the same position. A pressure sore formed on my butt.

"There were two policemen posted outside my door. They were there when the doctors told me that I would never walk again. I had no feeling in my legs and wasn't able to move. So I asked the doctors what had happened. They hemmed and hawed and said they would need to examine me more thoroughly before they could tell me. The next day they pricked me with a needle to see if I had sensation in my legs. They asked me to close my eyes and say where they were sticking the needle, but I couldn't answer at all because I didn't feel anything. When I pressed them they told me the truth. I looked at the two policemen and thought, "how am I going to make it in prison like this. I'll die in there." I later told my mother to speak with my friends and have them get me the hell out of the hospital.

"The next day two social workers came to talk with me. They didn't know that the police in the hallway were there for me. And it didn't occur to me to discuss this. They only knew that I was an invalid. They said that if I wanted I could go to a program called Project Quilá, or if I preferred I could stay in Culiacán and get some help from DIF, the government agency where they offer services to people in need.

"I asked about Quilá. They said it was a rehabilitation program in the Sierras. 'It's in the Sierras,' I thought, 'and far from here.' It was a great opportunity to get out of the hospital and go to an out of the way place where I could get treated without problems from the police. I said it sounded good. They contacted the group and asked if they would accept me. The people at Quilá agreed.

"When the doctors told me that I wouldn't walk again the police became a bit careless and started going out to eat without leaving someone to guard

me. My friends came for me when the police were out to dinner. They took me to a house where I stayed the night. The next day they brought me to a place where the Quilá truck was to pick me up. Everything went as planned. The police didn't find out where I went. To this day they don't know if I'm dead or alive because I haven't had anymore problems with the government. I've only had problems with people here at Quilá.

"Valentín and two therapists from the United States were responsible for me when I first arrived. I had pressure sores, a bladder infection, and one of my lungs was in bad shape. The bullet had gone right through it."

"What was your first impression of Quilá?" I asked.

"I thought it would be a modern institution. When I saw that the people who worked here were disabled, and how well they cared for you, I got to like it. I think I would have never adapted to an institution. At a professional institution they treat you but don't teach you how to treat yourself.

"I spent my first year in rehabilitation. I learned how to be independent in every part of my life, how to bathe myself, how move from my bed to the wheelchair, and how to protect myself from pressure sores. I learned how to go to the toilet using a method which might seem strange, but which serves you well. I learned about the importance of drinking water. When you have a permanent catheter and don't drink enough water you can get urinary infections."

"You had never worked in a shop before coming to Quilá?" I asked.

"Never. I did have some experience working on guns. I didn't know how to weld so I couldn't repair the individual parts. But I could figure out what was wrong and buy replacement parts, and thus fix the problem. After seven months at the project they asked me if I wanted to work in one of the shops. I was still new, depressed, and in bad health. So I just did small

chores. I started to sweep up the trash under the trees. At that time the ciruela trees were in season and I'd bend over and pick the fruit off the ground and eat it. Each time I bent over I strengthened my waist.

"Later, when I felt better, I chose to work in the wheelchair shop. Given the situation I was in, I thought that the most practical thing for me to do was to learn to make wheelchairs, or at least repair them, because I didn't feel that I had the capacity to make a wheelchair.

"I began working with Valentín. He taught me the most indispensable skills -- welding, bending tubing, and how to make a very basic wheelchair. These days the chairs we make are more complicated. When I learned they were very simple, very durable, but not as adaptable. Each wheelchair design has its own problems. Valentín didn't work full time in the shop. There wasn't a regular person making wheelchairs then. But I liked this work and have been in the shop ever since. I went to the United States for six months to learn how to make more modern and practical wheelchairs. When I returned to Quilá people paid attention to the work I was doing. I was doing things that had never been done here. What I like about making wheelchairs is that you can develop the design as far as your imagination can take it. I'm interested in learning how to develop lighter wheelchairs. Light and practical, and teach those who have a desire to learn."

"Would you tell me about the time you were asked to leave Quilá?" I asked.

"I've had problems at Quilá because of marijuana, I've had problems because of guns, and I've had a lot of fights. They've thrown me out three times, not just once. The rehabilitation that they provided was so good that I felt I was able to return to my old life. I saw that I could do the same things that I had done before. The wheelchair didn't matter. I had lost all my

money, my house, my car, but I could go back and make it all back. You can make a lot of money quickly with drugs. I knew how. I myself smoked marijuana. People call it a bad habit. For me it isn't, because I can quit anytime I want. I have always tried to have some around. Life so full of problems that one has to look for an escape. Smoking is marijuana is mine. I'm not an alcoholic and have no other major vices.

"I didn't know all the rules here at Quilá, and didn't pay much attention to those that I did know. I didn't plan on spending so much time here. I was going to rehabilitate myself and go back and get on with my life. But time passed and I was still here. I found that I was able to do a lot of things that many other people couldn't do. People started paying attention to my work. Some of them began to envy me. They envied my work and my relationships with women. I've always had a lot of luck with women. They didn't want me here anymore because I was making a place for myself. They felt they were important because they kept the books and handed out the money. I never got along well with these people. I annoyed them and said a lot of things about them that made them angry.

