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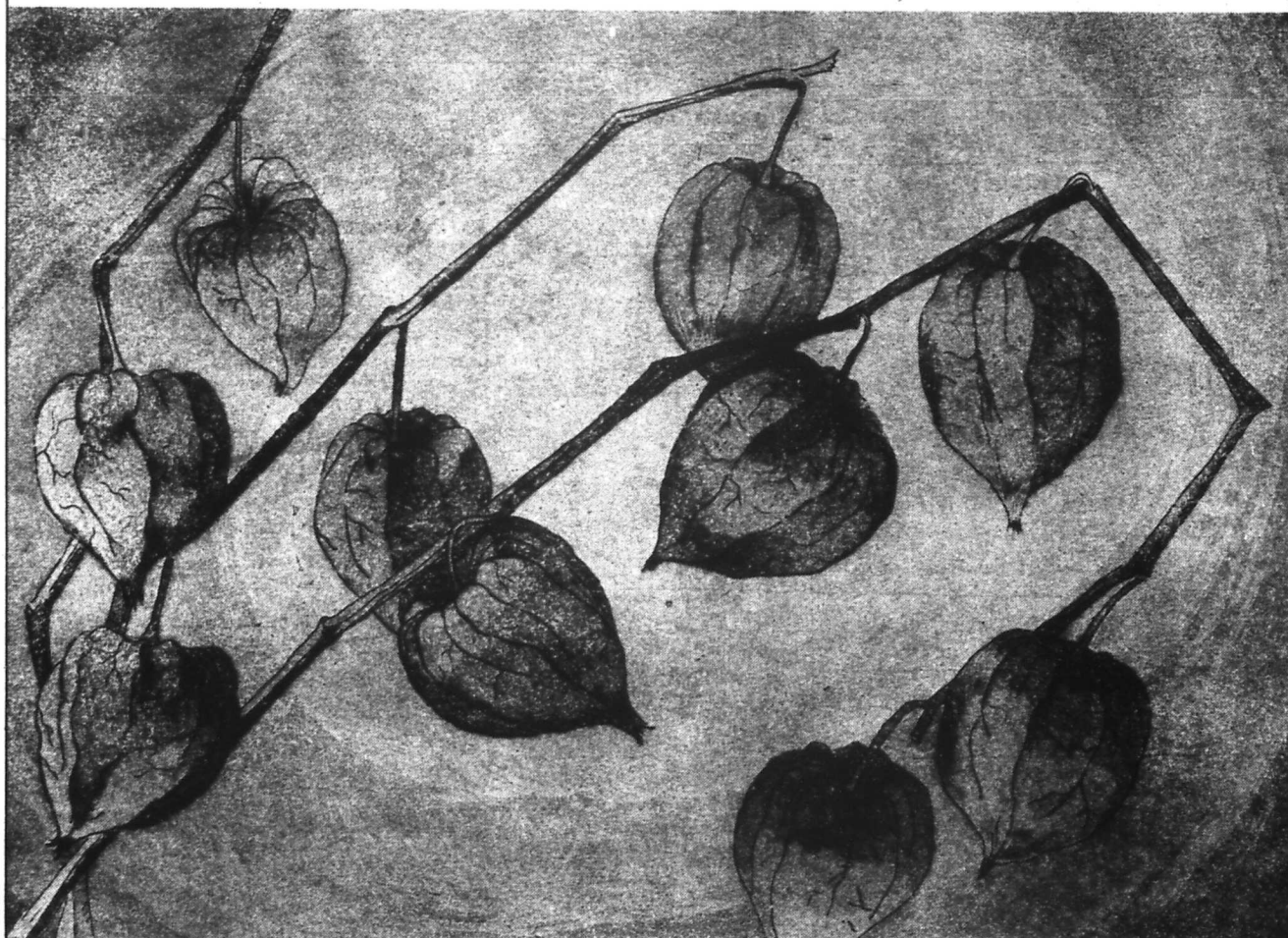
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JAIME'S STORY: A MAYAN REFUGEE FROM GUATEMALA

By W. GEORGE LOVELL

'Guerrillas passed through Jaime's village late one night and painted revolutionary slogans on the walls. The following morning the villagers awoke and looked out in horror at the graffiti defacing their community'

We have always been surrounded by terror and by the beauty that is an inseparable part of it.

— Josef Skvorecky, *The Engineer of Human Souls*

GUATEMALA HAS absorbed me now for the past 13 years. Jaime was only four years old when I first saw the Cuchumatán mountains that are home to him and another 120,000 Kanjobal Maya. His Spanish, then, was rudimentary, his eventual command of English unimagined. And his father, murdered at 36, my age as I write, had two more years to live.

