

Opinion

Death in El Salvador brings tragedy home

I met Chris in Guatemala three summers ago. We shared a room in a family home while we both took classes at a language school. He had just accepted a job as an English teacher in an American School in El Salvador, and was taking a vacation and some Spanish lessons before his job began.

Most of the time we talked about ordinary things. He complained that, as a native of Washington, he always had to qualify his home as Washington state. We waged battles with a rooster that woke us up each morning.

We rarely talked of the local politics. He wasn't there to study the area or to collect ammunition for his political opinions. He was only in Central America as a step toward his goal of work in the far east. He admitted his ignorance of the events around him and made preparations for his work his priority.

Chris' lack of information made him a target of disinformation. For his benefit, fire-damaged buildings became remains of a guerrilla attack. Routine police patrols became a sign

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Guest Writer

of an upcoming military offensive. After several weeks it was difficult to tell when he believed in the dangers or when he was just playing along.

He did have doubts about his safety. He worried about travelling by bus through the countryside. We were both amazed that every Salvadoran we met could name at least one friend killed in the war.

He also had doubts about his housing in San Salvador. He had been assigned to a house next door to the president's home, on a heavily guarded street with large speed bumps to prevent surprise attacks. We joked that this would either keep him safe or force an attacker to slow down to take a good shot. We never really talked as if it was a serious threat.

I last saw Chris around 5 a.m. on a Monday. He packed his bags, swore

at the rooster one last time and headed out to catch the first bus to San Salvador. I wished him luck, told him to be careful and went back to sleep.

I last heard from him a year ago. He loved his job and had signed a contract to stay in El Salvador. He never learned much Spanish and still didn't understand what was going on around him. It seemed he would never change.

I now can name a friend killed in the Salvadoran civil war. In the latest guerrilla offensive, Chris Babcock died. He was shot in the head as he ran for the safety of this house — the guards and the speed bumps did nothing for him. The newspapers, concerned with the Berlin Wall, have noted little more than that he was a native of Washington state.

Many will use his death as an example. People will praise or condemn the guerrillas or the government. Others will present him as political martyr or pawn in global policy. Others will use his blindness as example of dangerous American ignorance. Such debates seem inappropriate surrounding this innocent abroad.



I simply wish to note Chris' death more thoroughly. I have been aware of the war for years. But for the first time the senselessness has really hit home.

My hope is that Chris' death may

help bring an end to violence which has killed thousands. His name should not be used to serve political disputes in which he played no role. I hope his name will be invoked to promote peace. Perhaps then, El Salvador, and the world, will be a place where teach-

ers can teach, people can live and a bit of uninvolved won't have such deadly consequences.

Douglas Murphy is a graduate student in Latin American history from Hillsborough.

New guerrilla offensives far from 'peace initiative'

On Oct. 10, Arnold Ramos, a representative of the FMLN (El Salvador's communist guerrillas), spoke to a group of students and faculty. The speech went largely unnoticed, but the protest by the UNC College Republicans generated criticism and controversy.

The College Republicans questioned whether a representative of the FMLN could possibly address "Prospects for Peace" as the fliers advertising the speech claimed, for the CRs recognized that the so-called "peace initiatives" of the guerrillas were nothing more than a ploy. Biased reporting by the DTH and whinnings from the Left painted a picture of the College Republicans as over-reactive or ill-informed. However, recent events have proven that the College Republicans were perfectly justified in their protest and have perhaps given

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the world a clearer view of the true "initiatives" of the FMLN.

On Nov. 11, the FMLN launched an offensive against San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. Surely not even campus liberals consider the guerrilla attacks "peace initiatives." The fighting has been called the worst in a decade and at least 600 people are estimated to have been killed so far.

Guerrillas continue to mount heavy attacks against military installations. The FMLN has attacked both the private and official residences of President Alfredo Cristiani and the private residence of Vice President Francisco

Merino. On Nov. 13, the FMLN attacked the residence of the U.S. ambassador.

Attacks are not limited to military and public officials. The FMLN is infiltrating neighborhoods to create a "human shield" against the counterattacks of the armed forces. Dozens of families are being held hostage as innocent lives continue to be taken.