"People started coming to the project to hang out and drink with some of the new men who had come to Quilá. When they'd get drunk they sometimes got rude or played their music loud. So the project became stricter, and prohibited guns, drugs, and drinking on the grounds. They began to prohibit everything. This was when I began to have problems. They found marijuana in my room and threw me out for two months. Samuel was against this and he brought me back. He felt that the project was here to help people, not to send them home where they would become even more depressed and take more drugs because they felt abandoned.

"They threw me out a second time because of a pistol I had. I always carried this gun. Everyone knew this. They didn't say anything because they didn't know what to do. They finally met amongst themselves and made the decision that if I wanted to carry a gun I would have to leave Quilá."

"Why did you have the gun?" I asked.

"People were looking for me for all of the things that I had done in the past. As we say in Sinaloa, 'before I die I'll take someone with me.' I carried a gun to defend myself. If they found me without a gun they would kill me.

"So they threw me out, but Samuel went and brought me back once again. I am very grateful to him for this help. For me it was normal to carry a gun. It was normal for me to have drugs. I was accustomed to all of this. But the problem was that this was a rehab program and I didn't understand very well what that meant. Now I know. At the time they just said that it's prohibited and gave me no explanation. Now I understand that mothers won't leave their children to be cared for by drug-addicts and guys carrying guns. There was a lack of communication because they never explained this to me, or what little they told me I didn't understand. I was worried about my survival and I didn't give a damn about the rest.

"The third time they threw me out was the most important. I have a very violent character. I've had a lot of fights here. But I had never been thrown out for that. That's because I fought out front and not on the project grounds," he said laughing. "But this time the violence took place at Quilá."

"What happened?" I asked.

"My girlfriend Silvia worked at the Project helping with physical therapy. We had been together about a year and a half. Her family never accepted me. This is a small pueblo and everyone knows about everyone else's problems. Her mother had heard all about my history and the things I had done. Silvia

loved me but her mother wanted nothing to do with me. So Silvia and I were very careful and kept our relationship hidden.

"This particular afternoon they had a birthday party for one of the people at Quilá. Silvia and I had a moment to be alone together. It was very romantic. One of the men went to tell Silvia's mother that we were together that afternoon. Other people used him. They put him up to this. His name was Javier. He was a little . . . how can I put it . . . he acted as if he were a little funny in the head, but in reality he wasn't. He was angry with me because I said that we should put him to work. He just hung out here and talked to people, that was the only thing he did.

"He told Silvia's mother all kinds of rubbish. He said that Silvia was sleeping with me and that we were together all the time. Silvia went to get her boy so that he could attend the party. When she got to her house her mother and brother hit her, screamed at her, and threw her out of the house. She came back to the project and told me what had happened. I stayed calm because she told me not to go do anything stupid. Then he passed by the room and snickered at us. He was making fools of us.

"He went into the kitchen and Silvia followed him. She was in a rage. She picked up a kitchen knife, grabbed his head from behind, and threatened to cut his throat. 'Go ahead,' he said, 'I'd be better off if you did.' She fainted. They carried to her bed room. It took her a long time to come to. Four men from the project took Javier out back by the ciruela trees. It was about seven and was getting dark. They began to slug him. Silvia was a friend to everyone and they wanted to teach Javier a lesson. Enrique came and got me. When I arrived Gildo was hitting Javier. They had put a rope around his neck and tied it overhead to a branch of the ciruela tree. 'She's your

girlfriend,' said Gildo. 'Aren't you going to do anything.' I wanted to get even with Javier. So I slugged him. I also burnt him with a cigarette."

"You burnt him with a cigarette?" I asked.

"Yes. I rubbed out burning cigarettes on his chest. I didn't want to get in a lot of trouble. I never thought about killing him. I just wanted to scare him and keep him from doing this again. I knew that I was making a mistake, but in my anger I forgot that he was funny in the head. I had to support what the others were doing because I was the one who he had made a fool of.

"Javier was pretty badly beaten. He face was all cut up, his chest was covered with burn marks, and his neck had been rubbed raw by the rope. His clothing was covered with blood. I had helped beat him and I knew that I was going to be blamed for everything. 'I want your clothes,' I said. He refused and I said, 'if you don't give me your clothes I'm going to start beating you again.' He finally gave me his clothes and I went and threw them in the river. The guys wanted to continue hitting him but I said to let him go.

"Javier was put up to what he did by people who didn't want me at Quilá. The next morning these people went to him and told him that he had to tell the group what had happened. He didn't want to, but they convinced him. The village síndico came and told me that I had to leave the pueblo. I was very sick at the time. I hadn't realized it, because of the energy I had from my love this woman. When I left Quilá, I ended up in the hospital in Culiacán. I had to have an my bladder operated on. I then spent another month recuperating. Then Samuel spoke with the síndico and arranged for me to return to Piaxtla."

"When you were in police custody, did they treat you like you treated Javier?" I asked.

