

HEARSAY

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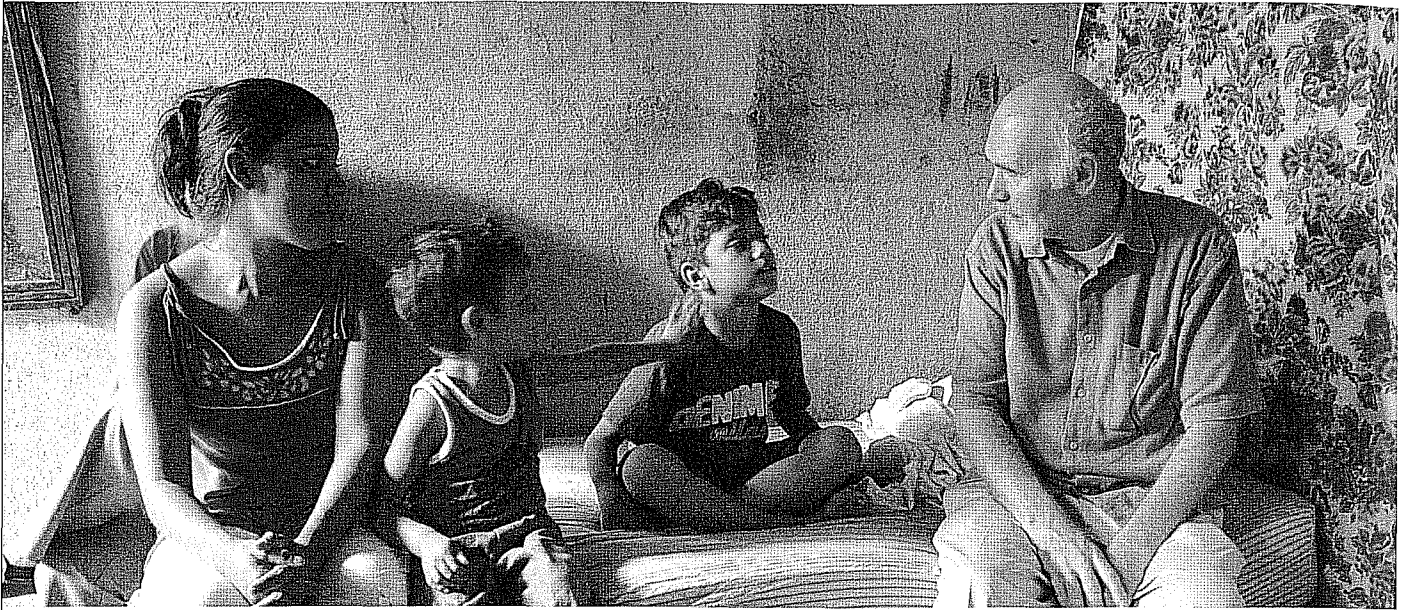
ED DUNSWORTH FINDS A
PATHWAY TO CHANGE
IN NICARAGUA

SPEAKER PETER MILLIKEN
SPEAKS OF "HIS DAY"
AT THE LAW SCHOOL

PAULA TAYLOR SCALES
KILIMANJARO FOR
YOUTH AND MENTAL
HEALTH

R. B. BENNETT

A "PROGRESSIVE" ALUMINUS
REMEMBERED ON
80TH ANNIVERSARY



Erick is a nine-year-old boy from a community of extreme poverty in Managua, Nicaragua. He attends school at the Loyola Institute, a private-run Jesuit school in the heart of Managua. Erick's mother, Rosario, beams with pride as she speaks of Erick's academic success in coming third in his class with an average of 95 per cent. She says it is a "miracle from God" that Erick has been given the opportunity to receive a top-quality education that has already made a profound change in his life.

Erick is but one of 52 children ranging in age from six to 16 years attending four different private schools in Managua. The story of how these children have been given a chance to reach their full potential goes back to the late 1990s when Edward Dunsworth ('75) took a two-week trip to Nicaragua that changed his life.

Ed Dunsworth's ('75) pathway to change

Ed Dunsworth is a native Nova Scotian who grew up in the affluent area of south-end Halifax. He attended St. Francis School, St. Patrick's High School and Dalhousie, from which he received a Bachelor of Commerce ('70), and an MBA and law degree in 1975. He married, had four children and enjoyed a successful law practice. For 13 years he was an instructor in the Faculty of Commerce at Saint Mary's University where he taught a course in business law. Moreover, Dunsworth gave generously of his time and talents to several local organizations and causes. For many years he served on the board of the Nova Scotia Division of the Canadian Cancer Society and was one of its major fundraisers.

