

Hospital Clown Newsletter

A Publication for Clowns in Community and World Service

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For the 2003 AATH Conference in Chicago, I wrote the following presentation; however, I think it is more appropriate for this newsletter. I receive email every day from clowns traveling all over the world sharing their big hearts and big shoes!

– Shobi Dobi, Editor

Over Here and Over There! Send the word to be aware! For the Clowns are Coming, the Clowns are Coming . . .

The world is losing its sense of humor
and a mighty army of clowns is forming,
Bearing their weapons of silly stethoscopes,
bubbles, balloons and nonsense.

What are they doing on the battle fields,
in the hospitals, in remote villages of the world?

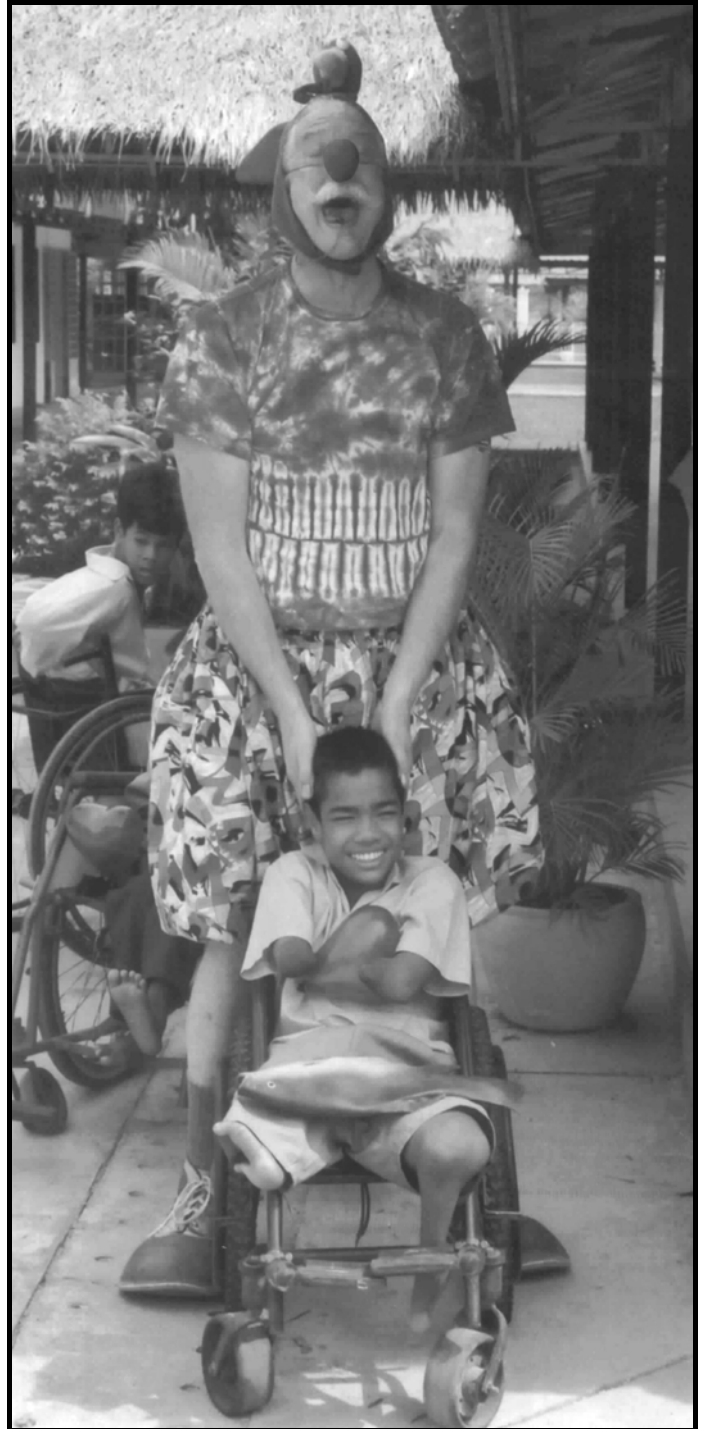
All around the world clowns are emerging
to serve the wounded human spirit.

By some estimates there are 25,000 clowns in the USA alone! So where is this mighty army of clowns? Organizing clowns is like herding cats. Don't try to get us to line up in a single line to be counted. Our very existence depends on our resourceful intuition and our tricksters' tales. We don't march in formation waving banners or shouting slogans in front of TV cameras.

