

Rhetoric vs. Reality: Central American Violence Not Forgotten

By Jennifer Wake

On March 24, 1980, while celebrating holy Mass at a

ferences between rhetoric and reality with respect to U.S. support of human rights

Guatemalan civil war and I have seen him suffer so much throughout my life,

Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). The Army states the SOA had finished its mission and that WHINSEC was opened to address new missions. Ahnen contends the new institution was “placed in the same place, teaching pretty much the same courses.”

“Most of us in the movement understand that what took place was a political move at attempting to save the school by making cosmetic changes to the name and claiming broad changes for the mission that



Banners secured to WHINSEC fences denounced the facility during the three-day protest.

Photo by Lorna Contreras

small chapel near his cathedral in San Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero was shot to death. According to a U.N. report, his assassins were members of Salvadoran death squads and two were graduates of the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia.

Now 27 years later, protesters continue an annual pilgrimage each November to this military training facility, hoping to force its closure. A Saint Mary's professor, a campus minister and twelve students, who joined more than 20,000 people in this year's protest, spoke about their experience at the college last week.

“Many of the martyrs of the cruel torture and repression [in Latin America] are Catholic religious leaders such as Archbishop Romero, the four churchwomen killed in December of 1980, and the six Jesuit priests killed November 1989,” said Saint Mary's politics professor Ron Ahnen, a principal organizer of these trips since 2003. “Our goal is to educate students about the dif-

violating regimes in Latin America.”

Prior to the protest, students were required to do a substantial amount of reading specifically on the SOA as well as an overview of U.S. military and economic policies toward Central America.

Ahnen and Campus Minister Bob Mallon helped students review the history of Catholic Social Thought which emphasizes respect for human rights, giving priority to the needs of the poor, and supporting reforms in favor of economic and social

dealing with flashbacks, depression, and problems with anxiety,” she said. “There are so many other people who suffered the way my

dad did, and no one fought for justice. I may be little, and not very significant in the eyes of our government, but I will fight for the injustices and

“There are so many other people who suffered the way my dad did, and no one fought for justice. I may be little, and not very significant in the eyes of our government, but I will fight for the injustices and the damage the SOA and the U.S. caused to so many Latin American countries as strongly as I can.”
— Lorna Contreras, student

justice. They discussed how this fit in with the SOA issue.

For Saint Mary's student Lorna Contreras, who has traveled to Fort Benning for the past two years, the protests are a way for her to fight back.

“My father was a victim of torture during the

the damage the SOA and the U.S. caused to so many Latin American countries as strongly as I can.”

In 1999, outside pressure seemed to work and the school was shut down, but it soon reopened as the Western Hemispheric Institute for

really aren't there,” he said.

While at WHINSEC, students were given an opportunity to meet directly with school administrators for a question and answer period, but unfortunately, they say, they left unconvinced.

“I realized they had actually dodged all the questions asked and just turned them into informative messages about how great the school was,” said Contreras. But Contreras says she and the others returned to Saint Mary's undaunted. “Even though we can't change the world, I can always try to cause some change. In a democracy, you use the voice you have to stand up for what you believe in.”

“Our goal is to educate students about the differences between rhetoric and reality with respect to U.S. support of human rights violating regimes in Latin America.” — Politics Professor Ron Ahnen



SMC students gather before protest march.

Photo by Jaime Zepeda



Protestors act out torture during Nov. march.

Photo by Jaime Zepeda



Photo by Ken C. Young, Moraga; www.kcyoungfineartimages.com

Go Gaels!

Upcoming Saint Mary's Sports Events

Saturday, March 31

• Men's Rugby vs. Stanford
1 p.m. at Pat Vincent Rugby Field

We wish all the Saint Mary's student-athletes the best of luck as they enter competition at games away from home this week. For information on all out-of-town games, visit the official Saint Mary's athletics website: www.SMCGaels.com.

