



CAPACITAR— Women Planting One Heart

An Empowerment Project connecting Women of North America with Women around the World

CAPACITAR is a local and international network of women bringing each other to life. Our logo comes from a pre-Columbian design of aquatic flowers of ancient Mexico. For us it symbolizes the creativity and empowerment of women—women coming to life, rooted to the earth, birthing new life, joining together, empowering each other. CAPACITAR shares techniques of healing, team building and self-development with women leaders to encourage physical and spiritual transformation. We act so that all women involved are empowered to take control of their lives, inspire communities, and struggle for liberation and peace in the world. International teams of women model alternative uses of power to aid in this self-transformation. As a grassroots organization, CAPACITAR connects women through an international network of solidarity, building relationships of cultural and personal understanding. CAPACITAR works with sensitivity towards cultural awareness and responds to needs identified by community groups within a country. Our name, CAPACITAR, is a Spanish word meaning to empower, to encourage, to bring forth.

Often in our travels and work for CAPACITAR, we meet remarkable women who are creating peace and change within themselves, their communities and their countries. They desire to work in partnership with others, modeling new ways of using their gifts and power. Instead of repeating the usual competitive patterns, these women are intent on empowering themselves and others, healing themselves and their communities in the process. Riane Eisler, author of *The Chalice and the Blade*, uses the term "partnership way" to describe these new tools for living and healing our world.

In this Newsletter you will meet some CAPACITAR women who exemplify this "partnership way". They come from diverse backgrounds and cultures—from the shantytowns of Lima, Peru, to indigenous groups in Nicaragua, to affluent areas in California. What these women have in common is their deep desire to work in partnership to recreate our world.

Peruvian Sister Magdalena Castro, who organized CAPACITAR workshops for hundreds of leaders last March, founded the Comedor Movement in Ermitaño ten years ago to help women survive starvation. Magdalena has inspired many women living in the shantytowns near Lima to work together in "comedores populares" (family kitchens) and to learn skills to organize and better themselves.

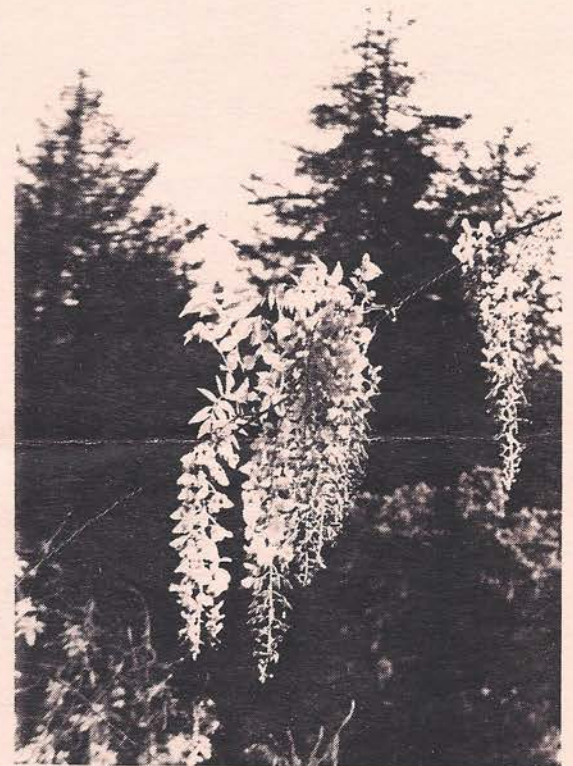
Suzy Marks, participant in CAPACITAR's Women's Journey to Central America, was moved to political action as a result of meeting Guatemalan and Nicaraguan women. She has organized a large conference in Los Angeles on immigration and immigrants, bringing together many diverse sponsoring organizations which until now have not collaborated in events.

Rayna Jack Felipe, president of AMICA and participant in a March CAPACITAR workshop in Managua, represents about four thousand indigenous women of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, who have organized to learn together to better the difficult conditions under which they live. Another Nicaraguan, María Elena Guerra coordinates loans to poor campesinas to help them form agricultural cooperatives in Chontales.

Holy Names Sister Mary Ondreyco, Domestic Programs Chairperson for CAPACITAR, has worked with Mexican women in Watsonville labor camps for the last four years. Mary has inspired and empowered the women to learn new skills, to organize and to care for their bodies and spirits.

