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A Public Appeal



Clara Peoples whose home was gutted by a fire Saturday has not yet given up on providing for those in need. Photo by Richard J. Brown

by Leon Harris

For more than 32 years, Community Care has fed, clothed and sheltered impoverished families in Portland and throughout Oregon. Irrespective of race or color, thousands have been recipients of this outstanding organization's desire to help the needy. Under the direction of Clara Peoples, founder and director, Community Care received no support from governmental agencies. Its resources were a result of donations from local merchants and farmers.

Every Tuesday and Thursday, hundreds lined up at 15th and Ainsworth in N.E. Portland to receive contributions of milk, bread, vegetables, fruit, cheese and meats, when available. Community Care received more than its share of requests for help to pay utilities, rent, and meet other family emergencies. Some families were helped, some were not. The agency's resources could only go so far.

But now, this God-sent supplement to public welfare is threatened with extinction due to the October 10th fire which destroyed the entire contents of the interior of the home which served as the distribution point for the food program and as the residence for the Peoples family.

Even more tragic was the absence of insurance on the structure. Community Care and Clara Peoples lost **everything**. The fire occurred while Ms. Peoples was in another part of the state collecting donations to feed the hungry.

The Portland Observer has established a special fund to help Community Care and Clara Peoples. The address of the Observer is 5011 N.E. 26th, Portland, Oregon, 97211. The telephone number is 503-288-0033. We can think of no cause more worthy than one which would ensure the survival of Community Care. The Observer appeals to you for community support.

All cash donations should be forwarded to First Interstate Bank, Walnut Park Branch, P.O. Box 11346, Portland, Oregon, 97211, Attn: Community Care. Other items for donation will be accepted at the Portland Observer, 5011 N.E. 26th, Portland, Oregon, 97211, (503) 288-0033.

Mireya Lucero: Patriot for El Salvador

Although only 25 years old, Ms. Lucero has endured years of deprivation and sacrifice. She has survived countless bombing raids and the repeated loss of her home.

Nine of her relatives — aunts, uncles, nephews and one brother — have been killed by government forces. An elder sister was "disappeared." They number among over 63,000 Salvadorans, mainly civilians, who have been killed and 5,000 who have been "disappeared" since the war began in El Salvador, a country the size of the state of Massachusetts. In the U.S., that would translate into two and a half million citizens murdered.

Mireya was born to peasant farmers in Potonico, Chalatenango. The peasants of Chalatenango are among the poorest in a poor country, where one in four children below the age of five dies from malnutrition and infectious diseases. Landlessness, poverty and illiteracy, compounded by the war, have eroded the social fabric of communities in Chalatenango and elsewhere throughout El Salvador.

Mireya's parents instilled in her a deep religious faith and encouraged her to complete high school despite the lack of adequate schooling in the area. Mireya began her commitment to social justice when she became involved in the Christian Base Communities, a movement that sprung up in Central America in the 1960's and 70's to find solutions to the problems of poverty and inequality faced by peasants. As part of this movement, Mireya travelled throughout Chalatenango with a group of religious workers, while still only a teenager.

At the age of 16, when she entered the 10th grade, Mireya began working side by side with her people, organizing campaigns to better the quality of education, lower tuition costs for students, obtain fair wages for teachers, and improve the working conditions of families in her community.

She went on to organize other peasant communities, working in villages such as Aguilares, where Father Rutilio Grande, the priest honored throughout the country for his work in the Christian Base Communities, was assassinated.

Like Father Grande, tens of thousands of Salvadorans who have attempted to organize for adequate living conditions and other social reforms have become victims of death squad attacks, disappearances, or have been imprisoned. Often, their horribly mutilated, tortured bodies have been left on the roadside, as a warning to others working for social change.

When the war broke out in earnest in 1979, the government undertook extensive ground invasions and eventually bombed villages to drive civilians away from the disputed areas.

During this time, Ms. Lucero began working with women, organizing community projects in Chalatenango that addressed the most pressing problems the war had created for her people. For five years, she founded projects that developed agricultural production, provided health care, promoted literacy, built schools, and made childcare available for women in the rural areas.

Her work has made a key difference in the lives of Chalatenango's peasants, developing crucial skills and contributing to fundamental and enduring development.



Mireya Lucero, a Salvadoran woman touring the United States, met with a group of women over breakfast at the Red Sea Ethiopian Restaurant Tuesday morning. Lucero spoke of conditions in her

country and the work people like herself are doing. The get-together was coordinated by the Black Womens Gathering.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

This fall, Mireya Lucero is touring the US to convey the plea of her people for respect in securing their human and civil rights, and economic assistance in rebuilding their communities.

Recently, hundreds of displaced families, aided by international volunteers and aid, have begun to return to the rural villages from which they

were driven.

The military continues to harass the repopulations however, through occupations, abductions, and blockades of vital food and medical supplies. Despite this, the repopulations have made remarkable advances, reflecting the peasants' determination to hold onto their rural way of life.