Campus Happenings

Lectures:

Tom Barbash
Author of several books including “On Top of the World — Cantor Fitzgerald, Howard Lutnick & 9/11: A Story of Loss & Renewal”
Tonight, March 28 at 7:30 p.m.
Soda Activity Center
Free

Abigail Thomas
Author of two collections of short stories, “Herb's Pajamas” and “Getting over Tom,” the novel “An Actual Life” and, most recently, two memoirs, “Safekeeping” and “A Three Dog Life.”
Wednesday, April 11 at 7:30 p.m.
Soda Activity Center
Free

Jon Waterman
Author of “Where the Mountains are Nameless: Passion and Politics in the Arctic Refuge” — winner of the 2006 Sigurd Olson Nature Writing Award — discusses global warming and oil development in the Wildlife Refuge. Waterman was part of an expedition to the Arctic last year that discovered melting permafrost, disappearing glaciers and dying forests.
Thursday, April 12 at 7 p.m.
Soda Activity Center
Free

Art Exhibitions:
“Paper Cuts: The Art of Contemporary Paper”
Continues through April 29
Hearst Art Gallery
Free

“William Keith: The 1870s Paintings”
Reopened Saturday, March 24
Hearst Art Gallery, William Keith Room
Free

For more information about upcoming events at Saint Mary's College, visit the college website at www.stmarys-ca.edu/news_events/.



Protestors listened to speeches and attended vigils during the November 2006 event.

Photo credit: Jaime Zepeda

Want To Knock Off 20 Years?

Support Gaels Athletics, says John Frei.

By Jennifer Wake

Long-time Lafayette residents John and Liz Frei have a unique hobby — one that, they say, makes them feel younger than their 70-plus years. The Freis have become Gaels sports junkies.

With a family of four

boys and one girl, the couple got into basketball; after their kids grew up and moved away, they continued their interest in sports. “Liz got interested in basketball when I suggested she come watch a girl's game,” said John, who graduated from

Saint Mary's in 1951. Soon after, they began adding different sports to their list of favorites.

“I tried to look up all the rules [of volleyball] on the Internet, but decided it's better not to know the rules,” said Liz, a graduate

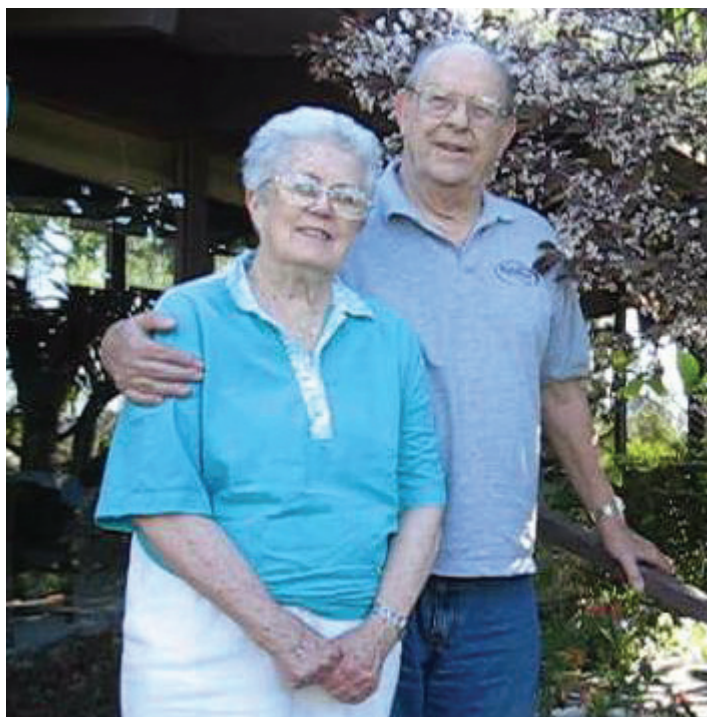
of Holy Names College. She can tell you all the players who have been injured recently and which are great shooters. “The women's teams are more reminiscent of what I can do. The girls are coming in prepared. They're tough.”

While attending the sports events, including men's and women's basketball, volleyball, lacrosse and

even rugby, now and then, the Freis have become well-known at Saint Mary's. They not only attend after game events, but they have even been invited to some student-athletes' graduations. A few weeks ago, they invited the volleyball coach and 15 players over for Sunday afternoon dinner. “We know the players and have gotten very close

to them, and we enjoy meeting the parents of the kids,” said John, who is notorious for waving his cane behind the visiting team's basket during games. “It's nice to see the students improve, mature.”

Liz agrees: “I feel younger when I'm meeting them and talking to them.”



John and Liz Frei at their home in Lafayette.

Photo by Jennifer Wake

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