Hilary Bendon, a recent graduate of the Monterey Institute of International Studies who has been an intern and consultant for CAPACITAR for the past two years, wrote her MA project on partnership as an alternative to bureaucracy. Joan Seybold, Capacitar Events Chair, planned an Empowerment Day to nourish the spirits of the women who gathered, and in doing so discovered some of her own gifts.

All of these women have worked in partnership with their communities creating new visions of how we can work together. Each of them can inspire us to look at our own lives and discover how we, too, can live out this "partnership way." As we honestly and courageously face the pain and disintegration of ways that no longer work, and as we faithfully discern the intuitions of our hearts, new options emerge that give us energy and direction. Following these options can bring us hope and healing.



We join with the earth and with each other to bring new life to the land, to recreate the human community, to provide justice and peace, to remember our children. . . . We join together as many and diverse expressions of one loving mystery, for the healing of the earth and the renewal of all life.

—UN ENVIRONMENTAL SABBATH PROGRAM

CAPACITAR—Toward Partnership and Empowerment

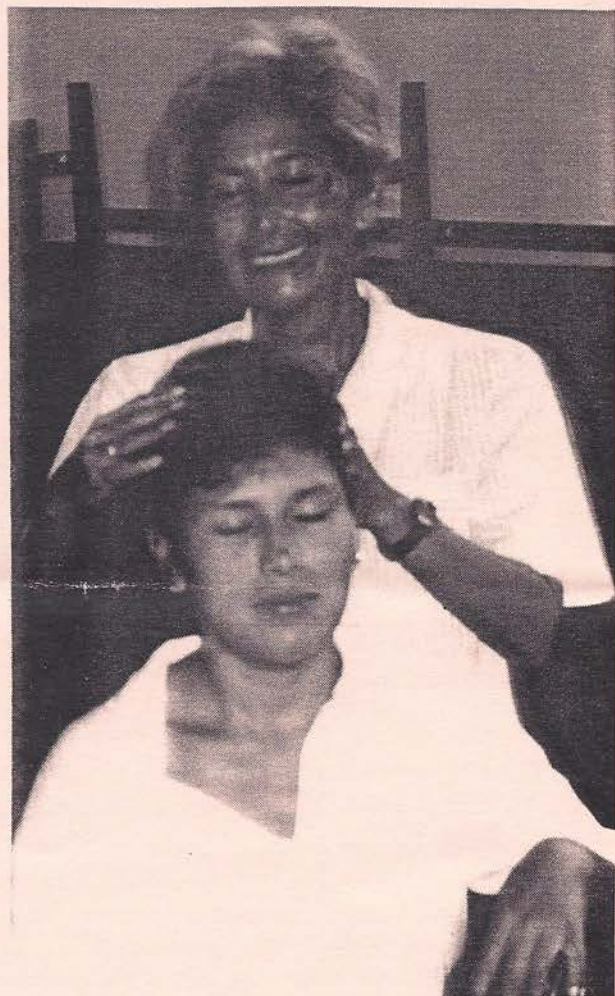
Comedores—Cooperative Family Kitchens in Peru

CAPACITAR Director Pat Cane recently initiated a program in Peru, working with several hundred grassroots leaders of comedores, feminist centers and program directors for the City of Lima. The following article describes the work of Carmelite Sister Magdalena Castro, who organized CAPACITAR workshops for women who run cooperative kitchens which daily feed thousands.

"I never thought I could do anything except take care of my family and try to survive starvation and poverty. But Sister Magdalena taught us how to organize, how to cook together, how to learn together to survive and to recognize our dignity, talents and strengths as women." Esther Arce beamed as she led us on a visit to four comedores in Ermitaño, near Lima. Esther is president of Sarita Colonia, a comedor which daily feeds 35 families. The comedor will be celebrating its 10th Anniversary in August. In Esther's district most of the women had few skills and could barely read or write. Through their participation in the work of the comedor, the women have learned how to keep accounts and make financial reports, plan menus for large groups, buy collectively, create delicious meals with the poorest of ingredients, work with diet-related health problems, strategize politically, and deal with community problems.