"They were worse. I have been beaten by the municipal police, the judiciales, the soldiers, every type of law. They tortured me with electricity, put plastic bags over my head, and made me drink a lot of water and then slugged me in the stomach. These things are harder to endure than cigarette burns. Its like dying, but continuing to live."

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A few weeks after Adolfo and I did this interview, Elena, Socorro, Samuel and I met to talk about the coming course in wheelchair making. Adolfo had been in the United States for a number of months working with Ralf, the wheelchair maker from the United States who was coming to teach the course.

"Ralf has been preparing Adolfo to co-teach the workshop," said Samuel.

Before he could continue, Elena spun her wheelchair around and started out the door of the consultorio. She then turned back to Samuel and said, "If Adolfo comes back, I'm going. It's as simple as that."

Samuel was stunned. "Well, all right," he said, "but Ralf probably won't come without Adolfo."

"I'll write to Ralf and ask," said Elena. "But if Adolfo comes back, I'm leaving Quilá," she added, and the meeting ended.

I had talked with Ralf about the wheelchair course a few weeks earlier. I told him that Elena had suggested that Paco Maldanado help lead the course. Paco was an affable man who had lived and worked at Quilá for several years. Ralf agreed and said that maybe in five years Adolfo might have the patience and maturity needed to take on this kind of responsibility. That evening as we waited for dinner at Lucila's, Samuel told me that Terecita had said that she missed Adolfo.

"I didn't know that they were that close?" I said.

"Apparently so," he said. "Osvaldo asked me if it was true that they were throwing Adolfo out. He seemed pretty disturbed about this."

"Is that right?" I said. I had heard that Samuel blamed me in part for what had happened and didn't want to get into this with him. Samuel felt that I had "pumped-up" Elena so that she felt that she was indispensable to the project.

"A lot of people envy Adolfo," he said. "That's what happens to the creative ones. The others push them out."

"The people in the project are tired," I said. I was getting irritated. "You use your influence to bring these guys back every time they throw them out. But you don't have to deal with the everyday hassles. They're fine when you're here. When you leave its Elena and the rest of the staff that have to deal with the insults, drunkenness, and violence. They 're just regular people and they're worn out."

"Perhaps I do side too much with 'los de abajo*,' with the oppressed", he said. "But you seem to be siding with those at the top." A little later in the conversation he said he had spoken with Enrique that morning and that he had some pretty good ideas. "Enrique could be the one to bring Quilá out of its problems," he said. "We need more caring people."

"Enrique?" I said. Enrique had been thrown out of the project several times for selling marijuana. When caught he said that he had to sell marijuana because the people at the project wouldn't give him money for toothpaste or soap.

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* "Those from below," the title of a classic Mexican novel about the exploited classes.

Lucila brought out the bowls of refried beans. She sat down with us while we ate. The conversation switched to her diabetes and the new medications the doctor in Culiacán had given her.

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Camilo was sitting out in front of his house one night when a drunk came up and told him that he was going to kill him in revenge for Camilo's brother's part in the murders of Gabriel and Jacinto Manjarrez. A few nights later someone shot off an automatic weapon outside Lionso's old house. The wall was filled with bullet holes. I heard a rumor that a red pick-up had pulled up out front of Camilo's house. The driver was said to have told Camilo that if he did not leave Piaxtla in three days he would be killed. Camilo denied that this had happened. Still, he sent his family to Cosalá, the capital of the neighboring municipality. They left in the project pick-up which was piled high with their family possessions.

I spoke with Jenaro that evening. He sitting in front of the pharmacy with several friends. He was very drunk. "Camilo has to leave," he said to me. "Each morning he walks down this street as if nothing had happened. Everyone knows that he could have spoken with his brother and saved Gabriel and Jacinto. Only Samuel and the Gringos like him. If he's your friend you're a fool." His grief at the loss of Jacinto was clear. However, I doubted that Camilo could have done anything to save the men's lives, but this was not the time to say so. I went across the street to watch a *telenovela* * at the house of primary school principal. I heard shots come from out front. I guessed Jenaro or one of his friends had fired a pistol off into the earth. I looked out and saw Norma walk up to Jenaro. "Give me the gun," she said.

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* Soap opera.

Jenaro looked up, and handed her a pistol. She walked back to their house with the gun in her hand.

I drove Camilo to Cosalá in Samuel's four-wheel-drive Blazer. The car was packed with medicines, blankets, and pillows. Camilo asked me to leave the village though a back road and thus avoid a humiliating final ride through Piaxtla. Once we were on the international highway he seemed relieved, almost joyful, to be out of Piaxtla.

Camilo's mood changed as we drove on. "There's no way my brother could have been involved in the killings," he said with anger. "I feel like I've been run out of town. And why? What have I done? There's a Mexican expression, 'Everyone kicks the log that has fallen.' Had anyone done anything to me my brothers would have come down on Piaxtla and all hell would have broken loose." I returned to Piaxtla that evening. I drove past Camilo's house. It was dark. One more empty house.

