

city, so there is a lot of room for people to 'disappear.' What they should do, I think, is to take a list of those that are sent back, and then try to find them. Don't look for how many you can document as being assassinated, look for how many you can find. I think they would come up with very different numbers if they did that."

There are about a dozen publicly declared sanctuary sites in the state of Oregon currently as well as another dozen or so peripheral or "private" supporting groups, according to Castro.

In addition to the Friends Meeting (which was the first in the state to declare sanctuary) and the Central Presbyterian Church in Eugene, participating organizations include St. Andrew's Catholic Church, St. Mark's Presbyterian and Centenary-Wilbur Methodist Church, all located in Portland. The latter three formed a coalition in 1984, according to a priest at St. Andrew's, and have since provided sanctuary to more than a dozen individuals — most of whom are still in the Portland area. He also identified the Temple Beth Israel, the Peace Church of the Brethren and the Multnomah Friends Meeting as other publicly declared sanctuaries in Portland.

After a group has declared sanctuary, the process of locating a family or individual for whom to provide shelter is usually accomplished by means of a loosely knit underground network, according to Hemmingsen.

"It's not like you put in an order, and then you get them through UPS or anything," she says.

The first family arrived at the Eugene Friends Meeting in November 1983 and included Castro's sister and husband, their three children and a nephew. Castro and his family arrived shortly thereafter. Castro says he and his family spent their first eight months living in the meeting house itself, later moving to their own home when they could afford to do so.

Although Castro says the Eugene community has been very supportive, living here has required some adjusting.

"The first year that I was here I felt so

uncomfortable. I was experiencing — how do you say — culture shock, and I felt like going back to my country... but I knew I couldn't do it," he says.

"At this point though," he adds, "I'm trying to think clearly about what is going on in my country and my responsibilities of what I can do here. I think that is what keeps me going."

Among those responsibilities, Castro is ever in demand as a public speaker and also serves on the National Sanctuary Communications Council and the local Interfaith Sanctuary Network.

Castro and his wife have balanced the art of maintaining a low profile in a foreign country with their active involvement in educating the local community (about El Salvador), raising a family and making a living.

He says their son attends kindergarten here, and he and his wife do what work they are able to find, including tutoring Spanish.

Although INS officials have yet to bother Castro or his family, Hemmingsen says "they know exactly where all of the refugees are."

"Let's face it. The INS office is up in Portland, and it's not worth their while to drive through Woodburn and Salem (where they could easily snatch loads of undocumented people with almost no protest on anyone's part), and instead come on down here and grab what we've got — for which they're going to get horrendous publicity. It is just not worth their while to aggravate us," she says.

In addition to Eugene's location, she credits the fact that "this is a relatively well-informed community with a political conscience" as another reason for the refugees' safety here.

Castro, who says there are 20 to 25 Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees currently in Eugene, agrees.

"I think that a major difference between Eugene and other cities and towns here in the United States is the high sense of solidarity with Central America that you have here," he says.

At any rate, members of the Eugene Friends Meeting fully expected the INS to "swoop down" on them when they opened their doors in sanctuary. Hem-

mingsen says.

But like Bondurant, the Eugene Friends Meeting also believed it was acting within the true letter of the law.

"We felt that the folks we would be helping would qualify for asylum if the laws were applied justly and that there was a real disparity in the way the law was applied to different nationalities," she says.

"For instance, if you were Polish or from Afghanistan, you wouldn't have any trouble getting in... and in fact, the figures bear that out."

According to immigration attorney Mark Silverman, "The U.S. State Department has rendered 'negative advising opinions' in more than 97 percent of the Salvadoran applications, which contrasts sharply with the very high approval rate for Afghans. If you're fleeing Soviet bullets from essentially Soviet backed repression, you have a strong chance of getting asylum. If you're fleeing U.S.-backed repression, your chances are slim."

Because of this disparity, many refugees have sought asylum in Canada, a country that has received them more readily.

A 1985 report prepared by the Immigration Statistics Division of the Canadian government revealed an acceptance rate for Guatemalan and Salvadoran refugees of 57 and 25 percent respectively, in contrast with the U.S. rate of about 2 percent for each group.

This has spawned an added element to the "underground" activities of the sanctuary movement as churches and individuals work within the legal process to assist refugees seek asylum in Canada. The so-called "overground railroad" has provided a way for churches to participate in assisting refugees without technically breaking the law. It also has been an effective help for many refugees who were previously unaware of the Canadian option.

In Eugene, a Salvadoran refugee family that had been in sanctuary at the Central Presbyterian Church recently was granted asylum and accepted into Canada, Bondurant says.

Adding to the complexities of the already controversial issue of sanctuary was a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision that apparently eased the legal requirements for obtaining political asylum in the United States. Handed down on March 10, the decision challenged the current standards of "clear probability of persecution" that a refugee must establish in order to be considered for asylum here.

While the ruling represents a sign of hope for many refugees, most involved with the sanctuary movement are approaching it with guarded optimism. Until more precedents are established, it is safer for most refugees to stay in hiding rather than face possible deportation if their asylum appeals are denied, Castro says.

Several major cities (including Berkeley, Olympia and Seattle), a few colleges and universities, and even the state of New Mexico all have declared sanctuary, according to Hemmingsen.

"What this means is that they basically refuse to comply with the INS in any efforts to locate or arrest undocumented refugees," she says.

She adds that no effort yet has been made to establish Eugene as a sanctuary city but that she could possibly envision Lane County doing so someday.

Fortunately, Eugene has thus far proven a safe haven for Castro and the rest of the refugee population in town. Castro says he longs to return to El Salvador as soon as the situation changes but considers the country's current president, Napoleon Duarte, a "U.S. puppet" who is merely providing a democratic face for the continuing oppression.

Asked how much secrecy he must maintain here in Eugene, Castro says he is cautious, but life must continue.

"I don't live in a state of being paranoid," he says. "I feel comfortable about going out and doing my normal day — teaching, speaking and doing all the kinds of things that a normal person would do. I am aware that around me there could be some danger sooner or later, but you know, that's the way things are." □

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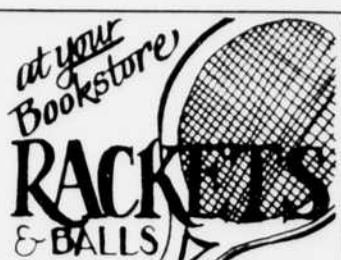
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