As we climbed the rocky paths which led up the mountain to the poorest part of Ermitaño, Magdalena explained that 67% of the poorest families were members of comedores. These families live in shacks, often with dirt floors, and their average family income is \$35 per month. As a result of the economic program enacted by the Peruvian government three years ago, even many of the professional class have had to organize in comedores just to survive. A center was established in Ermitaño where the women come for support, for social events, for workshops in organization, skills, health and personal development. Magdalena told us how many of the women have grown beyond their own small worlds and have developed a deep commitment to better the larger community. Through the Comedor Movement the women have even gained some voice in Peruvian politics.

Magdalena describes her years accompanying the women as challenging and very gratifying. "The comedores brought together women from vastly different backgrounds, villages and beliefs. But one thing united them all: hunger and the need to feed their families. With this common challenge of survival we worked and learned together. There were no easy answers. We made our mistakes. And the only security we had was that our work was an expression of love for the people. Like in the Gospels, the faith of the women transformed the loaves of bread, feeding the community, bringing dignity, respect and joy to the people. I have come to realize that in the measure that we unite ourselves with them, we, too, will be transformed by them."



Above: Sister Magdalena Castro working with a comedor leader during a recent CAPACITAR workshop in Peru.

Photos Below left to right:

- Director Pat Cane with Magdalena Castro visiting Esther Arce (right) and the women of Comedor Sarita Colonia.
- Suzy Marks sharing a hand massage with Sheny in Guatemala.
- Rayna Jack Felipe, President of AMICA, the Association of Indigenous Women of the Atlantic Coast, Nicaragua.
- Sister Mary Ondreyco (right) working with María Esther, Beatrice and Consuelo of San Andreas Labor Camp in Watsonville, California.

—Photos: Pat Cane



Indigenous Women's Groups in Nicaragua

Rayna Jack Felipe radiated vibrance and strength as she cared for her small son who accompanied her to our workshop in Managua. She had traveled a great distance from her home in Puerto Cabezas, where she is president of AMICA, the Association of Indigenous Women of the Atlantic Coast. She shared the following account of her work:

"Our Association was founded in 1991 with the desire of empowering ourselves in solidarity with women throughout the world. For centuries as black indigenous women we have suffered a great deal of oppression, and during the ten years of the Contra War we were particularly vulnerable. AMICA is a regional organization with 4,000 members representing 45 communities. We have many limitations economically. All active members are volunteers without pay, and each woman is trying to offer her time and talents for the betterment of all. We've had one formation workshop on gender issues and human rights. This we tried to share with the rest of the members through visits and workshops with the 45 communities. We are trying to inspire within the women a sense of themselves as indigenous women, as well as encourage their intellectual development and teach skills in agriculture and artistic production."

Loans for Women's Farm Collectives in Chontales

María Elena Guerra, whom we met at our Managua workshop, has worked for four years in a project which lends money to help women form collectives. Because banks only lend money to wealthier growers, a Norwegian nonprofit makes loans available to the campesinas. The women pay back the loans with part of their harvest. María Elena and her organization also offers workshops in health, agricultural production, women's issues, as well as encourage sports, groups for dance, art and theater, and campaigns for ecology, vaccination and nutrition for children.

María Elena was excited about starting CAPACITAR workshops with the many women with whom she works. She was especially enthusiastic about sharing with them the guided visualizations to connect with the wise guides within. "It is so important to return to the traditions of our ancestors and to reclaim our connections with the wisdom within to give us the support and strength we so need, especially at this time of such material and moral crisis. We can never again feel that we are alone."



Immigration Issues and Partnership in Los Angeles

Suzy Marks is a woman of action. Several years ago she won the Sister Corita Peace Award for developing the Nuclear Freeze Movement in the Los Angeles area. Suzy had never been to Central America, so last fall she decided to join our CAPACITAR's Women's Journey. In the course of getting to know women in Guatemala and Nicaragua, Suzy was deeply moved. So much so, that when she returned home she organized a large conference: "Let's Talk—Immigration and Immigrants." Suzy realized that the people of her area needed to look honestly at immigration policy and the people involved—a common concern that deeply affects the lives of everyone in Los Angeles.

The way Suzy has organized the conference at Leo Baeck Temple also reflects her ability to empower people to begin working in partnership. Through Suzy's encouragement and leadership, groups representing many different socio-economic backgrounds and viewpoints are co-sponsoring the event—civic leaders, educators, lawyers, immigrants, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, activists. Conference participants will dialogue about the complex issues surrounding immigration: legal aspects and root causes, as well as the contributions of immigrants.

