

# *The Behrhorst Ripples*

*A 2007 Story Gathering Project*





**Leonél Sacbajá** (to his father's left)  
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I never intended to be a doctor, but perhaps my work now is akin to the “calling” which traditional midwives speak of. It’s possible that my path was set well before I realized it because when I was young, maybe 8 years old, I went with my father to the health promoter training sessions with Dr. Behrhorst.

My mother sold vegetables in Guatemala City, and so I stayed with my father. I have vague memories of those days in Chimaltenango, and by now I’ve concluded that those visits were my first steps toward becoming a doctor. I actually was headed for a career in graphic design, and then one day, when someone asked me what I was going to study, I blurted out, “Medicine!” Now where did that come from?

Today I am the director of an integrated health program, Aj’on Jay, with eleven employees, which serves 87 rural communities, mainly in Tecpán, and other adjacent municipalities. I can tell you honestly that the best teacher I had regarding how to care for people’s needs was Dr. Behrhorst, even though he never taught me directly. Through my father and through my own years working as a doctor at the Behrhorst Clinic (1992-1994), I absorbed so much about the Behrhorst approach, and I have intentionally applied those teachings.

One teaching is that of listening to people. This seems like an obvious principle, but it is often difficult to put into practice.

Another teaching is that health care is best done in an integrated manner, addressing the root causes of disease. That’s where problems can be solved. Aj’on Jay, the health program which we launched here in Tecpán in 1995, has all these components:

- Health
- Agriculture
- Women’s productive projects
- Appropriate technology
- Microcredit

- Commercialization
- Technical assistance and training which assists community groups in taking their own “next steps” in development. Some community projects have actually gained their own legal status as income-generating business entities.

Of course, not every community project is a success story, but there are certainly successes among them.

In my opinion, it was the Violence which cut short the contributions of Dr. Behrhorst and the Chimaltenango program. He could have launched a dozen more initiatives because of his dedication to people, his openness to new ideas, his willingness to work with others, and his accumulated experiences in the Highlands.

I hope he knows that his work continues. I hope he knows he has a disciple in me.