

Portland man lays his life on the line in Guatemala

by Robert Lothian

A Portland man has put his life on the line in Central America, with nothing to defend himself but his faith that what he is doing is right.

Jim Conroy, a former Roman Catholic priest active in the Central America solidarity movement in Portland, arrived in Guatemala City in May. Since then, he and a group of foreigners have provided a daily escort service for to women leaders of the Mutual Support Group (GAM — *Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo*).

The GAM, only a year old, is a committee of mothers, spouses, and relatives of "the disappeared" — the thousands picked off by death squads and security forces and never heard from again.

Because the GAM petitioned Guatemala's president and staged demonstrations, it has been the target of right-wing violence. Two leaders were killed in April, one went into exile and another felt compelled to drop out of the organization.

The group's two remaining leaders, both women, "were determined to continue their attempts to find their loved ones or to get some response from the government as to where the disappeared are and why no one has been brought to justice in these cases," Conroy wrote in a letter to Portland friends.

Conroy and others put their bodies in the way of bullets by accompanying the women to meetings, interviews, shopping, "wherever they go," he said. "We hope that the presence of a foreigner will make it less likely that these two people would be kidnapped and killed."

"We try to be aware of what is going on all around us and to be prepared for the unexpected as best we can," he continued. As a precautionary measure, he said, they contacted embassies in Guatemala City with the hope that foreign officials would com-

municate their awareness and support of the escort service to the Guatemalan government.

In addition to the escort service, Conroy offers his house in Guatemala City for GAM meetings. The fear is so great, he said, that no other group or organization would allow the GAM to use their facilities for meetings.

About 150 people crowd in for the Saturday meetings, he said, including many Indians who travel three hours or more, taking their lives in their hands. "It was only a few blocks from here that Hector (former leader) was kidnapped as he left a meeting," said Conroy. His body was found a few days later."

Conroy described a meeting of GAM leaders and Guatemala's President, General Mejia Victores. "He was sarcastic and extremely insensitive . . . because of his remarks, the two leaders of the group have become rather frightened. They are not going to stop their work but they do feel that something is going to happen to them." The two former leaders were killed, he said, after Mejia Victores accused them of being subversives.

Notices appear in the newspapers every day about murders and disappearances, Conroy said. He urged his supporters to write letters of protest to Guatemala's president and archbishop.

Conroy's friends in Portland support his efforts by sending periodic subsistence checks. "He's living very, very simply down there," said Carol Halvorson, who is coordinating fundraising and communication for Jim. She described Conroy as a little edgy and "constantly on guard," but in good health other than having lost a little weight.

"I feel that his real strong religious convictions have given him the courage to be down there," said Halvorson. "It's almost like he's been called to do it."



Colon Jones, South African preacher, at press conference. See story on Page 5. (Photo: Richard J. Brown)



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Discussion group

A book discussion group sponsored by the Multnomah County Library will be held on Wednesday, Sept. 11, 7:00 p.m., at 512 N. Killingsworth.

Topic for the evening will be Working — Exploring the Role of the Worker. Book to be discussed is *Growing Up* by Russell Baker.

The Royal Esquire Club's Community Service Statement by A.D.S.

Volume V

Community Service Benefit Coming Up!

Portland, Oregon, is a unique slice of America for Blacks, who are able to produce and perform meaningful services. Nowhere in the world will you find a place that has the kind of background and history of racial prejudice toward Blacks, and yet has so many very successful Black professionals in business, as well as Blacks in key prestigious jobs. To name a few who readily come to mind are: Bill Hilliard, Editor, *The Oregonian*; James DePriest, Director, Portland Symphony; Matthew Prophet, Superintendent, Portland Public Schools; Mercedes Deiz, Judge, Multnomah County; Aaron Brown Jr., Judge, Multnomah County; Hazal Hayes, Oregon State Parole Board; Bill McCoy, Senator, State of Oregon; Margaret Carter, Representative, State of Oregon, Multnomah County; Jim Hill, Representative, State of Oregon, Marion County; Dick Bogle, City Council, Portland; Venerable Booker, President, American State Bank, Portland; David Nero, Founder and Chairman of Nero and Associates, also of Nero Industries, Inc.; Walter Reynolds, M.D., Founder of Phil Reynolds Medical Center; Henry Scott, Founder and President of Coast Janitorial Services (Coast Janitorial is the second largest janitorial service in Oregon); Marion Blackburn, Founder and Owner of Raleigh Hills Racquet Club; Richard Washington, Oregon's first Black commercial artist, 46 years in business; Dr. E. C. Oqbuobiri, electrical engineer and founder of EZAK; Paul Knauls, very well-known businessman of Portland; Alfred Lee Henderson, Founder, *Portland Observer*; Gary Ann Garnett, Editor-Manager, *Portland Observer*; Al Williams, General Manager, *Portland Observer*; Bernice Foster, Founder, Editor and Publisher, *The Skanner*; Don Vann, Founder, Vann and Vann Funeral Directors; Arthur Cox, Founder, Cox Funeral Home; Thomas Boothe, Founder, Addiction Diagnostic Services; R. D. Sevier, Founder, Sevier Sanitation Services.

We can all remember those who are no longer with us, some who are deceased and some who have moved on such as Charles Jordan, Gladys McCoy, several TV news anchor persons; deceased Richard Muffet, Sherman Thomas, George Baldwin, Rosalie Boothe, Ira Mumford, Sidney Porter, Thomas Johnson, and many others.

I know that I have not named many persons who may be just as successful, if not more so, than some I have named; to those I apologize. However, my intent here is to show and document that out of a population of approximately 30,000 Blacks, success is not denied those who can perform and produce quality services. The above-mentioned Blacks excelled out of a population of approximately 700,000 people living in and around the Portland Metro area.

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