We fly with the Red Cross to disaster areas, perform in remote villages in foreign countries, dance with the police, hold hands, listen to the tearful and pass out cheer. And in our spare time we go to the nursing homes, homeless shelters, relief centers, hospices, wherever there is a need for heart.

Exposed to all the *slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*, we may trip and fall, but we always pick ourselves up only to forget we have fallen at all. We live in the moment with our hearts open. Vulnerable to everything, yet we have found nothing can stop the power of love that comes through our silliness. Citizens, patients, children, soldiers all fall victim to our play.

We are only ordinary clowns playing in an extraordinary world full of the human spirit. We see the spirit everywhere, grab onto it, and make it dance with us. We can be gentle or bold. We slide as a chameleon into a situation and bring our light and hope. Sometimes there is too much grief to play, so we hug and hold and cry. There is so much to do and so many to visit. A big job, you say? That is why we wear such big shoes, we say!



Patch Adams continues to make it happen. Above in Cambodia “. . . one armless and legless boy in a rapture of silliness with Patch.”

(Continued on Page 3)

Clowning in Cambodia

If you are unwilling to see and hear the realities of the cruelties that exist in our world, you may find this article disturbing. It will make you feel and it will definitely make you think about being a humanitarian clown..

In our comfortable chairs, in our warm houses, with full bellies, we are often unwilling to see the suffering in our world. Unfortunately the eyes unwillingness to see this reality, are the same eyes unwilling to see the suffering in our own communities. As the world grows smaller through communication, we become acutely aware of the suffering of peoples in other countries on our little planet. Can we ignore them?

It is this awareness that motivates us as caring clowns. This is a willingness to live fully even if it stings our hearts. It is the ability to absorb suffering and remain centered in our love of humanity that is at times so difficult. Being in our clown characters we can respond with gentleness and with non judging eyes. We can see without blame, and play with the gray in between the right and wrong. But when we are sitting alone with returning memories of suffering, our tears may say "Was I enough?"

As hospital clowns we witness pain and suffering on every visit to a hospital, nursing home and hospice. These pages on Cambodia speak to realities beyond most of our experiences. Few of us can personally relate to what has happened to countries like Cambodia. Suffering inflicted by people in power on civilians is a reality that touched every clown on this trip.

On Page 19, I have added a page of "Unsung Heros We Encounter on Our Trips" Somehow their stories need to be seen somewhere. They'd receive us clowns with open arms.

The trip was sponsored by Patch Adams and Wildman Adams of the Gesundheit! Institute, who both did a huge amount of detail work to bring eleven clowns and 2 camera people to Cambodia for a week, and had the vision to make it happen. The Cambodian trip was also sponsored by the actress Angelina Jolie*, mother of an adopted Cambodian child, refugee camp visitor, and poster child for UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) She has written a book on her visits with refugees in Africa, Cambodia, Pakistan, and Ecuador, Notes From My Travels.



Top Row left to right: Mariana Ramos (Italy), Danny Kollaja (Texas), Patch Adams (Virginia), (Guide for the prison camp), Steve Phillips (Virginia), Kathy Blomquist (West Virginia), Sophea Seng (translator - Cambodia), Bowen White (Missouri), Bottom row left to right: Heidi Read (Idaho), Susan Parenti (Illinois), John Glick (Virginia), Ginevra Sanguigno (Italy).

Thirteen Clowns Standing in Stunned Silence **by John Glick "Jawknee"**

"They took us first to the killing fields. Thirteen clowns standing before a monument of thousands of human skulls, observed in stunned silence as a Cambodian man told the story of the maniacal slaughter of 2 million Cambodians from 1975 to 1979. He lifted a young woman's skull, showing us the hole left by the machete, which took her life. Then we sat weeping under the shade of the tree against which babies and children were murdered , their heads smashed against the trunk.

"Bones and teeth are still on the ground of the quiet countryside near Phnom Penh, Cambodia's capitol city. The river flows quietly nearby. Small children beg from beyond small chain link fences. "Hello, hello...dollar?" Children . . . the tremendous number of children. The Cambodians were at times a sea of faces, there were so many of them. A culture so ravaged, so impoverished, so degraded; yet, here is the vigorous response - all one can do when there is nothing else to do . . . make babies. A generation wiped out - a generation to take it's place. But so many problems: high infant and child mortality, no teachers or doctors - most were killed during the terror. Terror inflicted to achieve a "pure" society, untainted by intellectuals or progressive thought.