I met Jaime shortly after he arrived in Canada. I had heard a little about him, he a little about me. Jaime knew, for instance, that I had written a book about the experience of his people and their Cuchumatán neighbors under Spanish colonial rule. The look of bewilderment that crossed his face when I told him I had spent 10 years researching and writing that

book will stay with me always. He paused, then queried, eyes of obsidian shuttered open in that classic Maya stare: "How is it possible to write a book about my people without knowing our language, without speaking Kanjobal?" I defended my work of a decade, worthy or unworthy, as best I could, at that moment more unsure about my chosen profession than ever before. Whether or not Jaime was convinced by my explanation, he began to tell his story. The look he gave me still lingers and haunts, pokes at my conscience like a caring friend. That look means more than a dozen glowing reviews my book may receive in the scholarly journals, for it signalled a return to the source, there to reformulate, there to begin again.

People and Place

Jaime was born and raised in a small Cuchumatán village of about 150 people. Its name, in Kanjobal, translates as "in the water" or "the place where there is water." Pre-Columbian in origin, his village and its inhabitants today form part of a municipal and parish division called Soloma, which is also the name of a nearby town. Soloma is itself administered as a township of the Department of Huehuetenango.

The city called Huehuetenango, about 35 kilometres away, is an important administrative and market centre designed to serve the political and economic needs of the government of Guatemala over the entire northwestern highlands, as far as neighboring Mexico. With a predominantly Ladino or Spanish-speaking population of 12,000 and such facilities as banks, cinemas, shops and hotels, Huehuetenango is like a foreign metropolis compared to Jaime's village. To go to Huehuetenango, therefore, is to enter another world, to pass from Indian countryside to Ladino cityscape.

Jaime's people, the Kanjobal (pronounced "Can-ho-bahl"), belong to one of 20 different Maya groups who make up approximately half of Guatemala's national population of eight million. The demographic presence of four million Maya Indians in Guatemala today is testimony to a capacity for survival few native American peoples have been able to sustain. It contrasts sharply, for instance, with the bleak prospects of Brazilian Indians, who in the present day number about 150,000, approximately one-tenth of one per cent of the Brazilian population.

In Guatemala, Maya survival is related to how, from 1524 on, Indians resisted the intrusion of Spanish conquerors by warfare, flight, solidarity and shrewdness. Moreover, natural resources elsewhere in the New World, especially in Mexico and in Peru, deflected to those lands a more intense Spanish interest, thus making Guatemala an economic backwater where only modest returns could be expected from gold, silver, or commercial products such as cacao, cochineal, indigo and sugar.

The rugged countryside around Jaime's village was described in 1570 by a Spanish official as "poor and unfruitful land" where the only things in abundance were "corn and chickens," hardly the stuff of which an El Dorado could be forged. Paltry resources in isolated terrain meant symbolic Spanish occupation, not genuine Spanish conquest. The Kanjobal and other Cuchumatán Maya

The rugged countryside around Jaime's village was described in 1570 by a Spanish official as "poor and unfruitful land" where the only things in abundance were "corn and chickens"

were thus able to create for themselves a culture of refuge that was a blend of pre-Columbian and colonial Spanish ways, to take shelter in a culture of retreat with long-term benefits for survival.

Most destructive of Indian life in Guatemala during the colonial period, far more so than Spanish brutality or exploitation, were outbreaks of disease. Sickneses introduced from the Old World to the New, passed without comprehension from European and African carriers to vulnerable Indian hosts, served as inadvertent but nonetheless lethal accomplices of conquest.

It is now 10 years since I unearthed, in the dusty archives of Guatemala City, a report about the ravages of typhus in the Indian communities of Soloma parish. More than any other colonial document I have examined, this report tells of an unforeseen and little-known consequence of imperialism that had a devastating effect on native welfare. The report fills me, as it did when first I read it, with immense sadness, for such suffering as it describes fell on Soloma again this past decade, albeit for reasons more ideological than epidemiological in nature. Dated May 5, 1806, and written by a Ladino official named Marcos Castañeda, the report is worth looking at in

some detail. Its Bosch-like imagery and Dickensian tone of concern, the latter a rather risky attitude for the petty bureaucrat who penned it to assume, evoke a grim sense of what Jaime's ancestors were up against. Castañeda, whose appeal for help was ignored, wrote:

For four years now in the towns and villages of Soloma, there has been great distress because of the mortality caused by the typhus epidemic, which kills the Indians without relief or remedy, leaving them only in dire hardship. Through fear of death, my brother and myself fled with our families to the solitude of the mountains, suffering there from the extremity of the climate, leaving our houses and possessions abandoned in Soloma. But God having seen fit to end this terrible affliction, we have returned once again to our homes. We find that the majority of Indian residents have perished and lie unburied all over the place, their decaying corpses eaten by the animals which stalk the countryside.