Ironically, the heaviest fighting is taking place in the neighborhoods inhabited by the poorest of all Salvadorans, the very people the communist guerrillas claim to be fighting for. Apparently, the FMLN intends to make the poor pay a heavy price for not joining in the rebellion. For the number of guerrillas has never exceeded 10,000, a statistic which translates into less than 1 percent of the population.

No, the "oppressed" of El Salvador

have not joined the FMLN, although this offensive was supposed to result in a popular uprising to overthrow the democratically-elected government. But, looking at the history of the FMLN, this is not surprising.

The last "final offensive" of the FMLN took place in 1981, shortly after the group was founded in Havana under the direction of Fidel Castro. Obviously, it was unsuccessful, as were subsequent efforts to disrupt the 1984 elections. Realizing that they had lost the battle for popular support, the FMLN then set out to destroy the system. Attacks on the economic infrastructure of the country continued for the next several years, followed once again by attempts to prevent democratic elections in 1988 and 1989.

When these attacks failed to generate a "popular rebellion," the FMLN

adopted a new strategy — the "peace initiatives." An FMLN document entitled "Strategic Appraisal" outlined FMLN strategy. If insurrection were slow to develop, the document said, the FMLN would unleash their "arsenal of proposals." These were described as the primary instruments of their "conspiratorial capability," and would be used to "keep the enemy tied to the table," breaking cohesion and eventually bringing down the government.

While the Salvadoran government considered the peace proposals, the FMLN escalated its terror and sabotage. Guerrillas blew up electrical towers on a daily basis. Car bombs directed at urban military installations often resulted in civilian deaths. A death threat was sent to government officials and many who refused to resign were murdered. All this af-

ter the FMLN issued its "peace proposals!"

The terrorism of the FMLN, besides taking innocent lives, has disrupted the economy and increased the poverty of the masses whom the guerrillas claim to represent. Surely, even the most devout campus Marxist can recognize that *nothing* in the current FMLN offensives can even remotely be called a "peace initiative!"

As the College Republican sign read, "The FMLN speaks of peace but wages war." As reports of hundreds of Salvadorans losing their lives continue, I only wish they hadn't proved us right.

Sharon Sentelle, chairwoman of the UNC College Republicans, is a junior journalism/political science major from Asheville.

College Republicans reactive, not active

For each of the past three years — as with most groups on campus — the new members of the UNC College Republicans have chosen their leaders anew. Despite the new officers and membership, the group's actions seem to justify the cliché "the more things change, the more they remain the same."

Two years ago that organization built a cardboard "Berlin Wall" around the shanties that were constructed in protest of UNC non-divestment in South Africa. About the same time posters appeared all over campus declaring "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Thereafter, a band of rowdy College Republicans broke in on a Young Democrat meeting featuring Congressman David Price. Both before and during his address these students chanted, "Vote for Price, pay the price."

In 1988 both the Young Democrats and College Republicans mutually agreed to prohibit such rude, childish and uncalled-for behavior in the midst of official meetings of the other. Nonetheless, other antics occurred in lieu of the precluded one. Numerous Democratic campaign posters were swiped

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by College Republicans, as admitted by the CR president, on the eve of a statewide Democratic rally here at UNC last October. Fortunately, he handled that act responsibly by ordering the aforesaid posters to be returned. Hours later about 25 College Republicans tried their best to disrupt the Democratic youth rally attended by more than 450 Young and Teen Democrats, even to the point of crowding the outdoor stage as much as possible with themselves and their posters, shouting at Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas.

Just when it seemed things could not get any worse, the College Republicans breached their promise to participate in a UNC student government-sponsored debate with Young Democrats representing the Dukakis-Bentsen campaign. Both student government and the Young Democrats went out of their way to continue the planned event by inviting

N.C. State's College Republicans as last-minute replacements for UNC's own group.

A new year still failed to bring a changed College Republican organization in 1989. In September we students discovered fliers blanketing the campus advertising an upcoming CIA-Action Committee meeting. There were two problems with this otherwise ordinary publicity, though: (1) the College Republicans themselves printed the fliers; and (2) they defamed the CIAAC and its members. The matter almost wound up in Honor Court but failed to stop the College Republicans. A few weeks later, as reported in the DTH, they jeered a representative of the FMLN prior to his address at the Student Union.