"Cambodia is still politically disabled. Most human services are rendered by non-governmental organizations (NGO) from many different nations and religions. A quiet Buddhist country is now deeply dependent on Muslim and Christian charity, on goodwill and money from private organizations, individuals and nations. Russia is helping rebuild the roads and Germany the ancient temples. Help from the US is mainly through organizations and missions with dedicated individuals like John and Kathy Tucker and David Harding - more on them later.

"Our week-long clown mission took us to several projects, schools, hospitals, and orphanages in Cambodia. Rachel Snyder and Paul Burton, who live in Phnom Penh and handled the logistics and contacts for us, organized our tour. Also Sonny Choum and Sophea Seng were our Cambodian guides and interpreters. We learned much through their stories and their willingness to connect us with the

people of Cambodia in our play and our conversations. From them we learned there is no clowning tradition as such in Cambodia but the role of the fool is accepted and valued. We also learned to eat spiders, but more on that later.



Steve Phillips holds a child at Mary Knoll Group Home

“From the killing fields and the terror prison in Phnom Penh, we took a deep collective breath and were taken to Mary Knoll Group Homes, the AIDS baby orphanage, a project begun by John and Kathy Tucker (See *Heros* on page 13). They witnessed a baby dying on the street in Phnom Penh several years ago, and immediately responded by a commitment to never letting this happen again. Now they have over 60 babies and young children.

“We played, danced, fed babies, and had fun. So close after the killing fields, it was strange. We were privileged and awed to care for and hold in our arms the fragile, ailing future of this culture. As John and Kathy told us, Cambodia's cultural instability makes it vulnerable to exploitation by among many other things, the international sex trade, where the young women and children are infected with AIDS.

“Kathy has begun a project, "Patches of Hope" where women with AIDS are taught how to make quilts [See *Heros* on Page 13] We visited their quilt studio in a small storefront on a busy city street. The women, a group of 15-20 tiny, bubbly, young women in sarongs, were delighted by the clowns, especially Steve, our giant 350 lb plus clown, who they each wanted to touch, laughing "Yes he's REAL!!" We were each given a quilt.

Friends, an NGO (non government organization), was a large school for street children in Phnom Penh, involving hundreds of kids from preschool to college age, teaching ABC's to hairstyling, sewing, and mechanics. They even had a restaurant, which trains students in the entire restaurant business.

“David Harding, Director of Friends [another “hero” on page 13], had dyed his hair red for the occasion of our arrival. We played, danced, visited, got our hair cut, ate, chased and performed for most of a day. We were, by this time, stinky clowns as most of us had our luggage delayed until our third evening in Cambodia. But the children were eager to play, eager to learn. It is sad that most elementary school teachers have themselves not passed the 6th grade. 'Friends' people were all vibrant and passionate about their work. We had a great meal at their restaurant.

“Certain regions in southern Cambodia, near Viet Nam, have some of the most severe landmine problems in the world. Many farmers and children are killed or maimed from the residue of the Viet Nam war. The Kien Khleang Rehab Center treats most of those landmine injuries. We clowning at the bedsides. There was also a burn ward where a young boy with only three fingers played my accordion. Our magician clown, Lanky from Texas, did his show for a large group. The clowns ran a 60-yard dash race with a Cambodian amputee. He won.

“We visited a fabulous project begun by a group of French women serving the children of families subsisting on garbage dumps. In the shadow of a mountain of garbage, they bring food, clothing, showers, and a school to the poorest of the poor. We emptied from our bus into a mass of children ready to party. It was clown mayhem -- lovely children in the midst of squalor, pigs running free, the smell of garbage, the dirt poor hovels and the sweet, sweet faces of children smiling with readiness to play and dance. Bubbles, balloons, music, and laughter prevailed.”

[Pictured on right Danny “Lanky” Kollaja works his magic with the children *at the Dump*. Despite the heat, Danny retained his clown image minus a wig. He now has longer hair which is naturally red! You can see it in the group photo on the previous page.]

“A special needs children's school run by a small group of Marist Brothers, a Catholic organization, teaches 85 children with disabilities, and houses and feeds 60 of them. The spirit of this place was extraordinary. The children, all dressed in blue uniforms, had disabilities ranging from cerebral palsy to Down's to birth deformities to mental retardation. First we played outside. It was a "free for all" of goofiness and fun, including one armless and legless boy in a rapture of silliness with Patch.” (Pictured on the Front Page)



“After a meal together, we sat while the children all sang songs for us, finishing with a love song, " I feel it in my fingers, I feel it in my toes...." The brothers, very quiet and gentle in their bearing, taught the gospel of pure love. It was palpable and real. We wept, many of us, from the sheer joy these children generated and gave to us.