What grieves us most, however, as it would any pious heart, is to see orphaned children crying for the laps of their parents, asking for bread

without having anyone to receive it from; to behold many widows and widowers mourning the loss of their consorts; and to watch older people lament the death of their offspring. After so much hard work, these unfortunate Indians have been reduced to a life of misery. Having returned from afar, those who arrived are without homes to live in, for these were burned to rid them of the contagion; are without resources to pay their taxes; and are without corn to feed themselves.

If no measures are taken to assist these wretched people, they will most certainly starve to death, because they did not plant corn in the places where they sought refuge and so have nothing to live on, both for this year and for next, since it is now too late to plant their fields. It is a common thing in this parish to encounter Indians, old and young alike, walking from town to town, from house to house, begging or searching for corn and charity. Others seek loans, leaving as security one of their children, for they have nothing else to offer. For the sake of God and a sign of his mercy, assistance should be extended to this parish. At the very least the people could be exempted from paying taxes for the years during which they suffered great misfortune.

Independence from Spain, attained in 1821, was an event of little importance for Jaime's village and hundreds of others. Indian communities effectively maintained the culture of refuge shaped during colonial times until the late 19th century, when the reality of being part of the Republic of Guatemala finally began to register.

Under land and labor reforms initiated by President Justo Rufino Barrios, Guatemala was not so much a "banana republic" as a "coffee republic." Indian lands, especially along the Pacific piedmont and in the Verapaz highlands, were taken over by enterprising coffee planters who also demanded that Indian hands be made available to perform agricultural labor. This double plunder, very importantly, did not affect all Indian communities to an equal extent. The "Indianness" of some disappeared or was dissipated by the joint operation of land and labor encroachments in locales suitable for the cultivation of coffee. In other communities, including Jaime's, the intensity of land expropriation was tempered by their being situated at elevations where coffee does not grow well.

The land base of Jaime's community may not have been taken over, but his people began then to spend part of each year (as they do still) working as wage laborers who migrate to Pacific plantations in order to pick coffee. Indian culture today, however, tends to be particularly resilient in areas that, like Jaime's, successfully held on to land even if labor was (and is) procured for plantation deployment. Before we make the mistake of regarding land retention as the key to understanding Maya cultural survival, we must also observe that Indian identity is equally as resilient in communities that lost land, or had little to begin with, but in which alternative means of existence (weaving, pottery making, itinerant trading) lessened the impact of the Barrios reforms.

How people made place and how



place made people is therefore a complex affair in Guatemala. What is crucial to realize is that places and peoples like Jaime's endured despite the destructive intrusion of Spanish conquerors in the 16th century and coffee planters in the 19th. Only in the past decade has the bond between people and place in Guatemala begun to unravel as never before.

Family Life

When he fled Guatemala four years ago, Jaime left behind his mother and a younger sister, both of whom are still alive and live in the village. His father, before being murdered, had two children by another woman in an adjoining village, so Jaime also has two half-sisters. His maternal grandmother, who is in her 90s, lives in a hamlet close to Soloma, as does an uncle. Two older brothers were killed by the army in 1981 while visiting other relatives in distant San Ramón.

Like most Indian families, Jaime's has at least some land around which to devise an existence. The holder of 40 cuerdas (about eight acres), Jaime's father was a wealthy man by the standards of his community. Jaime's family also derived some sustenance from another 10 cuerdas his mother shared with her two brothers.

Land is something Indians in Guatemala relate to in ways that transcend most western notions of what sensible property management is all about. For the Maya, land is something to be sold only as a last resort. It should be guarded, protected and passed on to offspring as a sacred gift passed down from the forefathers with that end in mind. Indians consider themselves not so much owners as caretakers of land.

Not surprisingly, it is in relation to land that Jaime's earliest memories are lodged: "We lived on land by the side of the river. On it we grew corn, beans, chiles, tomatoes, carrots, beetroot and potatoes. Some wheat too, higher up. For fruit we had apples, cherries, plums and even some peaches. On our land my father raised many animals. With my sister I looked after sheep, watching out for coyotes when my father was away."

Why his father was often away, Jaime disclosed only piece by piece as the trust between us grew. It is difficult for any son to form a definitive picture of his father. What Jaime remembers about his father comes not so much from lived experience — he was six years old when his father was killed — as from what others told him afterwards, as he was growing up *medio huérfano*, half an orphan.