Perhaps their role on campus is so limited due to their failure to even receive official University recognition this year. According to a November public announcement in the DTH, UNC College Republicans do not exist in the University's eyes. Is this indicative of simply gross neglect or an even greater

contempt for the University community?

As is obvious from this chronology, reactionary tactics have been and remain common practice of the UNC College Republicans. Even though the winds of political change suggest that Republicanism is more popular than in times past, their organization continues acting as if it has no alternative.

With a Republican in the White House for yet another term as well as the first two-term Republican governor in North Carolina, it would seem that College Republicans would have evolved into a positive, active campus organization, seeking to enlighten fellow students and not darken political attitudes via disruptive, reactionary measures.

Wayne Goodwin, a past president of the UNC Young Democrats and now the graduate vice president, is a graduate student in law from Hamlet. Mike Dickey, the undergraduate vice president of UNC's Young Democrats, is a sophomore linguistics and Spanish major from Clemmons.

Rumors about King can't ruin dream

Debbie Baker
Staff Writer

Rev. Ralph Abernathy recently published his autobiography, "And the Walls Came Tumbling Down." A close friend and associate of the late Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., he discusses his work with King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. He also devotes eight pages to King's alleged extramarital affairs.

It seems people won't let King rest in peace, even though he has been dead for almost 22 years. However, I have decided I will not let unsubstantiated allegations or lies change my view of the man who gave his life to make the world a better place.

Abernathy's account of King's last night places King in a bedroom with two women who were not his wife. Later King allegedly fought with a third woman. How could Abernathy know enough to make such accusations unless he too was doing something he had no business doing?

There are two reasons I won't let these allegations distort my view of Martin Luther King Jr. First, Abernathy does not have a good credibility record. In his novel, he portrays himself as the person who narrowed MLK's plans into the tactics the SCLC used in its campaigns. He claims King was practically lost without his help during the movement. Anyone who knows anything about the movement will realize this is an exaggeration. Besides this, the women with whom King supposedly had affairs deny it, and they have as much credibility as Abernathy has.

Secondly, I'm not going to let rumors ruin my view of the ultimate articulator of nonviolent direct action for social change. I am not going to change my opinion of a man arrested unjustly more than 30 times to dramatize his dream of racial equality. I cannot think less of the man who gave his Nobel Peace Prize money to the movement for civil rights and defied die-hard segregationists. I can't have anything but admiration for the man who led demonstration after demonstration to secure civil rights for black people. Adulterer or not, my conscience won't allow me to view him except as a great black leader and champion of justice.

I am not advocating hiding the truth. However, sometimes writers need to respect the privacy of those who stay in the limelight the most. Although MLK is dead, Abernathy should have thought about the King family's right to privacy and right not to be humiliated by allegations

that can never be proven.

Abernathy called himself a friend of King's. But a friend does not put half-truths in his autobiography to sell more copies; he remembers what you stood for, even after your death.

Abernathy argues that it was his duty to tell the truth, since other people have written extensively about King's extramarital affairs. But he is worse than the gossip columnist because he considers himself a friend and a civil rights leader. This is the man who cuddled King in his arms as he lay dying and served as King's top aide in the SCLC. Yet he uses eight pages to say the same thing MLK's enemies had been saying for years.

Abernathy's allegations reinforce the fact that black people are faced with intraracial as well as interracial problems. We all know that tensions still exist between blacks and whites; sometimes we overlook the tensions within our own race. Sometimes black people don't realize that we hold each other back. Sometimes we participate in our own degradation. Black people will never attain social, economic and political equality as long as we disrespect our own people and exploit them for material gain. The allegations in Abernathy's book should incite black people everywhere to work even harder for social change.

Despite Abernathy's book, somebody still has a dream of a colorblind society. Don't let eight pages in a book keep you from working to make Martin Luther King's dream and your own dreams come true. You must rise above what others say or think in order to be successful in the world. If Abernathy's allegations begin to distort your view of King, shake them off with the same power King used to ignore his enemies. We must overcome rumors with a force greater than the rumor or the bearer of the rumor — love. We must continue to love Rev. Ralph Abernathy, for he doesn't understand the consequences of his actions. People probably think less of him for writing about the alleged affairs than they would think of King for having the affairs. Remember that it is possible to physically kill the dreamer, but it is difficult to touch his vision, harm his spirit or dilute the strength of his dream.

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