“There are thousands of motorbikes in Cambodia, as well as bicycles, carts, cars, trucks motorized rickshaws, and just about anything with wheels you can imagine. Many people are crammed onto one conveyance. We counted a family of six on one motorcycle! After our last clown gig in Phnom Penh we each of us climbed on motorcycles and took the clown tour through the business of Phnom Penh traffic, a clown parade drawing waves, stunned stares, smiles, and double takes from pedestrians, fellow cyclists, shop owners and policeman. Many a balloon was released that day into the gray cityscape.

“A daylong magical boat ride took us up the Tonle Sap river past temples, and countless fisherman, and houses, arriving at Siem Reap a city situated near the historic Angkor Wat Temple complex, a 900 year old World Heritage site, famous for it's sculptures, architecture and mystic trees. We saw houseboats and houses on stilts, some no bigger a than a big closet, housing the poorest people we had yet seen. Lots of TB and diseases from poor nutrition here: typhoid, malaria, and dengue fever. There was friendly madness of docking and wading through hawkers and gawkers to get to our bus. We visited a wonderful hospital here, served by volunteers from Australia and the US. Bedside clowning was with frail emaciated little ones, often on oxygen and IV's, in bed with mothers, siblings (and us).

“We drew a crowd of Cambodians on the street by the vendors selling from baskets tiny deep fried birds, caterpillars, grasshoppers and spiders -- BIG spiders, as big as your hand, with hairy legs. Many of us did fine with the grasshoppers - very crunchy. Sonny, our Cambodian guide, wolfed down a spider, which brought screams from clowns, and grins from vendors. Lanky nonchalantly ate one, admitted to a tiny wave of reverse peristalsis, but bravely finished, nibbling delicately the legs.

“We visited other places as well as these in Phnom Penh and Siem Reap - schools mostly attempting to meet the needs of the huge numbers of children here. We all felt changed by our experiences in Cambodia. It felt like a huge privilege. Recognition of the deep human cost of mistakes in foreign policy by one-sided shortsighted leaders gave me a renewed commitment to working and playing more for justice and healing. It also gave me a desire to go back to Cambodia, to have more time with these amazing people, people who have so deeply suffered, yet still can open their hearts to laughter and play. And also to support the work of the wonderful volunteers who are doing the real work of healing a shattered culture.”

– John Glick



Experiences of Cambodia by Susan Parenti

Susan, pictured above playing the accordion, is a composer and teacher at the School for Designing a Society in Urbana, IL (www.designingsociety.com).

“It took us 36 hours to get to Cambodia from Washington DC. I grumbled: ‘Why do we have to go so far to clown around with suffering people?’ It seems like US is full of them. Why can’t we stay right here?

“Who are we? We are humanitarian clowns. We’re clowns who visit places of suffering, who stay in our clown clothes the whole visit and consider all moments perfect settings for creating good will through silliness and music. So an airport is as good a place to clown as a hospital. This clowning aims to take liberties with power, so even the politicians, police and soldiers fall prey to our silliness. In this way it is possible for clowns to become political agents -- ambassadors of good will and humor.

“When we finally arrived in Phnom Penh, the country stole my eyes -- the streets wildly busy with motorbike travel with sometimes 6 people on a bike. The people seeming small to me, slender, graceful, and not pugnacious. How could one out of four people have been killed in this country, mostly by Cambodians themselves – the Khmer Rouge soldiers, between 1970 and 1995?

But Who Will Solve this Riddle, Who?

“The statistics I was told: In 2003, 60% of the population is under age 24; and of that, 50% are under age 15, a consequence of the terrible last 30 years of the country. 1 out of 4 people were killed in the time period between 1970-1995, partly as a consequence of US foreign policies and partly as a consequence of the dictator Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge. 24% of the women can read; 36 % of the men can read. There is 80% poverty, with people living on 50cents a day. Rachel Snyder, our guide, said: Women and children have no rights. There is law, but no justice. Cambodia is riddled with corruption. But who will solve this riddle, who?”

“Beggars all over, some sliding on the ground without legs. The voices of beggars, of shop women in the market, trying to get your attention. Your 50 cents is their food, their survival.

What if you were too shy to beg? To starve from shyness.