To earn a living, Jaime's father worked the family land, as Indian men do, but he also spent time in a coffee-growing region to the north of Soloma called the Ixcán. There, unlike most of his race, he did not pick coffee but bought it for resale elsewhere in Guatemala to merchants who then processed it and shipped it overseas. Jaime's father was able to carve out a comfortable niche as a small-time middleman because of the capital he acquired from his bootlegging operations, which provided funds for an initial investment and a steady supply of cash thereafter. Bootlegging not only attracted men from all over to Jaime's house, seeking refreshment or escape, it also gave his father another excuse for being away a lot,



Mother and daughter: Mayans from El Quiché, Guatemala (photo by Norbert Sperlich)

selling *kusha*, rural Guatemalan firewater, in neighboring villages.

In one of these villages Jaime's father met and formed a relationship with another woman, who gave birth in the course of the union to two daughters. Keeping a *segunda casa*, a second home, is common male practice throughout Latin America. Jaime's father seems to have been as dependable a material provider for this "other family" as for Jaime and his mother, sister and two brothers.

Leading a double life, however, is seldom done without incurring problems. In the case of Jaime's father, it appears

that relatives of the woman with whom he kept a *segunda casa*, an estranged husband and somewhat volatile brothers, reckoned after a while that the arrangement was an insult to family honor and decided to intervene. In the macho craziness of Guatemala, intervention can take several forms. One of them is murder. Whether the husband and brothers actually killed Jaime's father themselves or arranged for others to do so — life, we think here, is the most precious gift of all, but it can be bought very cheaply in Guatemala — will never be known.

Jaime does not rule out the possibility that his father's involvement in the bootlegging business or his role as a coffee middleman may have been responsible for the murder. The treasury police employed by the government to track down bootleggers are notoriously vicious. Likewise, guerrillas who entered the Ixcán in the early 1970s to engage in revolutionary armed struggle would not have considered the business in which Jaime's father was involved to be politically correct.

Death leaves so much unasked, so much unanswered. Jaime has an endur-

ing image of his father riding off on horseback as he departed on a trip. Once, shortly before the murder, Jaime recalls travelling with his father to Barillas on a coffee-buying expedition. It is important for Jaime to remember his father as someone who never had to pick coffee to support himself, as someone who never had nothing.

Growing Up

For Jaime, growing up began when he went to school. In his village, the school was a two-room hut, attended by about 35 other children who received instruction in Spanish from two Ladino teachers, one of whom also ran the village store. Acquiring Spanish, the language of the conqueror, is not something all Indian children achieve with equal proficiency. Boys tend to be pushed along more forcibly during the learning process than girls, usually because it is them, as grown men, who will have more to account for to the Ladino, Spanish-speaking state. Jaime's easy, sing-song Spanish is considerably better than that of most Guatemalan Indians I have spoken with, many of whom command only a survival vocabulary of several hundred oft-repeated words, phrases, salutations and curses.

Growing up for Jaime also meant, as it does for almost everyone, first exposure to the world beyond house and community, the world beyond the horizon. The trip with his father to Barillas was preceded by shorter school outings to play soccer against the teams of surrounding villages, villages only a few hours walk away through the fields and the forests, in valleys that lie on the other side of the mountains.

Nothing gets people moving more happily from place to place in Guatemala than a fiesta held in association with religious celebrations. Walking all the way from Soloma to Santa Eulalia as part of a procession that carried a statue of San Pedro from one town to the next is a warm early recollection for Jaime. Also memorable was his first trip to Huehuetenango, which he visited as a small boy with his uncle, to sell apples at market. Huehuetenango remains one of his favorite places.

In Guatemala, Indian children are expected to start working at an early age. For girls, this usually entails innumerable household chores: helping with babies and younger children, fetching water, washing clothes and preparing tortillas. It may also involve learning to weave commercial items for the tourist trade. Often it means entering into domestic service in local Ladino households, where Indian girls are rarely treated well and can be sexually harassed or even initiated while barely adolescent.

For boys, coming to grips with how best to work the family plot, especially the rudiments of corn cultivation, is priority training. It is also common for a boy nine or 10 years of age to accompany his father to a plantation, there to be guided on how to pick coffee or cotton, shown what kind of working



conditions and living arrangements to expect and generally introduced firsthand under paternal scrutiny to wage employment in the Ladino world.

Jaime's introduction, at 10, to the vicissitudes of plantation labor was not overseen by his father, who had been killed four years previously. His debut occurred in the company of five others from his village on a cotton plantation to the south of Retalhuleu. There he lived, along with 60 fellow workers, in a large wooden shack adjoining the cotton fields. Like many Indians accustomed to breathing cool mountain air, Jaime did not do well in the suffocating heat of the Pacific coast. He fell sick with malaria and within weeks was shipped back home, where it took him six months to recover his health.