Women of the Labor Camps—Watsonville, CA

Sister Mary Ondreyco has been an inspiration to many Mexican women who live in San Andreas, a labor camp near Watsonville. Last Monday after a CAPACITAR workshop with women who had picked strawberries all day, one tired woman said, "Thank you for coming and being with us." Usually the only time visitors come around is Christmas time to bring them gifts or food baskets.

For four years, Mary has faithfully worked with the women, laughing, crying and celebrating with them. Mary is helping the women assume their own sense of leadership and is developing a learning center where they and their children can have access to personal and educational resources. Current workshops in self esteem and stress management teach the women techniques in acupressure and massage to help them relax their aching backs and muscles after long hours of stoop labor in the fields. After the Monday workshop, the women wanted to share their new skills to help their husbands and children.



CAPACITAR and Partnership

Hilary Bendon, CAPACITAR intern and consultant who recently graduated with her MA from the Monterey Institute of International Studies, has researched an alternative to bureaucratic structures: Partnership.

"Society has changed greatly over the past few decades and organizational power structures and decision-making must be altered to accommodate those changes. I saw the movement of women into the business and management workforce as a major factor in this transformation and in the growing inadequacy of bureaucracy because of women's emphasis in process, relationship and communication at all levels.

Hilary sees Partnership as having the following characteristics: The structure is a web, rather than a hierarchy. Personal experience predominates, rather than an authority of rules. Communication flows freely between all members, rather than emphasizing "experts" and superior-subordinate interactions. Partnership encourages interactive relationships where power emerges from the group and empowers the individual, rather than promoting domination and competition for power. In contrast to the impersonal bureaucratic machine, a partnership organization is human, and can be seen as an association of people working together to achieve certain goals. Quoting Body Shop Founder Anita Roddick, Hilary says: Partnership involves "principles of caring; making intuitive decisions; not getting hung up on hierarchy; having a sense of work as being a part of your life, not separate from it; putting your labor where your love is; being responsible to the world in how you use your profits; and recognizing that the bottom line should stay at the bottom."



Consultant Hilary Bendon and Events Committee Chair Joan Seybold leading a planting ritual for the CAPACITAR Empowerment Day.

Photo: Julianne Boyajian

We welcome you to become part of our CAPACITAR network. Please return the form below to:

CAPACITAR

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Watsonville, California 95076

408-761-5893 FAX 408-761-5893 Access Code 761

Pat Cane, Director

Empowerment Day—Rites of Spring

Joan Seybold, CAPACITAR Events Chair, described her experience of planning and facilitating our recent Empowerment Day: "The first step toward empowerment is discovering and recognizing not only your talents, but also those things which you feel joy in doing. I have always enjoyed and excelled at organizing people and events, so I was excited about volunteering to plan Empowerment Day. But I was also very nervous. In the process of facing my fear I discovered that all I could do was be true to my vision and understanding. I had a lot of support from the members of the Planning Committee who each shared their own special talents. I loved planning the ritual where we each planted a seed: garlic for healing, gladiolas for beauty and potatoes for sustenance. Altogether these make a lovely garden. The garden can be a metaphor for CAPACITAR where we plant seeds inside ourselves. The seeds are nourished and grow, bringing forth a spiritual harvest of energy."

CAPACITAR Executive Committee: Hilary Bendon, Julianne Boyajian, Teddy Carney, Johanne Christmas, Doris DeVilliers, Alice Godfrey, Diane Klein, Lucia Lopez, Penny Mann, Suzy Marks, Sr. Mary Ondreyco, Teresa Padilla, Yolanda Provoste-Fuentes, Barbara Richmond, Joan Seybold, Sarah Seybold, Zenaida Velasquez

International Advisors: Sr. Magdalena Castro, Marisa Grijalva, Sr. Mary Hartman, Sr. Mary Litell, Victoria Martinez, Judy Ress, Nelly Rumpill, Anabel Torres **Director:** Pat Cane

1994 Women's Journey to Guatemala and Nicaragua

November 24–December 8

For more information call or FAX: 408-761-5893

Name _____

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City _____ State _____ ZIP _____

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