A chance occurrence in the fall of 1996 was to change both Dunsworth's life and that of his family. A friend mentioned that he had recently been involved with Habitat for Humanity in Guatemala. Habitat is a non-government organization that assists in building affordable housing for the poor in over 100 countries. Dunsworth was inspired to investigate the Habitat program. For two weeks in February 1997 Dunsworth and a few other volunteers helped build brick and tin houses in a small village in northern Nicaragua. The experience compelled him to consider making a dramatic change in his life. He later recalled, "When you are in Nova Scotia you think you know poverty. You see it on TV or read about it. But until you actually come face to face with it, and live in a community where there's abject poverty, you really don't know what it is."

Upon his return to Halifax Dunsworth's wife, Barbara,



became acutely aware of her husband's desire to make a long-term commitment to improving the lives of the most disadvantaged. She agreed to join her husband in a three-year stint with Habitat. Dunsworth took a leave of absence from his law firm, Leahey Nearing, intending to return to Halifax in 2001. Three of their four children Sally (age 15), Edward (10) and Jacqueline (7) accompanied their parents. Following a training session at Habitat's headquarters in Americus, Georgia, the Dunsworths were assigned to head up Habitat's house building efforts in the small Latin American country of Belize. The family took up residence in Belize City. The move was particularly hard on 15-year-old Sally. In the family newsletter she wrote:

"Last year I hated Habitat. I knew it was an organization that built houses for the poor and other than that I didn't care. The only thing that mattered was that Habitat was ruining my life. I had to leave all my friends and move to a third-world country. What worse thing can happen to the life of a 15-year-old? I had no idea. I hated the fact that I had to

leave everything that was familiar to me, but what I really couldn't understand was why my parents wanted to sell their lovely home and belongings and move to a place I had barely heard of to help people they had never met."

Although Sally was to become attached to her new school, life and surroundings, the Dunsworths had real fears at the beginning that she might run away.

Life was certainly very different for the Dunsworths in Belize. Although they lived in a comfortable house in a good part of the city, a short distance away were blocks of shacks and deteriorating houses. The smell of sewage and rotting garbage was everywhere. People dug through their garbage looking for food.

Dunsworth remembers, however, the excitement of the ground breaking ceremony for the first two lots upon which they would be building. The first Habitat homeowners of Belize were single mothers with three children each. Ruby lived in a house that flooded when it rained, was overrun with rats, and had glass missing from most of the windows. Anna shared a

dilapidated old house with nine other people: her mother, two sisters and their children. During the dry season the children slept on the floor. When it rained, the house flooded and the children had to crowd into Anna's bed. Dunsworth notes that these women were dedicated mothers, determined to make a better life for their children. They had jobs, but would never make enough to qualify for any kind of housing loan.

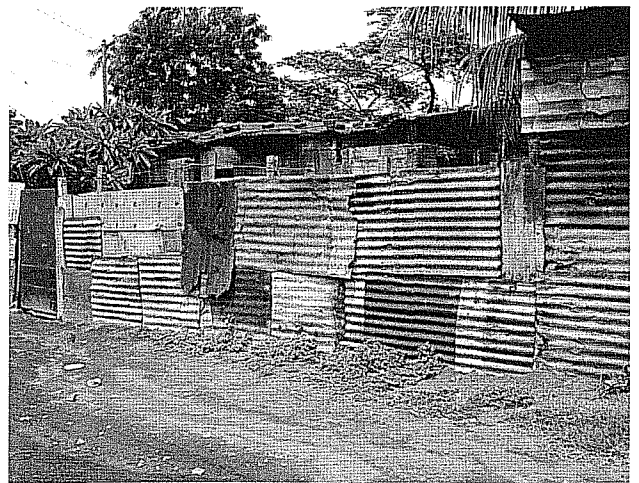
Dunsworth

also recalls the challenge of encouraging the local people to join with the Habitat workers in their building projects.

"Too often in developing countries there is a tendency for the people to stand back and let foreigners do all the work. It's not because the people are lazy or indifferent. More often it is because their input is not sought or encouraged. Our aim is to motivate as many people in the community as possible to become involved in the process."

The Dunsworths' intention to return to Halifax after three years with Habitat was not to be. Their work with the

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organization extended to Argentina and Chile, encompassing administration, recruitment, training, fund-raising and a myriad of other responsibilities instrumental to Habitat's growth in the Caribbean and Latin American regions. Dunsworth also served a seven-month stint on the island of Grenada with Habitat's Disaster Response Program in the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan.