He fared much better the next year on a coffee plantation near Santa Lucia Cotzumalapa. There, at an altitude salubriously above the coastal plain, he worked a full 40 days, earning about \$2 each day. The food and water at this plantation were more palatable than on the cotton farm, the lodgings cleaner and more spacious, with fewer occupants.

Jaime's most enjoyable and most lucrative spell as a wage laborer was on a coffee plantation, Finca La Florida, at Pochuta. He speaks almost fondly of his time at this place. Hard work, for sure, but good pay, tasty meals, comfortable beds and a river nearby to bathe and even to frolic in. Jaime likes to swim. At Finca La Florida, in the company of his best friend, who met and later married a girl also working on the plantation, Jaime fulfilled an 80-day contract before returning to his village to go back to school.

By this time Jaime, now 12, had gained enough confidence, had acquired enough experience, to test even deeper Ladino waters. Huehuetenango, which Jaime had visited or passed through on several occasions, would have been challenge enough, but even more so was Guatemala City.

La capital. Perhaps the most striking feature about Guatemala City is how it appears to bear absolutely no relation to the land and people over which and whom it presides. If Nero fiddled as Rome burned, then the government of Guatemala is a symphony orchestra playing in the midst of even greater conflagration. What do the signs and paraphernalia of downtown Guatemala City, the multinational consumerism and chic glitter of Sixth Avenue, the elegant mansions and flashy nightclubs of Zone Nine, have to do with the events and circumstances of a life like Jaime's? Nothing and everything.

The incongruity of Guatemala City is one of the most jarring derangements with which I wrestle each time I visit. When I mention this to Jaime, he shrugs. Why did he go there, what did he do there? "Para ver. To see what it was like. I worked as a *lustrador*, a shoeshine boy. I cleaned boots [50 cents] and shoes [25 cents] for about six weeks. During the week I looked for



NO MAS AGRESION!



customers at the main bus terminal, where I'd make two to three dollars a day. On Sundays I'd go to the zoo, where I'd usually make four dollars, sometimes even five. I had a bed in a room with two others in a house in Zone Four. It wasn't bad."

He talks into the tape recorder so matter-of-factly. It is a warm summer day in southern Ontario. The sky is blue and cloudless. Birds sing. Squirrels scatter playfully. The flowers blaze, the grass soaks up water, the trees provide shade.

In the garden, as I listen and scribble, it sweeps through my mind that I first left Scotland at the same age Jaime left his village for Guatemala City. I travelled with my youth club from Glasgow to Stranraer and then across the Irish Sea to Belfast. There we beat at soccer a team of older boys representing a youth club on the Ormeau Road, in whose church hall we celebrated and slept. We toured the premises where Cantrell and Cochrane made pop and also visited Gallagher's cigarette factory. I drank free samples at the pop place, but did not have the nerve to smoke the cigarettes some of my teammates plundered at Gallagher's. I certainly would not have had the courage to take off for Edinburgh or London, to say nothing of Guatemala City, and chance my hand shining shoes.

Getting Out

When Jaime returned to his village from Guatemala City, the countryside around him was becoming dangerous.

By 1982 the left-wing insurgents who had earlier set up a base of operations in the Ixcán, the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (Guerrilla Army of the Poor), were at the peak of their strength and influence. Their actions, along with those of the *Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo Armado* (Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms), were so widespread that the Guatemalan army found itself losing control over the western highlands. Matters worsened, from the army's point of view, when President Romeo Lucas García rigged the 1982 elections in true Guatemalan style: a member of the corrupt military elite chosen earlier to succeed the general relinquishing the presidency "won" a majority of the votes declared "cast." This would have meant a continuation of counterinsurgency strategies that clearly were not winning the war in the countryside, where more and more Indians were joining insurgent ranks. A coup by junior officers against the army high command on March 23, 1982, brought into power Efraín Ríos Montt, a retired general whom the coup leaders remembered in army college as honest, patriotic and professional.

The 17 months during which Ríos Montt held office as the president of Guatemala witnessed a reversal of army fortunes, but only at the expense of appalling slaughter and intimidation in rural areas where, at the local level, guerrillas had experienced some success in building popular support for their cause. Maya communities paid dearly for their involvement in Marxist revolu-

tion, whether direct or indirect, real or perceived. In essence, how Ríos Montt decided counterinsurgency should be fought was by following the thoughts of Mao Tse Tung: the sea in which guerrilla fish swam and procreated should be simply dried up. Jaime's village cannot be said to have suffered the worst of counterinsurgency. Some communities no longer exist, the houses burned, the fields untended, the pens of animals empty, the people dead or, if alive, relocated in "model villages," traumatized, hushed, beaten into submission and silence. There is much that cannot be known.

