

Martha Gies is the author of "Up All Night," a portrait of Portland told through the stories of 23 people who work graveyard shift. In Veracruz, Gies leads an annual writing program called Traveler's Mind; at home in Portland, she teaches at The Attic Writers' Workshop.

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Or, if you don't have all that paperwork or an aptitude for red tape, or if someone at the Consulate doesn't like your looks, you turn tail and head back to rural Guanajuato. Unless you have the dough to start shopping for a smuggler – called a coyote or *pollero* – to lead you across. Whether you live through it or not, you're going to owe at least three grand.

And if you make it to the Christmas tree farms or food processing plants of the Willamette Valley, you'll be stuck. You'll be able to wire money home, but you won't be able to return to watch the children grow up, because they won't grow up if you don't stay here and keep sending those wires.

It's a catch-22.

Yet it benefits everyone – except the 7 million Mexican workers who are here illegally.

The Bracero Program (1942-64), permitted Mexican men to come to the U.S. legally to work and, having earned a bundle – much like our own boys did in

the Alaska fishing industry – return home to their families in Mexico, perhaps for three months over Christmas, perhaps for good.

Originally enacted during World War II, when the U.S. was fighting in Europe and the South Pacific, the Bracero Program ensured an adequate supply of agricultural and railroad workers. The U.S. actually appealed to Mexico

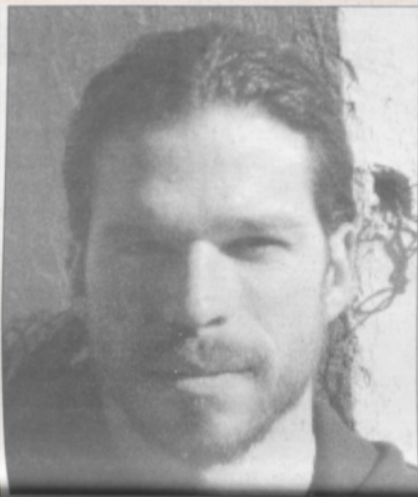
to send a workforce to keep the farms and canneries and freight cars running, the tracks in good repair.

The repeal of the Bracero program, in 1964, was not designed to eliminate a Mexican work force – and it didn't – but rather to give growers complete power over a labor force that was dangerously close to organizing: César Chávez founded the National Farm Workers Association in 1962. The early '60s also saw several new specialized mechanical harvesters on the market, along with the first *maquilladoras* – over-the-border factories built to take advantage of cheap labor with no environmental or workplace protections.

The Bracero program had been a humane way for Mexican men to keep food on the table without paying the price they pay now: by coming to the U.S. they lose everything worth paying for in the first place – family, home, culture, church, music, language, the silent land and the very stars.

Today, on both sides of the border, there are people speaking out about these injustices, people writing about the problem and companionship the workers, the poor, who endure it as a fact of life.

"This is the land of stolen futures; the land of stolen families, stolen villages; this is the land of the eviscerated present, where possibilities hang dry and collapsed in the air, still visible, haunting, unattainable: here all paths lead through



Hear John Gibler, above, read from "Mexico Unconquered," Friday, Feb. 6 at 7:30 p.m. Powell's City of Books, 1005 W Burnside

You can talk to Beth Poteet about joining the New Sanctuary Movement at 503-550-3510. Or travel with her to Mexico to learn about how NAFTA has put 2 million corn farmers out of work. Learn more at witnessforpeace.org



Recently deported migrants eat lunch at a Catholic soup kitchen in Nogales, Sonora. PHOTO: COURTESY JOHN GIBLER

the desert, across an invisible line drawn in the heat, into another world – a world known here as "el otro lado," the other side – a world where survival implies at least tacit acceptance of the law of transnational apartheid," writes John Gibler, author of an important new book on Mexico. "No one is spared."

"Our three main goals," says Beth Poteet, speaking as coordinator of Oregon New Sanctuary Movement, "are to change hearts and minds, to be ready to respond to immediate needs, and to really start to change immigration policy."

Gibler, 35, is an activist, an author and U.S. citizen whose new book, "Mexico Unconquered: Chronicles of Power and Revolt," was just released by City Lights. For the last several years, using Mexico City as a base, he's been roaming around the country writing about the trouble spots he is irresistibly drawn to – Chiapas,

Oaxaca, Atenco, Juarez. His book eloquently and movingly answers the question: Why do they come here?

Poteet, who graduated from Spokane's Whitworth College in 2001, settled in Portland four years ago and began volunteering with Witness for Peace. The following year, she went on staff 30 hours a week as the WFP Northwest organizer.

Founded in 1983, Witness for Peace was a prayerful response to the discouraging news that the U.S. government was financing the Contras in their fight against the revolutionary Sandinistas in Nicaragua. WFP sent thousands of peace activists from many different religious groups to witness the CIA-directed warfare in Nicaragua and to accompany the people in their struggle. Since then, WFP has also developed programs of

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