“On the first morning of our visit, we visited the actual 'killing fields' and the prison camp where thousands of Cambodians were murdered. A way to start being in Cambodia that would help us understand. I was grateful to our guides Rachel and Paul for starting the trip this way---showing us the traces of suffering created by power and violence. Though visiting hospitals also puts us into contexts of suffering, illness is quite another thing from avoidable humanly-caused misery, which is what we witnessed. A detail I can't forget: we were shown a tree against which babies were killed---in order to save precious bullets, the Khmer Rouge battered the babies against the tree until they died – *In order to save precious bullets!*



Kathy Blomquist with a baby at the AIDS orphanage

Drugs, Despair, and Poverty Working More Quickly than Education

“We visited children with AIDS (Cambodia has the highest rate of AIDS in Asia) and people who had been hurt by land mines, children who had birth defects (some as a result of the chemicals used in warfare). We clowned in a huge school (formerly a factory) for street children where they learn trades. The organization that runs this school has

three parts: one part is out in the streets trying to help the children, the second part is the running of the school, and third part is follow-up work to keep the children in jobs and not going back into the streets. they said this was the hardest part---drugs, despair, and poverty are working more quickly than education). We ate in a fine restaurant, run by street kids.

“The strangest sight, the one my eyes won't easily digest, is our clowning at a school, which is in the City dump, for the children who work in the City Dump. As a huge number of kids spend their lives in the City dump looking through the huge 30 feet high mounds of garbage for salvageable things to sell, this French agency set up a school right there, in the dump!



Patch playing in a school court yard

Who Is to Take Care of Them?

“When our bus of clowns and musicians arrived, hundreds of smudged and semi-naked kids ran towards us. Normally I bend down, according to my chest, to meet the eye level of my little listeners. In this place, I was so overwhelmed by anger (hiding inside was grief), I couldn't meet the eyes of the children. I couldn't look at any one of them directly. In the background were the smoking mountains of garbage, with little figures - the kids - on them. Who is to take care of them?”

“Eating a nice dinner in a hotel, and the dinner's cost is \$2.00. What is this? My brain kept thinking, What? What? What?”

“It's tricky, this 'humanitarian clowning'---my impression is so strong when I'm there, the desire to help so strong, and then I come home, and Christmas in this country was brewing, and there I am. The TV and newspapers smirk at me in their slick grind of producing one more day of expensively calculated ignorance”

– Susan Parenti

*The fool performs a sacred role in the community -
the mirror to the people of their ethic and possibilities,
a teller of truth standing naked in the marketplace
and confronting the powerful with playful disorder,
a beggar, a story teller, a magician.*

*Few things are more awesome
than a clown let loose in the streets.*

– Ken Feit

~ Heros Met along the Way ~

John and Kathy Tucker and The Little Sprouts



John and Kathy live in Phnom Penh, Cambodia where they started the *Little Sprouts* program to save these children from a life without family or hope. These children are faced with a future where mothers and fathers have died of AIDS. Many are left in the care of relatives who are desperately poor. These families have no resources to care for ailing children. The group home does have some orphans, but their goal is to "revive" and reintegrate the children back into the family. Besides the 54 kids they have there, they work with over 1,000 additional in their homes.

The group home can house, feed, and provide all AIDS medication to an individual for just \$500 a year. That amount includes their AIDS medicine. If they get the child early enough in their diagnosis, they can usually save or at least add five years to the child's life. When the children become very ill, they go to a new 25-bed hospice where they are sheltered and loved.



The children of Little Sprouts are ill, but they ...are children who have found love, care, and compassion. They have parties with cake! And twice a day, they are given the medicines that help them fight this disease.

. . . . and Patches of Hope

The HIV disease prevents people from working because of the stigma attached to the illness. People are fired from their jobs and in some cases thrown out of their homes when it is discovered that someone has AIDS. This program give them hope.

Kathy Tucker who "had never made a quilt and who was not that fond of any form of sewing" took over this quilt-making project from Dr. Margraute Junker and Fr. Jim Noonan

Many of Phnom Penh's factories produce garments for some of the major clothing lines in the US. These factories are donating scrap material. Project men and women work at home, cutting material and bring the goods in on Fridays. This small salary helps them with living expenses And, just as importantly, it offers these people the dignity of employment.

Twenty-eight women and men are now employed at Patches in the sewing center using newly acquired sewing machines. The quilt-makers earn about \$58 a month, along with a lunch money allowance. This is a higher salary than the \$45 a month typically earned by workers in garment factories.