What can be known is that guerrillas passed through Jaime's village late one night and painted revolutionary slogans on the walls of the bridge, the church, the school and some houses. They melted back into the darkness before dawn. The following morning the villagers awoke and looked out in horror at the graffiti defacing their community.

Terrified that an army patrol might arrive and think their village a guerrilla stronghold, people set to work, daubing over propaganda with mud, paint and whitewash. Fear lurked for days, for by then it was well known what could happen to a community suspected by the army of co-operating with guerrillas. It mattered little to the army how co-operation was engendered, that it arose in many instances from the same fear of guerrillas that people had of government soldiers. Indians often could not distinguish which side was which. Whether voluntary or coerced, sym-

pathy for the guerrilla cause, however the army chose to define it, was punishable in the most barbarous ways imaginable.

Some villagers feared that perhaps the guerrillas would return first and, seeing their slogans erased, accuse people of casting their lot with the army, of being the lackeys of counter-revolution. This was eventually deemed the lesser risk, for although the guerrillas were known to assassinate collaborators or undesirables — a woman who ran a bar in the village had been killed after she ignored warnings to stop selling liquor — never did they resort to indiscriminate slaughter or full-scale massacre.

The army did not itself arrive in the village, but an order from the regional commander did. This order called for all able-bodied men between 16 and 60 to form a civil defence patrol which would act, under army supervision, as a screened buffer between soldiers fighting for the state and guerrillas fighting to overthrow it.

Although civil defence patrols originated with the counterinsurgency unleashed by former president Lucas García, it was under Ríos Montt that they were most actively and successfully promoted. They are still in existence in parts of the highlands today, allegedly functioning as a means of community self-protection. Their existence is a tangible reminder not only that the threat of insurgency continues to be taken seriously, as it should, but that it is really the army, not civilian President Vinicio Cerezo, that exercises meaning-

ful political power in Guatemala.

Most Indian men resent having to avail themselves, once or twice a week, for civil defence duty. Besides forcing them to align with, and possibly even fight alongside, the national armed forces, patrol service disrupts normal working routines. It takes people away from their fields. It makes it difficult to plan projects or lengthens their time of completion. It retards mobility. It especially creates problems when a patrol member has to be absent from his resident community, in which case permission must be solicited, a travel permit obtained, a suitable replacement found, persuaded and paid to act as a substitute.

Even before he reached minimum age, Jaime was pressed into service in the local civil defence patrol. For two weeks he served as an emergency recruit, standing guard during six 24-hour shifts while regular patrol members went off with the army on a distant counter-offensive against the guerrillas. Not to have served, to have run away as some village youths had done, was to be considered subversive.

It was a scary experience. Given antiquated guns but no instructions on how to use them, one under-age patrol member shot himself accidentally in the foot. Most frightening of all was when Jaime had to leave the checkpoint at the entrance to the village and comb the surrounding hills in search of guerrillas. He had heard about exchanges of fire between guerrillas and civil defence patrols in which the latter, poorly trained and ill-equipped, had been wiped out. Although no fatal encounter occurred, Jaime began to worry that, inevitably, one day he would qualify automatically for regular duty in the civil defence patrol. After that loomed conscription, forced membership in an army, which in his words, "would teach me to hate, teach me to kill." He was frightened and confused, filled with fear.

His fear turned to panic in May 1983 when, in a town called Chiquimullá, he was apprehended by the army, thrown in jail and interrogated. What was he doing so far from his village? Why wasn't he there serving in the civil defence patrol? Where were his papers?

Jaime had gone to Chiquimullá to work, to sell ice cream at the annual fair. With earnings and some help from his mother, he had purchased a small ice cream maker, transported it by bus from Soloma to Chiquimullá, found a local supply of ingredients and set up shop. The days before the army picked him up saw him sell out completely. Business was terrific. He smiles as he remembers, then turns quiet and forlorn.

Luckily for Jaime, he carried with him a pass signed by the commissioner in charge of the civil defence patrol, which authorized him to be absent from the village for up to 40 days. Being shown this pass convinced the officers who questioned him that he was not evading service in the civil defence patrol, nor engaged in subversive activities in Chiquimullá. He was later released, unharmed but shaken by the experience.

Just awful, *muy terrible*, is how he describes his time in custody, locked up overnight with about 200 others in a compound that had no bunks or toilets, only enough room to stand upright, waiting for daybreak.

