



Zoe Kopp
Brattleboro, Vermont

I first met “Doc” in 1985 in New Orleans at Tulane University, when he had to leave his beloved Guatemala due to death threats. At first glance I felt this man with a Santa Claus twinkle in his eyes was a saint and a hero. Doc is one of the few mortals among us, who has a vision that inspires others. The only other time I had felt this was when I met the Nobel Prize winning physicist Paul Dirac. I had been a member of the women’s self-help movement in the 1970s in the US and started the first holistic clinic for women in Tallahassee, FL in 1981 and was grateful to learn the Doc was bringing this important concept of self and community care not only to the Guatemalan highlands where he worked but to the rest of the world from being a model program for community health care for the World Health Organization.

My first day at the Behrhorst Clinic, my nose was greeted by aromas of tortillas and frijoles. It was 1986. the hospital was unique in Guatemala in allowing the families of Mayan patients to stay with their family member during their hospitalization and also to cook for them. The staff were not all clad in white; instead they were dressed in everyday clothes, many of the female staff wore the brilliant rainbow of colored huipules (blouses) typical of their village. Since then, in my role as an evaluator I have visited hospitals on six continents but have never experienced the home like ambience of the Behrhorst Clinic in Chimaltenango. There is no reason for hospitals and clinics to be the cold, intimidating place they are. Doc and the Mayan staff were able to create a different more positive healing environment.

I saw the real power of this ‘bring the healthcare to the people’ model when accompanying the Mayan health workers in their remote villages. There in the villages the lay healthcare workers helped prevent illnesses and death through clean water, sanitation and education. They also provided care and medicine that would not have been possible without ill individuals having to take a costly, long, uncomfortable bus ride. Most important, unlike medical professionals who tend to be protective of their knowledge, these lay health workers shared their knowledge freely

with the individuals in their village. This knowledge not only improved an individual's health, but their self-esteem as well and empowered them in other ways.

Doc taught me that vision needs to be accompanied by hard work, patience, persistence, love and fun. Doc drove me up to Chimaltenango once in 1986. He had just returned to Guatemala after having been advised to leave for his safety in 1985. We were driving on a windy road up a lovely valley on a perfect spring like day. Doc then pointed to a place beside the road that was a mass grave of those who were victims of 'la violencia'. He was clearly saddened deeply by this memory and by the great loss of the clinic's health workers; yet here he was back in Guatemala his chosen home starting again to rebuild this community based model of healthcare all the more needed because of what the Mayans had been through the last few years. Few have that strength.

Meeting Doc, the Mayan staff at the clinic and the people of the Mayan highlands motivated me to focus my career on improving individual's access to healthcare and increasing each individual's understanding of how to responsibly care for their own health. This has been my guiding principle in my work for at: International Planned Parenthood Federation, CARE International, Project HOPE and Pfizer. Twenty years after meeting Doc I am now serving on the Board of Behrhorst Partners for Development and have started a non-profit GRACE Cares (<http://www.gracecaresvt.com>) that provides funds and technical assistance to community self-help projects around the world.

Meeting Doc and working with the BPD staff and communities has renewed my conviction to strive for a healthcare system that empowers and educates individuals to practice health prevention, strive for wellness and joy, and be knowledgeable partners in healthcare decisions that affect them and their families. I promise to continue to work for a world where individuals do not have to feel embarrassment or shame for who they are or for any medical condition they have. I will continue to work for radical change to health care that is wellness-focused and centered on individuals, not patients.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." -Margaret Mead

The individual and small group that started the Behrhorst Clinic has grown to a large worldwide group that continues to bring Doc's vision of integrated, community healthcare that helps empower individuals. Each of us who has been touched by our involvement with BPD, now have gained years of additional experiences and our visions of how to best make a contribution to bettering the world has evolved and diversified as it should. Now we can look not only at our memories of Doc, the Mayans and tortured but magical Guatemala for strength but also to the thousands of us in this ever growing Behrhorst family for inspiration.