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At breakfast at Lucila's, Samuel told me that Alberto had come to his house late the previous night, naked, and in a panic. Alberto told him that three of the men at the project had come into his room drunk and had threatened him with a pistol. Alberto had been a guerrilla in Guatemala. He was hit by a mortar and left paraplegic. He was unhappy at Quilá and waited month after month for his "compañeros" from the movement to come and get him. They had initially left him for six months of rehabilitation and training. It was now nearly a year. He wanted out. Samuel was to leave the next day for Mexico City. Alberto asked him to take him to the Nicaraguan embassy, or a sanctuary church, anywhere, but he wanted out. Alberto was

waiting for us at the project when Samuel and I arrived. He was agitated and told me the same story he had told Samuel the night before. Susan, an older woman who had worked with Samuel for many years was visiting Quilá at the time. She saw me talking with Alberto. "Let him get to work," she said. "He needs to get his mind off these things. Samuel will talk with him in the afternoon."

Later that evening there was a knock at my door. It was a friend of Samuel's. He asked to come in. "Alberto se ahorcó,*" he said. I was half awake and I didn't understand. "Alberto is dead," he said. I felt dizzy. I was flooded by a confusion of emotions. I didn't know to act. I found myself looking at the teenager with a sickly smile. "Samuel wants you to come to the house," he said.

Isabel was at the gate when I arrived. Behind her a number of people were gathered in a half circle by Samuel's car. Lying there in the grass, in his baggy pants, red Nike t-shirt, and baseball hat, Alberto looked very much as he did in life. Only his tongue was different. It stuck out just a fraction of an inch from between his teeth. It appeared that he had been waiting for Samuel, and that when he could not endure any longer, he tied his neck to the side mirror of the car with one of his shoelaces, and then pushed away his wheelchair.

Samuel was explaining to the people gathered that he had tried artificial respiration but to no avail. I knelt beside Alberto and touched his shoulder. It was still warm. I held him as if to reassure him. Lionso's mother's behavior in the back of the pick-up now made more sense to me. Somehow it felt as if I could comfort Alberto. Jenaro brought a stretcher. We carried Alberto to the clinic and laid him on a cot in front of the examination room.

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* "Alberto hanged himself."

Isabel brought a clean change of his clothing from the project. Andrés carried in a bucket of water and a cloth. I washed the right side of Alberto's body. First his face, gently and respectfully. Then his right arm and chest. Isabel took the cloth and cried as she washed his left side. I took off Alberto's watch and put it in his pocket. Rosa placed a rosary in his hands. Andrés and Isabel laid a clean sheet over him and put candles around the body. Isabel then placed his tennis shoes neatly beside him. One was without its shoelace. Several of the Quilá men spent the night out in front of the clinic drinking coffee they heated in a pot over a fire. The women held their vigil inside the clinic. Andrés and I went to San Ignacio in the project truck to buy a coffin. Samuel left a few minutes before us. He had an appointment in Mexico City that afternoon. Andrés directed me to a small brick house. Six coffins were displayed in the back bedroom, three on each wall, one hung on top of another like bunk beds. We bought the most inexpensive. It was a wooden box with a little glass window near the top of the lid for viewing.

When we returned, four of us put Alberto in the coffin. The women put his clothing, a few t-shirts and pairs of sweat pants, beside his body. The rusty latch fell off, so Yoyo nailed the coffin shut. Alberto's only possession, other than the clothing, was an inexpensive short-wave radio. It broke a couple of months earlier. Alberto asked me if I could fix it. He wanted to listen to news of the peace talks in Guatemala.

"Have you asked Andrés?" I asked.

"He's working on a leg."

"How about Raymundo Sandoval? He lives near Elena and works on tape recorders and televisions."

"He'd probably charge."

"I can cover the expense."

"Would you talk with him?"

"Next time I see him." I never got around to that errand. Alberto was noble. I admired him. Each time I talked with him he had something he wanted me to do. Each of his requests was reasonable, though often I didn't have the authority to help him. In the beginning I took his suggestions to someone on the staff. They would be overworked and would say they would get to it but rarely did.

The women made a beautiful wreath from fresh flowers. Jaime and Efrain made a metal cross with Alberto's name. We put Alberto's coffin on the project truck. The funeral procession moved slowly down the street to the church in the orange light of the late afternoon. Yoyo and Andrés were in the back with the coffin. Socorro held on to the fender and was pulled by the slow moving truck. An irregular formation of about twenty-five people followed with crutches, wheelchairs and gurneys. We waited in the church for Doña Petra, who was to say the rosary. She arrived with several older women. After the rosary, Doña Petra looked through the small window in Alberto's coffin. We loaded Alberto's coffin onto the truck again. Andrés sat in back, holding the blue metal cross. The road down to the grave yard was steep and rutted. Many of the Quilá people stopped before the slope and watched the procession as it moved towards the graveyard.

Throughout the night Andrés had stayed near the body. He was also the last one to leave the grave the next day. I waited for him as he scooped out the wax around the wick, and relit one of the candles that had gone out. Alberto's grave was in an isolated corner of the graveyard, next those of Manuel and Paco, two other disabled people who had lived at Project Quilá. They had been pushed to the social periphery in life, and then again moved

to the margins in death. As we walked back to Andrés' house my body felt stiff and knotted. It was the first time in my life that I felt old.