If fear had turned to panic, panic

'The Rio Grande is a scar that separates not just Mexico from the United States, but the United States from all of Latin America. It is a scar that still bleeds, and the blood runs north'

triggered resolve, resolve to put himself forever beyond the clutches of the army. What Jaime decided, at an age perhaps shy of consent but certainly not courage, meant leaving things behind. An ice cream maker. A mother and a sister. A land, a people, a culture. A life in a place where terror has always suffused beauty. He would flee Guatemala altogether, escape to where abusive military authority could neither reach nor penetrate, first to Mexico and then to the United States.

Jaime moved quickly. From Chiquimullá he travelled back to Huehuetenango. There was no time, in the hot rush of decision, to return to his village and say goodbye. His mother and sister, furthermore, might persuade him to stay, even though they knew of the inevitability of some kind of military service and Jaime's fears of such involvement if he stayed.

In Huehuetenango he applied for papers that would enable him to enter Mexico, legally, for a short while. These he obtained with no difficulty, although he did have to lie about why he wanted to leave Guatemala: he said he wanted to visit a friend in Chiapas. From Huehuetenango he travelled by bus west to the border town of La Mesilla. The first rains had already fallen on the Cuchumatanes, which towered corn-green and forested on both sides of the Río Segua. He crossed into Mexico without incident, turning his back on the past,

looking ahead to the future.

El Norte

Borders are not just lines drawn on a map for administrative convenience. They are demarcations of mental as much as physical space, states of mind, not mere indicators of political sovereignty. A border is something we carry within, so the territories that lie on either side are in part our own creation.

Jaime was headed towards the most real and the most imaginary border in existence, the border between Mexico and the United States. Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes considers the line that follows the Río Grande less a border than a scar, a scar that divides the rich from the poor, the strong from the weak, those whom history has blessed from those whom history has damned. The scar separates not just Mexico from the United States, says Fuentes, but the United States from all of Latin America. It is a scar that still bleeds, and the blood runs north.

Like many people from Latin America, Jaime first formed an image of the United States from hearsay. "They told me in Huehuetenango it was a free place, a place where there was no war, a place where you can work and study in peace." His perceptions were reinforced by a group of fellow Kanjobal he met in Villahermosa, Mexico, one of whom (Tomás) had actually been to the United

States. Like Jaime, these folk had fled their native community, San Miguel Acatán, to escape counterinsurgency violence.

Jaime met them shortly after arriving in Villahermosa from Chiapas. He benefited considerably from their fellowship and counsel. He found work as a gardener and for two months planted flowers in parks, plazas and other public places. Once he helped design the display for a floral clock. Staying in Villahermosa, however, was risky. If apprehended by the Mexican authorities, Jaime reckoned, he would most likely be relieved of his savings and shipped off to one of the refugee camps that had sprung up in Chiapas close to the Guatemalan border. He and his friends wanted to be much farther north, so they journeyed all the way to Reynoso. There they made plans to swim across the Río Grande into the United States, where a new life beckoned.

All went well. Jaime is short in stature, but the river was low enough that he could wade across, balancing his clothes in a plastic bag on his head. No border patrol lurked or appeared on the other side. He walked with two of his friends from early morning until about three in the afternoon, when they arrived at a country store. There they pooled money and called for a taxi, which drove them to McAllen, Texas. Not yet 14, Jaime had made it to *El Norte* (The North).

His good luck continued. Tomás, who had crossed the border several times before, had good contacts and knew his way around. First, a place to stay, then a job to help pay the rent. For six weeks Jaime worked on a farm between McAllen and Edinburg. He fed chickens some of the time, fed fighting cocks the rest. Then his luck ran out.

It happened at a store in Edinburg.



Jaime had entered to buy some bread and milk. When he left, officers from the United States border patrol were in the street outside. They questioned him politely, but forcibly. Unable to produce papers, Jaime told them he was Mexican. The officers then escorted him by car to the border and watched as he walked across the bridge into Mexico.

Deportation was only a momentary setback, for it was clear to Jaime that what he had done once he could easily do again. Next morning, near Hidalgo, he waded back into the Rio Grande and crossed over into Texas. His second stint in El Norte, where he watered orange groves near Edinburg, lasted three weeks before la migra, United States Immigration Services, caught up with him. Again Jaime declared he was Mexican. Again he was delivered back to Reynoso. This time, however, he stayed longer, rethinking his situation. The trick, it appeared, was not just to cross the border but to get far enough inland to a bigger place than either McAllen or Edinburg, a place where the work of la migra was less efficient. He looked at a map and opted for Houston.