Dunsworth's determination to improve the lives of the less fortunate was to shift emphasis in 2005. Friends had mentioned "Hand in Hand Ministries" (HHM), a charitable organization formed in 1999. Operating in Belize, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Appalachia, HHM attempts to make a difference by providing food, shelter, clothing, medicine and education to the poorest of the poor. The Dunsworths' Spanish skills were now good enough and with the experience gained with Habitat they felt prepared to take on a new commitment with HHM.

Dunsworth says, "While we attempt to meet people's immediate needs, we seek systemic change. We like to work at the grass roots level, asking community leaders what they need most, and then helping provide the tools and skills to lift themselves and their communities out of extreme poverty."

The Dunsworths began their work with HHM in 2005. He states that one of the features that distinguish the organization is that it works very hard to keep administrative and fundraising costs at a minimum. "Over the previous eight years we averaged spending 85 cents out of every dollar in our programs. While we may not be the only organization that operates at that level, it certainly ranks us ahead of most." Dunsworth notes that while HHM considers itself faith-based it welcomes all people of good will—believers and non-believers. "It has always been vitally important that people of different beliefs, races, and all of the other factors that divide us, work together for the common good."

Fundraising is an important part of HHM's efforts to carry out its programs, and its donors are seen as major players

in a community dedicated to making life better for the children and families it serves. HHM also offers people in Canada and the U.S. an opportunity for hands-on experiences through immersion trips to the places it serves. It is believed that these volunteers will return home with a better understanding of themselves, and a compassion and desire to continue their lives with a component that includes service to others.

It is five years since the Dunsworths joined HHM. Dunsworth is now director of operations for HHM in Nicaragua and Barbara is associate director. They are based in Managua, Nicaragua, the poorest country in Central and South America after Haiti. Dunsworth's responsibilities, *inter alia*, include overseeing the staff of nine full- and part-time employees, meeting on a monthly basis with the sponsored children's families in group meetings, meeting with each family individually after each report card, managing the small loans portfolio, hosting immersion groups from out-of-country and organizing and managing the in-country projects, acting as agent for the new Canadian charity "Pathway to Progress Nicaragua," which was set up to encourage Canadian donors to involve themselves in the Nicaragua mission of HHM, and raising awareness and resources in the U.S., Canada and Nicaragua.

However, one project that is especially close to Dunsworth's heart is "Pathway to Change." The Dunsworths were struck by how poor the education system was in Nicaragua for a majority of children. Four years ago they started a pilot project to try and address in a small way the education problems they saw among families of scarce resources. It began with three children, and there are currently 52 children enrolled in the "Pathway to Change" program.

"The children we sponsor range in age from six to 11 and are enrolled in private schools such as the Loyola Institute, the Nicaragua Christian Academy-Nejapa, the Central Baptist School and Mother of the Divine Pastor School, which normally are attended by only the children of the wealthy and middle classes," Dunsworth

says. "We cover their education costs, pay for their school books, uniforms, transportation, and feed about 40 per cent of the children by providing nutritious breakfasts every morning. If they are sick and local clinics can't assist, we attend to their medical needs. We try to provide anything that is needed to improve their educational potential."

In keeping with HHM's objectives, the commitment of parents is essential to the success of the Pathway to Change program. Program facilitators make weekly visits to the homes of the sponsored children to encourage parents to play a greater role in every aspect of the lives of their children. Dunsworth admits that the challenge is great and it takes time to implement change. He states, "There is still much to do, but as a result of the program, and the commitment of the families of the sponsored children, on average 50 per cent of our students attain an average of 90 per cent or better. The future of these young girls and boys would be uncertain at best were it not for the help of this program. Education is the most powerful weapon against poverty. Our goal is to enable many more Nicaraguan children to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity."

William ("Bill") Leahey ('79),

Dunsworth's former law partner, is one of the local supporters of the Pathway to Change program. In a recent conversation with *Hearsay* Leahey remarked, "It has been a privilege to be able to call Ed and Barb my friends," he says. "Their decision in 1997 to fundamentally change their lives took enormous courage possessed by very few people. It was clearly the right decision for them, their children and the many people who have benefited from their selfless devotion to improving the lives of others in a practical way. The Schulich School of Law, can be very proud of its association with two people of such rare quality as Ed and Barbara Dunsworth." •

Ed invites any friends or interested alumni to contact him at ed@hhministries.com. The Pathway to Progress website address is www.p2pnicaragua.org