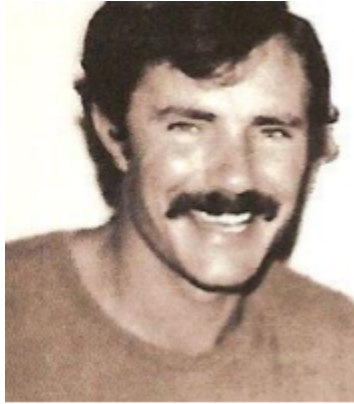


# *The Behrhorst Ripples*

*A 2007 Story Gathering Project*





**Bob Jackson**  
*(then and now)*  
Darwin, Minnesota



For the last 23 years I have been involved in the development and sale of farm seed to farmers in Minnesota and the neighboring states. I have been primarily involved with hybrid seed corn, soybeans and alfalfa.

I first met Doc early in 1970. I was a Peace Corps volunteer assigned to a school that worked with Agricultural Cooperatives. The school was located in Chimaltenango where his clinic and hospital were located. Each month on the first Wednesday he would sponsor Gringo Night at his home just outside of town. These were always interesting evenings. There was always an assortment of people from the U.S.A. who were either working in Guatemala or visiting and heard about these gatherings. I remember meeting Fletcher Knebel, a well-known author, and other high-ranking dignitaries. Cedric Hermann was always the bartender making his rum and orange juice with a slice of banana and pineapple in each one. Doc was always a great host and interested in what each of us were doing.

One time I cut my thumb very badly and the town I lived in was about an hour from Chimaltenango. The local health center in my town of Tecpán wanted to cut off the tip of my thumb. I wasn't too keen on that idea so somehow I got to Doc's clinic and was standing in line behind about 25 people. I didn't want to be an ugly American and jump to the front so I was just waiting my turn. One of the nurses noticed my hand wrapped in a bloody towel and took me directly in to see Doc. His first order was - get him an Octavo and a shot of Codeine. By the time he sewed my thumb back together I was definitely feeling no pain. I went back weekly for about a month and each time I was able to get to know him better.

After living in Guatemala for 1-½ years, I married Joyce Kollmann, another Peace Corps volunteer, and Doc and his crew attended the wedding and reception. About 18 months later our first child was delivered by Jenny Rothwell, a British midwife working with Behrhorst. Knowing that Doc had first been a medical missionary we asked him to baptize our son. This was another great day for fellowship with Doc and his people as well as many Peace Corps Volunteers.

Shortly after the baptism I heard talk of Doc starting a new program in a remote area of Guatemala in the department of Quiché. I was honored to be asked to participate as the agriculture coordinator for this program. My initial visit to the town of San Miguel Uspantán was in the clinic vehicle with Joe Narke, Cedric, Doc and myself. This was a very interesting trip! Uspantán is about an 8-hour trip from Chimaltenango up and down several mountain ranges. The roads are very steep in places with multiple hairpin turns. We basically wanted to scout out the area, talk to local leaders and meet as many people as we could. The town appeared ready for a program of this type. As it turned out we ended up moving to Uspantán and worked there for another three years, establishing the Behrhorst Program in Quiché. Joe Narke, his wife Feliza, my wife Joyce, our six month old son Mateo and I moved to Uspantán in early 1973 to begin this adventure. I believe that the work we did in Uspantán created a lasting legacy to Dr. Behrhorst and his visions.

The Uspantán program was set up with Joe and Feliza Narke running the medical side while I ran the agriculture side and my wife Joyce ran the school gardens and nutrition program. The big draw for people to participate in our program was the medical program. Everyone wanted to take better care of themselves and have access to affordable medicine. The agriculture and nutrition part was equally important but would have been much slower to develop had it not been for the clinic. Joe's idea was to have the clinic open everyday in Uspantán and then add several outlying communities for weekly or monthly visits as the program developed. Thursdays and Sundays were market days when people would come to town from as far away as 20 to 25 kilometers.

