

4-28-88 G-T *celestial aliens*

Salvadorans Find a Community of Refuge

TO many in Santa Cruz, the country El Salvador evokes an image of violence, corruption and never-ending civil war. But for some it is home, a place they would like to return to someday.

There are an estimated 250 El Salvadoran refugees in Santa Cruz, according to Raoul Hernandez of the Santana Chirino Amaya Central American Refugee Committee.

Hernandez is not his real name — he asked that a pseudonym be used for fear of persecution by the Salvadoran authorities if deported back to El Salvador. Hernandez also spoke through a translator, as did Salvadoran refugees interviewed in this story.

Hernandez, 28, is a refugee himself. He fled El Salvador in 1985, be-

cause of "terror," he explains. A few years earlier, he was a member of a law students' organization that was branded as subversive by the Salvadoran authorities. Shortly thereafter, his wife, a student in dentistry, was killed by death squads.

Now, as part of "Santana," as the volunteer staff refers to it, Hernandez "works to find solutions to the most immediate problems of the refugee community in Santa Cruz — those necessities being medical care, legal assistance, housing, work and education."

Hernandez said that although many of the Salvadorans in Santa Cruz are "technically skilled" people such as secretaries, carpenters and mechanics, they are often forced into "the



Maria: "We were persecuted."

worst kind of work." Because of the language barrier and their illegal status, many Salvadorans wind up as dishwashers and domestics.

To survive, the Salvadoran community operates as somewhat of an extended network of people helping each other. But even the extent of that help is limited "because we earn minimum wage but pay for rundown apartments (with) very expensive rents. But even so, the Salvadorans try to support the people who have recently arrived, and we have learned to share our own property," said Hernandez.

Despite the constant threat of deportation hanging over his head, Hernandez persists with his work. *(continued on page 58)*

Refugees

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For him, there is no other choice. "We're not afraid because it has to be done. We believe no human being is illegal," he said.

Last week, two Salvadorans were picked up along with other allegedly illegal Mexicans at the Boardwalk. The men, Juan Jose Hernandez Reyes and Juan Francisco Bonilla Aguilar, were released Monday on \$3,500 bail each. An immigration judge will hear their case on May 26.

Hernandez and Bonilla have an attorney to represent them, because the Santana Chirino Amaya Refugee Committee was able to step in and contact a lawyer willing to take the case. Not all are so fortunate. Without legal aid, the men would have been quickly deported back to El Salvador.

Currently, 300 to 400 Salvadorans are deported each month by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The United States grants only 1 to 3 percent of all requests for political asylum from Salvadoran immigrants, contending they are economic, rather than political refugees.

However, the government accepts 30 percent of all other immigrants' applications, with an even higher percentage of immigrants from socialist countries. Hernandez feels political reasoning decides who can stay and who must leave.

"The Vietnamese are given status as refugees because they are coming from a socialist government, as well as Poland and the Soviet Union. It is because the United States maintains that in those countries, there are violations of civil and human rights," said Hernandez.

"They don't give (Salvadorans) that status because as soon as they were to give us that recognition as political refugees, it would delegitimize the government of Duarte. (The United States government) knows that in El Salvador there is corruption and excessive human rights violations."

El Salvador is the largest recipient of U.S. aid in Central America, receiving \$1.5 million a day. Inflation still hovers around 30 percent and unemployment at 50 percent. Almost 70,000 civilians have died in the 8-

year-old civil war, and another 6,000-7,000 more civilians have "disappeared."

Two Salvadoran refugees who spoke to GOOD TIMES said it was the increasingly violent atmosphere which forced them to leave their country.

Rosario, 29, left El Salvador in 1981. She said all Salvadorans who flee to the United States or other countries do so for like reasons.

"Our history as Salvadorans is very similar because of the situation of war. The father of my son was 'disappeared' and I have a sister who was killed. I have cousins and aunts and uncles who have been killed or disappeared," Rosario said.

"It's a very painful situation and that's the main reason why we left. If we hadn't left at that time we would have been one of the disappeared or killed."

Maria, 59, left her country soon after the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in 1980 "because to work in the Christian-based communities was to be an enemy of the government," she said.

"Because we were working in the Christian-based communities, we were persecuted. In March (1980), during the time of the assassination of Archbishop Romero, we could handle the persecution ... but not living in our own houses. We would go around to different neighborhoods and rent houses," she said.

"The most terrifying things to see was the things that were happening in the neighborhoods. Near my house there was an assassination of 43 people at one time while they were having a Bible study time. After that massacre they poured gasoline all over the house and burned it down. That's one case of the thousands of assassinations."

Maria is still very involved with the church since coming to Santa Cruz, and the Santana Chirino Amaya Refugee Committee is an active participant in this area's sanctuary movement.

The sanctuary movement is based on biblical principles that the church has a moral obligation to help refugees of persecution. Hundreds of congregations across the country have declared themselves sanctuaries for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees, along with numerous cities and universities. Both the city of

Santa Cruz and UCSC are declared sanctuaries.

While both the Religious Society of Friends (the Quakers) and Temple Beth El are declared sanctuaries, no Christian denominations in Santa Cruz have declared themselves as such. Still, many congregations are active with the refugees and haven't felt the need to call themselves a sanctuary as they are already involved with the movement as a whole.

Father David Jones of Calvary Episcopal Church said church leaders "played back and forth with the idea" of becoming a sanctuary congregation, "but decided we weren't too sure how much that would benefit us given what we're already doing (with the refugees.)"

Currently, Jones holds ecumenical services and Bible studies with Salvadoran refugees, explaining it is the church's obligation to do so.

"In the Bible, (there is) the story of the good Samaritan, the man who looks after the person who's been injured on the side of the road. It's a biblical imperative of saying these people are here," said Jones.

Ned Van Valkenburg of the Santa Cruz Religious Society of Friends says he is prompted by a "human" rather than Christian responsibility to work with Central American refugees. He notes an "interesting and important" trend to the sanctuary movement as a whole.

"There's a shifting of the sanctuary movement from a North American charity movement to an empowerment movement for Central American refugees in terms of the involvement of a large number of the refugee community running and deciding what activities the organizations that contribute to sanctuary (will do)," said Van Valkenburg.

And while Hernandez seems confident that the growing sanctuary movement has "enough force to change the attitude" of the U.S. government toward Salvadoran refugees, he would rather see the war end and democracy restored in El Salvador.

"Here we have no future," said Hernandez. "Our children have no future. We know how to read and write Spanish. We don't have any major prospects in this country. We would like to return to El Salvador." •

—Rose Dean