

CARE Helps Mozambique Communities To Rebuild Lives Through Private Relief

"I was tired of running," said Ernesto Rodrigues, one of two million Mozambicans displaced by more than a decade of civil war in their homeland. "I remember praying every day that my wife and I could stay put somewhere safe."

Two years ago, Rodrigues and his wife, Costanza, were thrown off their land by anti-government forces. The soldiers destroyed their farming community, taking all the wheat that had just been harvested.

The couple was left with nothing but the clothes on their backs.

"It was awful," Rodrigues explains, "but honestly, we were a lot more fortunate than most. The rebels tortured and killed nearly all of our neighbors when they took over. We survived without any injuries."

Late in 1991, the situation throughout southern Mozambique began to improve. Western aid groups such as CARE, the world's largest private relief and development organization, gave thousands of the country's homeless the chance to rebuild their lives and their livelihoods.

"For a long time, we were forced to focus on keeping people alive with emergency rations of food because so many were dying of starvation," says David Neff, who recently ended a three-year tenure as director of

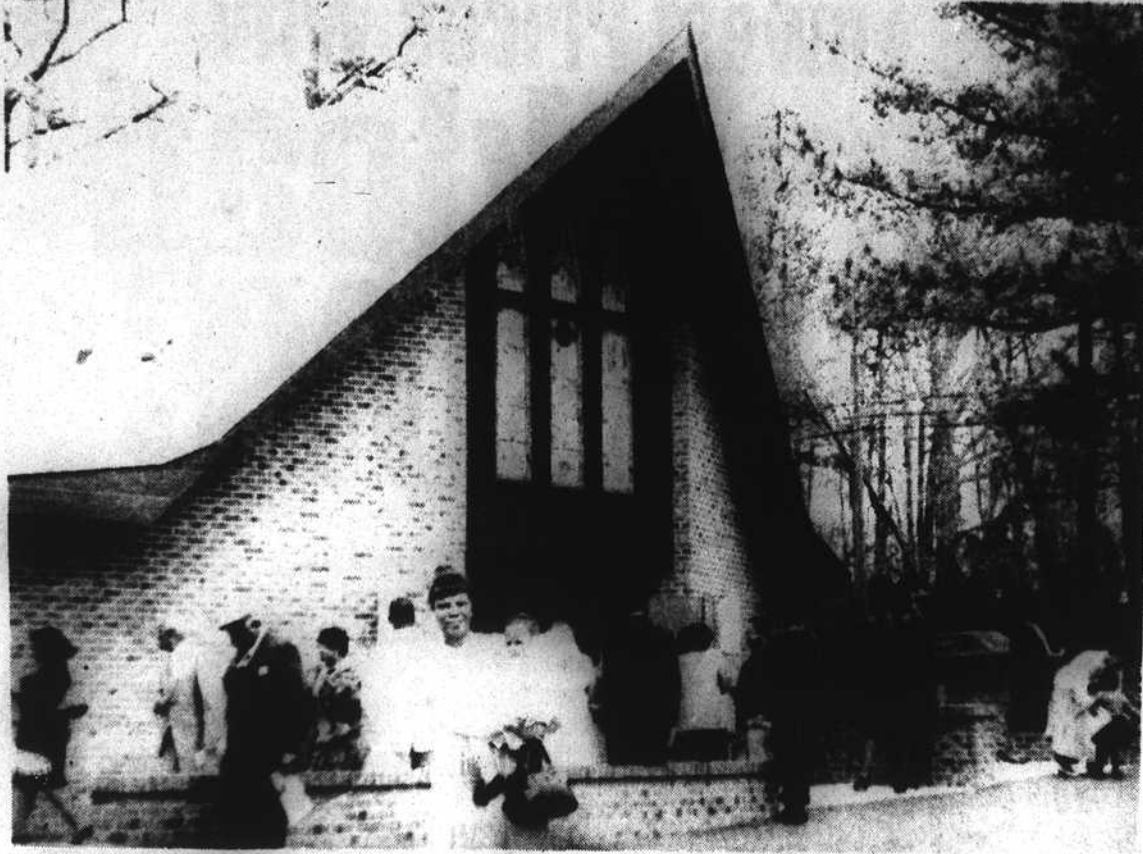
Mozambican programs for CARE.

"Although we're still providing emergency relief," Neff continues, "because fighting in the southern part of the country has quieted, it's now possible for us to look toward the future."

"This is the most fragile first step in the difficult transition from relief to development," explains Neff. "During peacetime, green and lush Mozambique could easily feed itself. But in this civil war, self-sufficiency is impossible."

Rodrigues is one of the farmers who is being helped by CARE agricultural experts. Late last year, he was given vegetable seedlings and training in the best methods.

"We've got enough tomatoes growing in Inhambane alone to paint the whole state of Arkansas red," Neff says.



THANKSGIVING SERVICES—The pastor, Rev. Donald R. Praise and Thanksgiving, Dr. Rollin Russell, Conference Ingram, officers and members of the First Congregational United Church of Christ, recently observed their 125 years of spiritual development and growth. During the Service of (Photo by James Giles)

Focus On WAKE FOREST

BY ELIZABETH ARCHER

JOBS AND THE WORKING POOR: FOCUS ON A WAKE FORESTITE

Because of the Thomas hearings back in October of last year, I was given many issues of the Washington Post newspaper. Besides all of the information obtained about Justice Thomas and Anita F. Hill, another important item from the Post Foreign Service caught my eye.

The headline read, "Disfigured Children, Distressed Parents... Suit Filed Against U.S. Firm Over Alleged Effects of Pollution in Mexican Border Region."