My first task was to visit all villages within 20 kilometers (about a four hour walk) and identify the individuals who were the most capable of receiving training in medicine and agriculture. This meant that they should be able to read and do simple math, be well respected in their home community and have leadership capacity. This may sound simple but finding people with these qualities was no easy task in the remote Guatemala of the early 1970's. Fortunately, by then I had been working in rural Guatemala for three years and knew the culture and language quite well. Add to this the draw of the medical program and it was a pleasure to seek out people who wanted to better themselves and their communities.

After several months we had enough interested people to start official classes and extension work. The classes were held on Sundays. Joe and Feliza had the students in

the morning where they had lessons and then observed in the clinic. Around noon they would come down to our house and we would have an hour or so of lessons and then go to our research farm just a block away. The things the students learned were basic health care such as washing hands before eating, boiling drinking water, how to diagnose and treat illnesses such as malnutrition, tuberculosis, dysentery and even serious diseases such as cholera and typhoid fever.

The agriculture training centered on improving their agricultural knowledge through the use of appropriate technology and readily available materials. Modest changes such as planting on the contour, spacing out their plants, and the use of manure and compost to improve production could make a big difference. Most Mayan families produced all their own food on small plots of land. An increase in production would mean better nutrition for the family for the entire year. Improved varieties of corn and wheat and the introduction of potatoes were all also a big part of the program. Only in very serious situations did we recommend the use of commercial fertilizers and pesticides.

The School Gardens and Nutrition program focused on the rural schools and the introduction of new types of vegetables – radishes, carrots, tomatoes, peas and green beans. There also were nutritional classes for young mothers. We had our own infant so Joyce could use him as an example for the students.

This was all made possible because of Doc. It was his dream to continue the Chimaltenango program and start this new program to reach more people. It was a very successful program until the violence struck the Department of Quiché in 1979, and the Guatemalan Army turned on the peasant farmers as if they were bloodthirsty war-mongering guerillas. As it happened, they went after many of our students because they were community leaders and all had medical kits to treat wounds and illnesses. I know that five or six were outright gunned down by the military. The town of Uspantán became the Army's main base for hunting down the so-called guerrillas. I saw this and learned about tremendous atrocities when visiting Uspantán in 1994.

Two more important projects with lasting benefits were the Heifer Project and the start-up of an agricultural supply store. The Heifer Project was designed to allow subsistence level farmers to purchase purebred cattle, sheep, goats, and rabbits for a nominal cost. Our program worked with all four of these animal groups and had success with the rabbits and sheep especially. The agricultural store was set up to provide the local farmers the inputs they needed to increase their crop yields and improve animal health. We offered improved varieties of vegetables, feed supplements, small-scale equipment rentals and occasionally commercial fertilizer and pesticides.

Doc was a big part of our time in Guatemala. Our daughter, Heather Feliza, was born in 1975. Again, it was Jenny Rothwell who offered her home and services to bring Heather into this world. Then Doc, in his usual unselfish way, offered his home for the baptism and celebration. He also performed the ceremony.

Our times with Doc didn't end when we left Guatemala. He visited us at our home in Minnesota on several occasions. On one such visit, I was honored to introduce him as the main speaker to a group of health care workers in Minneapolis in 1980.

The lasting effects of Doc's legacy in Chimaltenango are well known by those of us who continue to hear about and visit his clinic and hospitalito. I want to say a few things about the ongoing legacy in Uspantán. Back in 1994, 18 years after leaving Guatemala, I was in Uspantán for four days. I was amazed and quite pleased at what I learned about the lasting effects of our program. One of our most energetic students was operating a clinic in his home village and on Thursdays and Sundays in the town of Uspantán. He had a big clientele and was offering services not otherwise provided to the Mayans. His charges were very modest and he actually was helping people overcome common diseases and malnutrition. Several people talked to me about how the offspring from the original Heifer Project animals were still thriving and had improved the local flocks of sheep, goats and cattle. One of my biggest surprises was to find a small cart in the town square selling, of all things, French Fries from the potato seed introduced way back in 1975.

In conclusion, Doc Behrhorst was a great man with a very clear vision of what it would take to really help the rural poor improve their lives. He knew that curative medicine was not the complete answer. His idea of expanding into agricultural, health and nutrition, potable water, and even a revolving fund to help farmer controlled groups purchase land were right on the mark.

I will always admire him as one who lived his dream.