

Guatemalan refugee tells of real life horror story

by Michelle Walch
Rhapsody Editor

On February 22, CCC staff and students got a taste of what it's like to be an exiled peasant from Guatemala in a standing room only presentation in CC 101.

The Portland Sanctuary Commission and CCC's International Education Committee sponsored an Indian peasant woman who spoke of her experience in Central America. Because she has not been granted political asylum, her name cannot be mentioned.

Her talk was preceded by a slide show which gave the audience a glimpse of Guatemalan life. Her interpreter discussed how funding for peasants in Central America was cut off in 1980 and how two percent of the population controls 75 percent of the land. She also mentioned how the army is not just a protector of the wealthy, but has its own bank - it is its own entity.

Afterwards, the Indian woman told her story. "I never thought the day would come when I would be among the Americans," she said. She also shared her first impressions of the U.S.A. "We were told that in this country, people use their clothing or dishes once - and then throw them away. Before, I never thought there were

poor people here." She was surprised at the poverty; she thought there was more freedom here.

She was kidnapped by a rich man when she was eight to work on a plantation. She was raped by him and his sons. After having children, she was thrown out (plantation owners don't like women workers with children). She didn't know her way around and didn't speak Spanish. A friend recommended an American man, so she asked to be employed by him. She was afraid of Americans, and asked him if it was true that gringos ate people. "Yes," the American replied, "but I'm not hungry right now." Eventually her employer left the country, but she hooked up with some other Americans. She and her children were educated, including learning to speak Spanish.

"I can say that I owe my life to those Americans," she said. "They helped me a lot."

When Lucas Garcia was a presidential candidate in Guatemala, he said he was a candidate "for the Indians." According to the peasant speaker, the first thing he did was torture people who helped the poor. Her relatives have been tortured, killed, or have disappeared. She heard that she was wanted because she was a

suspected communist.

She left for another town but found it was no better. Her day was from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. During the night, any vehicle sound meant bodies from other towns. Every morning they are there. There are signs on the bodies stating if the bodies are moved - even touched - those who move them will have the same fate. Peasants are essentially a "business product."

"To be a refugee is not easy; it's the saddest thing that exists. We don't have our families; we don't have a country," she said.

"To say the truth is against the law... Oliver North is responsible for the deaths in Central America."

Although she has freedom of speech in this country, she can still be deported, sent to re-education camps back in her own country, be forced to give up her native clothing, and be forced to recite the national anthem everyday. Some will disappear, she added.

Just coming to this country is hard. "The first thing they ask you is 'What's your social security number?'" which they don't have because they have no papers.

The peasants have tried to reason with their government, but the interpreter said "non-violence

doesn't work." A group of peasant workers approached their mayor, and before they had a chance to speak, they were mowed down by the army. The peasants had no

weapons of any kind.

"I think the time has come for us to work together - not with weapons," the woman summed up. "We have to love each other."

ELC receives grant

by Briane C. Dotson
News Editor

The AMCO Oil Foundation has donated \$4,500 to the Environmental Learning Center to help finance seminars conducted by the ELC does to make people more aware of the environment around them.

According to Jerry Herrmann director of the ELC there are six different programs which can be conducted. One is how wildlife is helped through recycling. A second concerns whales, the marine environment, and how man affects the whales by pollution. For the second presentation the college uses a thirty-nine foot replica of a sperm whale. Other programs are on birds of prey, the deterioration of tropical rain forests, litter and its affect on the animals, and how to use the art of composting to beautify lawn and gardens.

Each of these programs is forty minutes long. After the program


is over the presenters will tour the different classes and answer questions.

This program is available to all schools and must be shown to at least three hundred people. This program has reached over 18,000 students since last September, and over thirty more conferences are scheduled.

According to Herrmann, the program has had requests for presentation as far south as Eugene and as far north as Seattle.

"Using live animals or simulations of live animals we get better results, because it presents the problems of waste and pollution as not just a problem of the animals, but as a problem of society," said Herrmann.


The ELC is looking for volunteers to help them in their presentation, and the ELC will train those volunteers. Those interested should call Jerry Herrmann at ext. 351 or 357.



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