Because I live in an area of farming, where the way of life today is hiring Mexican labor, especially to farm tobacco, for the last three summers, I've watched these "little brown men" come into my very community. Six or seven of them live peacefully and quietly nearby for about two and a half months, and then they're off again to Mexico, another year older and a few dollars richer.

The news item talked about a U.S.-Mexican free trade agreement designed to multiply industrial exchanges across the border. The story went on to say, "Foreign companies, most of them U.S.-based, have opened nearly 2,000 cross-border assembly plants, called *maquiladoras*, to take advantage of cheap Mexican labor."

A lawsuit has been filed in a Texas district court just across the U.S.-Mexican border to spotlight the down side of the new prosperity in Mexican frontier towns.

On Sept. 23, 42 families filed suit against the Mallory Capacitor Co., although the plant went out of business in 1977. In its wake, mothers who bore children with deformed limbs, learning deficiencies and faces that make them look like victims of Down's Syndrome had to live with their boys and girls with whom they had become pregnant during their employment at the Mallory Co.

These mothers bore their pain in private for more than 15 years, the story stated. One mother said, "The hard thing to put up with is that my son will never be normal. He only began to walk five years ago, when he was 12, and still has to be cared for like an infant."

The mother said that as far back as 1970, she and the other women knew that they were affected by the chemical wash for the capacitors, which are used in television sets. "Many of the several hundred women who worked there fainted regularly," she said, and many were euphoric from the fumes; one woman, 36, said that she spent a week in a hospital after being overcome two months before getting pregnant with her daughter, who at 18, still cannot speak. But, she said, "No one complained because we were afraid of losing our jobs."

Have we forgotten the 25 lives that were lost in the Hamlet fire? It seems that no one there complained either. They, too, I suppose, "were afraid of losing their jobs." I don't have time to further tell you of the unbridled industrial pollution and untreated toxic waste—and according to the suit—"inhuman tragedy" that's being dumped in the Mexican towns.

A Mexican anti-pollution activist in Brownsville, Texas, just across the border, said, "If they could do what they're doing in Mexico, they

wouldn't have left. The wages, that's one huge incentive. But there's that other one too; getting away from the regulation." It seems that the "Ugly American" isn't all that slick, after all, huh?

The other week I took special joy in listening to a story from a resident of Wake Forest that so reminded me of the Mexican story that I felt that I just had to tell you of it.

Doris Hartsfield Harris is an attractive, fortyish, well-dressed woman who also has a very good personality. I wondered why it was that Doris was always home, regardless of the hour that I visited her community. Being the "nosy" person that I am, one day I asked her if she worked or not.

"No, I don't work because I'm a disabled person," Doris told me. I found that hard to believe, because Doris would always be in the street, dressed beautifully in casual attire, with everything matching. She always called me "Archer" and was indeed friendly. I'd told her several months ago that I'd like to do a profile on her.

Like all of the other promises that I've made, it has taken a very long time, but once Doris started telling me her story, I had to share it with you.

"In 1975, I lost one of my kidneys. Later, I had breast cancer, and after an operation, cancer was found in another part of my body. Shortly after that, I once again found myself in the hospital. This time, I suffered 'congestive heart failure.' So now you know that I really wasn't joking when I told you that I am disabled to work."

At the courthouse in Raleigh in 1960, Doris became the wife of Freddie L. Harris. Shortly thereafter, the couple moved to Wake Forest, and made their home with his parents, Isaac and Lucy Harris. In the process of time, they became the parents of three children, two sons and one daughter. Shortly after the Taylor Street Housing Development was built, they moved into the unit in which Doris has made her home for more than 20 years.

The couple separated, with Freddie having moved out, leaving Doris with the children, Reginald, Melvin and Norma. Melvin remains at home with his mom, while Reginald and Norma live elsewhere.

The children were all in school when the separation of parents came about, and Doris talked of the struggle she had in working in a plant which made batteries for automobiles and other uses.

"I personally could well understand why the employees kept silent about the conditions of the Hamlet plant," she said. "Number one, they needed their jobs, and number two, they probably wouldn't have been paid any attention even if they had complained."

"Talking about 'bitching,' I complained every single day that I went to work, but it sure didn't help. One thing I hated was having a 'knotty head,' and talking about hair going back! I don't care how good you looked when you went to work, a few minutes later your hair was as kinky as could be."

"That was because the floors had to be kept wet all of the time in order to keep down the lead dust. The lead dust would cause some workers to have a blood buildup, to the point that they'd have to have their blood

drawn off every several weeks.

"The heat in that place was almost unbearable, and we had to make hundreds of plates, which had to be fired inside of a kiln, and when we had to remove them and fill them with acid, one had to be a strong person in order to endure it. If one wasn't extra careful, you could get severely burned handling the acid. That acid was like lye that our parents used to make soap out of, once that lye was dissolved, and when poured, it was something else,"

Doris said. Asked if she thought the terrible working conditions had anything to do with her failing health at such a young age, she replied, "I really can't say, but I do know that some other people did have cancer, and several died. One person died of alcoholism, and another died of something else, I'm not sure what. I used to come home so tired, and worn out completely, because we had to make production, we had to put the battery inside of a tub and keep the tub filled with water. I'd tell my children all of the time, that just as soon as I got them out of school, that I wouldn't ever work that hard again."

"I simply had to work, but when the Exide Battery plant closed its doors, after I'd worked there for all of 13 years, I wasn't sorry one bit, because if they hadn't I guess I would still be trying to work there."

There is more to Doris' story that I will include in another article, but for now, we must all realize that as we drive around in our cars, vans, and trucks, someone else is still making batteries. Could it be the "working poor of Mexico?"

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— Gloria Nowak

In making a living today, many no longer leave room for life.
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