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The days were short and difficult. In the morning, as I awoke, the hum of ceiling fan and dampness of the sweat soaked pillow were the first things that impinged on my consciousness. It was hot and humid. The clouds just seemed to hang there, day after day, and the air was still and oppressive. A calm, or an emptiness, had settled over the project. One morning Samuel called a meeting of six of the key staff members people at Quilá, and myself. We met in the consultation room.

Samuel sat up on the examining table. His white hair was unkept. His eyebrows flared out and framed his gaunt face. "I understand that there is some frustration with the weekly meetings and the process by which we run Quilá," he said. "Some seem to believe that we need to place power in the hands of fewer people. Daniel is of the opinion that I use my influence to change group decisions. I have been hearing a number of things indirectly."

"Don't worry. From now on the messages will come directly," said Rosa.

Socorro was sitting by the door. She moved a little further into the circle and said, "We had a coordinating group that functioned well for a time. They didn't continue because they weren't supported. We would like to form a small group that would have the authority to make decisions and the power to carry them out."

"So you would like to revamp this group, but this time their decisions would be respected," Samuel asked.

Yes, that's what I am saying," said Socorro.

Elena was sitting by the archives. She was wearing her red bike aid t-shirt." I think it's a beautiful idea," she said, "but I'd like to be realistic. If we see this as a dream, well, fine. But as a reality? What will you do when you make a decision and someone doesn't accept it? When Adolfo again refuses to pay for his wheelchair, who will confront him? I did, and the only thing that I gained was an enemy. He said I was shit. He called me every foul word you can think of, and not one of you said anything. And what will you do when you make a decision to send someone home for three months, and then Samuel arrives and everything changes. Samuel is someone that we can not change. He has a big heart, almost to big to fit in his chest, and sees the good in each person."

"You're saying my heart is larger than my head," Samuel said.

"Than your head, or whatever," Elena responded. You are easily swayed by people."

I looked to Samuel and said quietly, "The men are different with you. They don't insult you and they don't wake you up at night with a knife in your face."

"When you give people the responsibility of recording your hours, they dock you for whatever little thing they see you do," Andrés said. "Their attitude is, 'screw off, I'm putting down the hours, and I'll put down what I want.' We work a full day and they put down five or six hours."

"When someone does something like this, no one has the power to act," Samuel said.

Socorro's three year old daughter was sitting on her wheelchair footrest. She was playing with the office kangaroo with the interchangeable body parts. Socorro picked up a powder blue arm that had fallen on the floor, and said, "There are a lot of people who are here only because its comfortable. They

have a salary and the work is easy. So they stay, but they don't feel anything for the project..."

"If we are serious about forming a new coordinating group," Rosa interrupted," we will need to have more authority this time. We will need the authority to say, "you're drinking, selling drugs, and carrying a gun. We won't accept this. You'll have to go for three months."

Jenaro was sitting on a wooden stool in the corner. He was the outsider in the room. He had clashed with Elena, was skeptical about Socorro's sincerity, and was hardly delighted with the idea that power would be consolidated in their hands. "There has to be authority, but this must be thought out well. Otherwise, one person could rise to the top," he said.

The meeting went on for about another forty minutes. About lunch time Samuel wrapped it up. He said, "We are in agreement then about forming a group that would make key decisions, and that would function with my support but without my interference. This group, in part, already exists. Everyone knows the key people in the project. But we need to make sure that there are ways that the whole group can express its concern about decisions being made, and be able to make changes accordingly."

Jenaro called a meeting of the entire group the following morning. Samuel announced the formation of a new coordinating committee, the group of six. The young men listened solemnly, except for Enrique who sat through the meeting with a contemptuous smile. Manuel said that if the rules were to be enforced, they should be enforced equally, across the board. He doubted that the people on the committee would look at their own errors as closely as the errors of others.

The committee quickly took the reigns of power. The die had been cast, the staff had won. The shop leaders took over the responsibility of recording

hours. Chupón left the next day. Enrique was sent home a few months later. I had taken sides. Like oil and water, the two factions would never come together, and Samuel's balancing act was only creating chaos. One side, it seemed to me, had to be in control. And the young men had shown little indication that they were up to the task.

One by one the mariguanos left Piaxtla. The project was quiet. Some said that Quilá was tired, and that Quilá was tired because Piaxtla was tired. Yoyo made a few wheelchairs, Elena did a some consults. Once in awhile someone came in to have a brace made. Only Andrés' prosthetics shop was consistently busy.

People's hearts had moved from Quilá to their families. "Yoali fills my life and makes it complete," says Elena. "After the accident I felt like my life was over. But I slowly became aware of new things, things that I had never known before. I learned about friendship, love, and now the love of my daughter." Yoyo, Elena's husband, adds, "when our daughter was born they placed her by my side. After all I had been through... to see a child so small, so beautiful."