If you are interested in buying one of these beautiful quilts, a teen group in the USA is selling them. Contact: Terra at "Helping Hand Quilts" (540) 421-6422. See them at: www.parish-without-borders.net/mmm/cambodia/ministries/3m-kh-soh-phto-quilt.htm

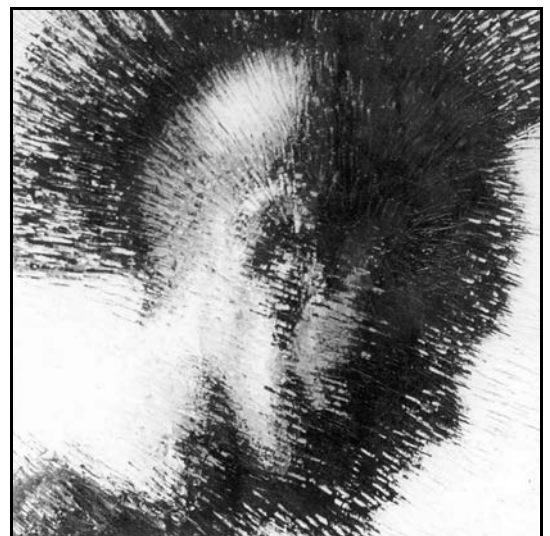
These programs work with Maryknoll Seedlings of Hope, a project that assists adults living with HIV/AIDS and continues to be a referral source for children in need. Perhaps its greatest contribution is that it cares for people who have nowhere else to turn – some of the poorest of the poor. MMAF at P.O. Box 307 Maryknoll, NY 10545-0307

David Harding, Director of Friends School for Street Children in Phnom Penh is from the UK (born in Australia), specializes in the field of drug abuse.

"Ten years ago substance use in Cambodia was restricted to the very limited use of black water opium, or 'the old man's drug,' but now the country faces a pandemic. In a country deprived of even the most basic medical care for an extended period, the use of drugs for medicinal purposes has become very ambiguous, for example amphetamine type substances are known as 'yamma', a word emphasizing strength, and users often praise its effects of well being and other positive aspects. But the problem has risen so fast that people do not understand the dangers, and for young people living on the street substances such as glue, amphetamines, and now heroin offers a cheap and available alternative to the pressure of their lives, not realizing or caring about the consequences."

David began painting when he arrived in Cambodia in 2000. He paints portraits in oils with a knife-edge and translates his experiences of Cambodia into powerful images of the human experience.

<http://www.streetfriends.org/index.html>



*David Harding's "Shine on Wattie Buchan"
Oil on canvas 90x90cm*

Barbara Black



by Linda "Cheeky" Simon, Cambridge, MA

On the Jamaica Goodwill Clown trip, I was most impressed with the *Windsor Girls Home* (WGH) and its noble Director, Barbara Black (pictured center above). This home and school, reached by a narrow, winding mountain road, hugs a hillside above St. Ann's Bay in northern Jamaica. Erosion and cracks in the foundation are recurrent concerns. Because our bus was late picking us up, we had the chance to talk at length with this dedicated lady who has helmed the WGH for twenty years, and is clearly trusted and beloved by her teenage charges. Some of them, she confides, have had a "very rough time."

Currently housing 46 girls between the ages of 12 and 18, the WGH is one of the most important and worthy endeavors I have ever seen. The home provides a safe haven and education for girls who have been abandoned, and/or physically or sexually abused, and/or involved with drugs, and who are in need of care and protection. Through love and training, the staff labors valiantly to assure that the girls will never be so vulnerable again.

WGH's security guards have multiple, compelling reasons to be vigilant. As in other poor countries or very poor areas of the U.S., destitute and unemployed people gravitate to the edges of resorts or other prosperous-looking places where they set up shacks and try to live off those establishments. Although the Windsor Girls Home is modest, there are squatters just outside its gates nonetheless. Occasionally, some individuals in squatter communities pose threats: some of the men have tried to entice the WGH teens to come outside the gate, and have even cut holes in the fence.

The state pays a little for the girls' support, but there are never enough resources, and the staff must fundraise to stay afloat and to get the academically inclined ones into good high schools that require tuition. The developmentally delayed girls are particularly worrisome, since the government stops funding them at age 18 even if they need more help and schooling.

This group is "in need" and more immediately they need a washing machine. If anyone knows or has a contact with Mattag, wishes to make a donation or knows of any other means of getting them a washing machine For donations, checks can be made out to "Linda Simon" with WGH or Windsor Girls Home in the memo line. Send to P.O. Box 381843, Cambridge, MA 02238-1843. Or contact by email lsimon2004@yahoo.com