For the third and last time the waters of the Rio Grande came up only to his chest. He dried off in Texas and made his way to the Greyhound station in Edinburg. There he caught a bus and sped up Highway 281. He got about 70 miles inland to Falfurrias, where a border patrol flagged down the bus for a routine check. An officer approached Jaime and asked him his nationality. This time he told the truth: Guatemalan, not Mexican. The officer did not believe him. Jaime was ordered to get off the bus and get in the waiting patrol car. He was taken to headquarters in Falfurrias where, when questioned, he repeated he was Guatemalan. His insistence was finally taken seriously. Instead of being accompanied back to the border, Jaime was drive to a detention camp for illegal aliens halfway between Brownsville and Harlingen, near a place called Los Fresnos.

For an entire month Jaime fretted in detention. During this time he was noticed by a visitor to the Los Fresnos camp, his youthful Maya face standing out among the older, predominantly mestizo (mixed Spanish-Indian) looks of other Latin detainees. This visitor contacted a local church group that had recently decided to challenge United States immigration law by offering sanctuary to individuals and families, especially those from Central America, who had abandoned their strife-torn homelands only to be denied refugee status in the United States.

Through the mediation of the sanctuary movement, Jaime was released from detention, a \$1,200 bond being posted with U.S. Immigration Services to guarantee future knowledge of his whereabouts. He was taken to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in December 1983 and placed in the care of a Quaker family who welcomed him as one of their own.

Jaime lived with this family for 3½ years. With their guidance and support he began the laborious task of adjusting to life in El Norte. Different sights, different sounds. Different wants, different needs. A different sense of time, a different sense of place. Different premises to wake up to in the morning, different expectations to go to bed with at night. A different set of rules with which to confront myriad different situations in the



course of a day. It was all, he says, just so different, especially the language. Learning English was not easy, but immersion at home and in school after only a short while produced encouraging results. Today, Jaime's spoken English is clear, softly voiced and less noticeably accented than that of most Latin American immigrants.

Two options lay before him concerning how to go about securing the legal right to remain in the United States. The first was to apply for status as a resident alien, a costly, protracted and unsettling procedure, one that might not produce the desired outcome. The second was to be adopted officially as a member of the family he lived with in Baton Rouge. Of the two options, the second carried with it the best chance of success, but it necessitated formal severance from his natural mother and acknowledgement of such on her part as well as his.

Although the paperwork for option two was begun, Jaime found himself unable to follow it through to completion. It represented an emotional rubicon his heart was unable to cross, a river far deeper and wider than the Rio Grande. Moreover, he worried that being adopted would get his mother into difficulties, for word had reached him that she had been questioned about his absence from the village.

As the dilemma grew, another option presented itself. A church organization in Georgia called Jubilee Partners found

out about Jaime's case and suggested that permission to enter and reside in Canada might be more readily attained than applying for resident alien status in the United States. Jubilee Partners contacted a refugee support group in Ontario and informed its members of the particulars of Jaime's situation. Despite recent changes to Canadian immigration law, an application to allow Jaime to come to Canada as a landed immigrant was processed favorably in six months. Jaime took leave of the Quaker family. He did not want to part, but neither did he wish to squander an opportunity to enter another country on a firm legal footing. On June 15, 1987, the plane he boarded in Baton Rouge touched down in Toronto. Jaime's life as a Kanjobal Canadian had begun.

His primary sponsor, an architect by profession, was at Pearson Airport to meet him. Jaime now lives with the architect and his family. Another sponsor, a woman restaurateur, found Jaime a summer job as a waiter. I introduced myself to him one afternoon as he laid down a basket of bread on the table I shared with a university associate who specializes in the geography of migration. It occurred to me as we spoke that I might try my own hand at writing a geography of migration, one that had Jaime as its principal focus of attention. It also seemed ironic, but not without meaning, that during one of the few summers I decided not to go to Guate-

mala, quite miraculously a wonderful piece of Guatemala came to me.

The garden where Jaime spent a good part of the summer telling me his story has taken on an autumnal air. Leaves have fallen, each one of them a word to be gathered or left to decay as I searched for a way to preserve an unfinished tale. What does winter hold for Jaime? In its icy grip will he yearn, like me, for the spring? A line from Eliot comes down with the wan October sun: "People change, and smile: but the agony abides."

Jaime has certainly changed, is still changing. When last we met his face lit up in a beautiful smile: the money sent to his mother had reached the village safely, and there was hope that arrangements could be made to have her undergo an eye operation she badly needs. His mind was at ease. He would be able to concentrate on his school work. The agony of Guatemala, however, eternally abides, if not for Jaime or his mother, then for other Kanjobal, other Maya, other people less fortunate than ourselves, to whom what little we could extend might also make a difference. □

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