Epilogue
Five Years Later

I was sitting in front of Elena's house when the bus arrived from Mazatlán. The rumble of its engine laboring over the hill signaled the buses' arrival. Then the headlights, bright in the darkening sky, could be seen on the hill above. It was the day before the Day of the Dead. As the bus came down the last stretch into town, horn blowing, people congregated in front of the stop. Kiko, the driver, took the final turn fast and pulled up in front of his house. The passengers unloaded and were greeted by family members under the orange glow of Kiko's porch light.

I went to the graveyard with Chema before dawn the next morning. When we arrived a number of people were sweeping family plots. Smoke from the burning leaves spread across the cemetery . People talked quietly as they worked.

"Quienes son?"* someone asked Mario.

"Son hijos mios,"* he said, looking down at the three graves he had just cleaned. Each was marked with a simple wooden cross. As Chema and I walked up the hill he greeted a man whom I had not seen before.

"Cuando llegaste,"* asked Chema.

"Anoche,"* said the man. A few women were now beginning to say the rosary. Chema placed flowers on Lucila's mother's grave. After lighting two candles, he said he wanted to find the grave of a man named Bibi. "Was he a relative?" I asked. "No, a friend. He used to wander about alone." After

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* "Who are they?"
* "My sons."
* "When did you arrive?"
* "Last night."

locating the grave, he wiped off the dust from the wooden cross and placed a wreath of paper flowers on it.

As the sun rose over the Sierras, the sound of the women saying the rosary began to drown out the calls of the morning birds. Family after family made their way up the hill. Many of the women balanced plastic buckets on their heads filled with flowers.

Rafaela and Juan Manjarrez's tomb was one of the largest in the cemetery. Above it stood a sculpture of Mary looking up at Jesus on the cross. By mid-day the tomb was awash in flowers. Nearby the family of Gabriel and Jacinto Manjarrez spread out a picnic blanket and spent several hours by the grave. Ema, Gabriel's widow told me that when she was a child throughout the Day of the Dead there were bands playing *musica ranchera* and women selling tomales and raspadas. She sipped on a coke as one of her daughters touched up the statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe on her husband and son's tomb.

At the edge of the cemetery, Claudio cleared the weeds from Alberto's grave with a machete. He thought he had done so the day before. I had come up to help him, but wondered if we were cleaning the right grave. The cross said Norberto Sanchez. Claudio assured me that Norberto was the formal form of Alberto. Later in the day, Elena's neighbor told her that Claudio had in fact cleared the wrong grave. Norberto Sanchez was the woman's nephew. Now Claudio was at work again. The cross on Alberto's grave had fallen over, and the plot was a tangle of vines and dead leaves. Next to it, Norberto's was tidy and bright with the paper flowers Elena had made for Alberto. We moved a some of the flowers, but left a few so as not to offend Norberto.

I went with Jenaro, Norma and their daughter Griselda, to the cemetery in the village of Campanillas. There was a half moon above in the day sky.

Jenaro put a wreath on the grave of "padre Beto," the man who had taken him in when his mother died. Jenaro then put another wreath on his grandmother's grave. The woman's husband was the man who once denied Jenaro a piece of the deer he killed. As we left the graveyard, Jenaro told us to go on. He would catch up. I looked back from the gate and saw him standing by padre Beto's grave with his hat in his hands. Norma, Griselda and I walked down Campanillas' one street. We passed the one room school house that Jenaro had attended. Its roof had fallen in long ago. The blackboard was still in place on a crumbling adobe wall.

When we returned to Piaxtla, Chema asked me if I wanted to go back out to the cemetery with him to check on the candles we had put out earlier. Andrés's son was selling cokes at the entrance. A little girl was sitting across the path with a bucket full of hielitos* her mother had made. It was now late in the afternoon. The hill was now fully adorned with candles, wreaths, and buckets of flowers. People exited the cemetery as if leaving a stage. As the sun set, the blue crosses, white tombs, and flowers faded into the darkness, leaving only the candles visible.

I walked back alone to the pueblo. Chayo, Andrés's wife, was selling roasted chicken from a stand across the street from Jenaro's pharmacy. A bare bulb hung above the stand. Andrés was leaning against a black and yellow Dodge. Musica ranchera blasted from the truck's stereo. Elena and Socorro were waiting for Chayo to fill their orders. "Last night when we got back from Culiacán," Socorro said to Elena, "Efrain helped me with the laundry. Then he swept the kitchen. After that he helped me put Emily to bed. I started to wonder if something was wrong with him. But then he went out and got drunk and disappeared until ten this morning." They both laughed.

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* Cool aid frozen in small plastic bags.

Elena was now thirty-seven. Socorro was thirty-four. Elena looked much the same as the day I first arrived in 1991. Socorro had given birth to a second child. Her face and body were a little rounder, though she still moved as quickly and gracefully as ever. Project Quilá was very much in the hands of these two women. One of the program funders had worked with them to help the project become independent of Samuel and the foundation. Yoali came up and asked Elena if the chicken was ready yet. Elena shook her head. Yoali was now eight. She came over and sat in my lap with a familiarity that only comes with years of friendship.

Jenaro was across the street in the pharmacy. The shelves were bare. Most people needed to buy their medicines on credit and rarely paid Jenaro back in full. Above the pharmacy entrance hung a large neon sign that said "larga distancia."* Jenaro had won the concession for the two telephones that had recently been installed in Piaxtla. The system used a relay located on a hill above the village. The phones rang constantly that evening.

"Mario," Jenaro called.

"Mario, te habla," said Valentín. Both men were sitting outside the pharmacy. Jenaro came out and told Mario that there was a call for Jovencia. As Mario left to find her the other telephone rang.

"Pedro," Jenaro called, and his nephew went into to pharmacy to get his assignment.

After eating I went to the project to see Pedro. He was in his cot wrapped up in a grey blanket. Pedro had made steady gains over the years. He was relaxed and seemed to enjoy his life. He no longer defecated in his bed or urinated in his pants. About a year earlier I was pleasantly surprised to see him walking on the parallel bars. Every morning he went back and forth for

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* long distance

half and hour with an expression of concentration and purpose on his round face while Rosa watched. Rosa taught him to count to twenty using his fingers. She also taught him the vowels. "A..E..I..O..U... A donkey knows more than you,"* he would chant.

Pedro loved music. Rosa taught him to sing the old ballad "El Indio Quiere Llorar." He then began to memorize the songs he heard from the tape recorders in the kitchen and the shops. When one of his favorites came on he would bang on his left leg sending it into spasms, then start singing along and moving to the music. As he did so, he would clap or count on his fingers, which he had included into his routine shortly after Rosa taught him his numbers. Pedro spent his days wandering about the project in the new wheelchair that Moisés and Andrés had made for him. Compensating for his lack of vision, his fingers probed the dry earth for objects of interest, like pebbles, large seeds, and scraps of iron. He called these objects his *monedas.**

Pedro was awake when I entered his room that evening. He turned over in his cot when he heard me enter the room. He had on a t-shirt with a drawing of a blue sky, white clouds, palm trees, sail boats, and the word "Mazatlán." I sneezed and Pedro says "salud."

"Did I wake you up?" I asked

"No," he said. "Daniel?

"Yes, it's me."

"Do you want to see the monedas I found today?"

"Sure."

"A leaf, a plastic chain, a seed, a tiny paper tube, a bottle cap," he announced as he extracted them one at a time from his pockets. He placed

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* "El burro sabe mas que tu."
* Coins

them by his bed where they reflected the light from the next room like small bottles of holy water. He then pulled out two scraps of metal from his shirt pocket.

"Daniel," he said, "listen to the pieces of metal clink." We sat quietly for awhile listening to the scraps of metal as he tapped them together. The sound of cow bells blended in from across the way. A pick-up truck started up, idled for a while, and died. Then, as if waking up slowly from a dream, Pedro turned to me with great purpose and said, "Compadre, something to eat? Something to drink?"

Footnotes

1. The hierarchical nature of Javanese society was seen by the planners as an aid in their efforts to organize the Banjarnegara programs. According to their reasoning, Java's social traditions are based on a strong sense of community, founded on a hierarchical structure, which facilitates consensus within the community. This, they believed, would tend to encourage and reinforce cooperation between government officials and community leaders and the acceptance of new development programs (Rifkin 1985:101).

2. The government encouraged foreign investment and opened the nation's considerable natural resources to Japanese, Malaysian, and North American contractors. A percentage of the revenues gained from the oil, logging, and natural gas operations were allocated to agricultural extension, education, road construction, and health services in the rural areas. While these policies and programs benefited some, especially landowners, village officials and entrepreneurs, living conditions among day laborers and landless peasants failed to improve and at the time appeared to be deteriorating. (White 1982: 2). Labor displacing technology, new labor arrangements and changes in the mode of labor recruitment and payment led to a slow but steady erosion of wage-labor incomes (White 1982: 10). These changes and an increase in absentee landlordism and consumerism among rural elites led to a decline in the corporate identity of many Javanese village communities (Mahoney 1981: 189).

3. This disinterest was interpreted by regency officials as apathy or a symptom of the inability of the poor to organize. Peasant apathy, however, did not seem to inhibit the spontaneous and locally recruited popular resistance against the Dutch in 1945. Twenty years later villagers in the Banjarnegara regency mobilized to protest the lack of enforcement of the country's land reform laws. Many were imprisoned or killed.

4. At the same time, Industry in the United States had dramatically increased its productive capacity during the war and was looking for overseas investment opportunities and markets (Escobar 1988: 429).

5. See Ahmed 1978; Banerji 1979; Bennett 1979; Benyoussef and Christian 1977; Newel 1975; Sidel and Sidel 1977; Werner 1976; Werner 1984; WHO/UNICEF 1978; WHO 1978a; WHO 1978b.

6. The People's Republic of China served as an important source of inspiration to those attracted to this approach. Western health delegations visited the country and returned with reports of impressive advances in the control of communicable diseases and of the role decentralization of the health care system played in these successes (Sidel and Sidel 1975; New and New 1975). The outside visitors were perhaps most impressed with China's demonstration that dramatic health improvement need not depend solely on highly trained and highly paid professionals. In a profound experiment the political leadership created a corps of one million barefoot doctors, selected by and accountable to the communities they served (Rifkin 1980: 2). Alternative approaches also emerged from small community-based health care programs in Asia, Africa and Latin America. These programs often started with an emphasis on sanitation and curative medicine. As their efforts developed and matured, however, the link between poverty, exploitation and health became harder and harder to ignore. In several programs attention eventually shifted to the villagers' own priorities, be they agriculture, housing, education, or health. (Werner 1984; Rifkin 1980: 3).

7. Most recent studies of "health by the people" have concluded that the degree of success of a primary health care program is directly related to the degree of social stratification found in the society. Whether in Latin America, Asia, or Africa, the greater the social inequality the

greater the possibility that "heath by the people" will fail, be co-opted, or be violently repressed.

8. In this insightful little article titled "Time, Inequality, and Emotion," Mansbridge describes the reoccurring problems faced by participatory democracies in terms that are all too familiar to anyone who has had experience with such groups.

9. Mansbridge's finding that "members may have nightmares, talk and think about nothing else, cry uncontrollably during the day, have fits of paranoia, be unable to work, and begin to distrust themselves" was particularly true for those participants who had trouble experiencing and handling their emotions (Mansbridge 1973: 359). Much of the often complained about staff "burn out" was in part generated by this problem.

10. The history of the Community Action Agencies also affirms the importance of including consideration of larger political and economic constraints when analyzing the decline and collapse of alternatively oriented community-based organizations. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 that inaugurated the "War on Poverty" provided for the creation of local community action programs, to be developed, implemented, and administered with the "maximum feasible participation" of the people to be served (Fisher 1984). As these groups became increasingly politicized and initiated welfare protests and lawsuits on behalf of tenants, local politicians complained that the programs "fostered class struggle" and worked to undermine the programs. By 1966 Sargent Shriver, originally one of the leading proponents of the concept of "maximum feasible participation," declared that he had "no intention, of course, of letting any one group, even the poor themselves... run the programs" (Kramer 1969: 10). The following year the Community Action Agencies were facing substantial opposition in Congress, and by the early 1970s meaningful community participation in federally funded social programs was a thing of the past, "a memory of the Civil Rights movement and the tumultuous 1960s" (Fisher 1984: 119).

11. There is also a long history of research suggesting that participation in voluntary organizations is often associated with an increase in political activity in the community at large. In The Division of Labor in Society Durkheim stressed the importance of voluntary associations in stimulating greater involvement in the political life of their society.

> 1. "A democratic nation can be maintained only if, between the State and the individual, there is intercalculated a whole series of secondary groups near enough to the individuals to attract them strongly in their sphere of action and drag them, in this way, into the general torrent of social life" (Durkheim 1947: 125).

12. The ethnographic approach based on participant observation has in the past proven effective in portraying a group "in its own terms" (Mullings 1987: 5). The approach is relatively unobtrusive, and can be especially effective when gathering sensitive information and when working with stigmatized groups. It is also a way "of bringing together what people say (the content of interviews) and what they do" (Stack and Newman 1990). In addition, such qualitative methods have proven invaluable where multiple uncontrolled variables are expected.

13. Participation in this research was in all cases purely voluntary. Data was gathered only when those involved formally agree to its inclusion in the study. No one was identified by name on any notes taken during the course of this study in order to insure that people's identities remained strictly confidential.

14. Present and past participants were asked about their lives, their rehabilitation at Project Quilá, training, work, the project governance structure, and the strengths and weaknesses of the

project's workshops. They were also asked about their reasons for coming to Quilá, why they stayed or left, and what their experience there meant to them (163 one hour interviews).

15. I interviewed a cross section of townspeople about the history of the village, the struggle for land that grew out of the earlier health program from which Quilá developed, the founding of Project Quilá , their involvement with or opposition to the project, and their views about disability (71 one hour interviews).

16. I interviewed physicians, physical therapists, orthopedists, and administrators from Sinaloa, Mexico City, Oaxaca, and Michoacán, about their perceptions of Project Quilá and the rehabilitation needs of the disabled. I also interviewed foreign specialists when they came to teach at Project Quilá . (18 one hour interviews).

17. Clark and Anderson (1967: 76-77) have given the following more systematic explanation of this qualitative method:

> "Qualitative content analysis attempts to develop a taxonomy which will comprehensively and systematically describe a large and diverse body of narrative or descriptive data. Transcriptions of subjects responses are read through and examined for major themes which recur with some frequency. Usually notes are made as the analysis proceeds, indicating the range of elements being placed under a single category and their relative frequency of mention in the sample. After having prepared a list of preliminary categories, these data are next examined for possible integrating concepts which would permit a secondary grouping into a small number of somewhat broader categories. The various residual items in the "miscellaneous" category are usually examined at that time to determine if these more broadly defined categories will now permit inclusion of some of the previously unclassified data."

18. An ejido is a form of land tenure in which ownership is invested in the community whose members work the land collectively or in family plots.

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