
RÍO ABIERTO SOLIDARITY - BULLETIN Number 3, August 2003

EDITORIAL

Dear friends of this Río Abierto Solidarity:

We renew our contact with you all through this bulletin in order to convey the joy it means to bring the work of the Río Abierto Foundation to this new social context.

Since February 5th, when we inaugurated our work with Sol Naciente, we have contributed to creating a home for women and abandoned children, where at present there live more than 20 persons. Also there is a day care center that attends around thirty children every day.

The classes that we give on Mondays and Thursdays have grown remarkably and likewise the groups of children who work with Carlos, María Virginia and Alejandra on Saturday mornings.

Thanks to your contributions, we have been able to purchase:

- Beds for the home
- Tables and chairs for the day-care center
- Supplies and toys for our work with the children

We have also succeeded in paying the rent and in increasing our assistance in this area: collaborating in the payment of the gas bill and the cost of various repairs.

We should also like to mention that, thanks to your contributions, some of our instructors have begun to receive some monetary payment for their solidarity work.

Our hearts are full of projects, hopes and plans because we know every time we go to Shanty Town 1-11-14, we are not going alone: You all come with us.

Thank you.

Viviana Britos

DIALOGUE WITH MARÍA ADELA PALCOS
About the program “Río Abierto Solidarity”

On Wed. July 21st, 2003, we met with María Adela to contemplate the Río Abierto Solidarity project from the bases of our system. What we transcribe below is just the beginning of a dialogue that will go on deepening and taking shape like this project.

From the perspective of our system, how would you define this Río Abierto Solidarity?

I believe we can find two viewpoints here:

1. We can regard it from the point of view of those who are carrying out the solidarious action. I see this as a deep, heartfelt work. Volunteer work arises from a deep need of the cardiac center. The cardiac center is nourished on giving, it is love in movement in all of its multiple manifestations: love as time, love as work, love as the possibility of going back to the basic tasks; this is very important because that work connects us with our basic necessities.

2. And then, there is the other point of view: that of the people who receive the solidarious action... It's a viewpoint that begins perhaps due to those basic necessities, with the receiving of material help, but it is a viewpoint that is modified by “the Work” and it becomes the ability to act, to overcome paralysis. It becomes transformed into spiritual food, into the possibility of continuing that growth and development in love, in becoming free, in learning to breathe.

What do you understand by “basic tasks”?

Here, I refer to those tasks that put us into direct contact with our basic necessities: What do I plant or pick in order to eat? What do I cook or make to prepare my food? What do I build to have a room? How do I shear, weave, sew, knit, to keep me warm?

None of us has ever been hungry and had no way to satisfy that hunger, or felt cold and had nothing to keep him warm nor a roof to provide shelter, and in as much, we are far from the drive of instinct, which is directly related to the urgency of fulfilling basic needs. So, we have been stripped of that basic strength which is essential to the human being and to his contact with what is vital.

And taking it from there, what is your vision of the social gaps that are growing wider and wider both in our country and in Latin America as a whole?

I observe that in general, the upper classes fear the lower classes; it is a fear full of phantasms: "If he's poor, he's going to rob me, he's a brute, he wants to take something from me". These fears and these phantasms are very deeply woven into our social fabric. And the other side of this picture is that the lower class individual feels rejected, and he very much is, marginated, without rights.

At some moment of history, a division of labor is made by which the upper classes are put in charge of thought and to some extent, sensitivity whereas the lower classes are given physical work, especially that related to basic necessities. With this division between slavery and aristocracy – as it was in other times and as it is coming to be again today – a split was produced in the human being – and so the upper classes were left bereft, in part, of the element of strength and vitality; and lower classes bereft of the higher centers.

We are all of us needy and lacking in one aspect or another. Generally speaking, if we look around us, we see that the middle and upper classes are lacking in the strength that corresponds to the lower centers. This lack hinders action. One's daily action is removed from vitality. We need to work to recover our vital energy, our strength and our presence. Being supportive and working together with people who had the lot to be born in another sector is a wonderful opportunity – and this is offered in Río Abierto Solidarity.

And, how then, should we contemplate violence?

When strength or energy has no direction, it can find no meaning, so it turns into violence.

Strength, energy is victimized in two ways: by the imposition of a violent reality from without, absent figures, unsatisfied needs, marginality; or else from within, one's own social environment through blows and physical abuse.

The great masters say we are all timid – but there are two kinds: the repressed timid and the explosive timid. On the whole, I see that most of those who come to Río Abierto are the repressed timid kind, while those of Río Abierto Solidarity are the explosive timid kind...

And what is explosive is frightening, perturbing... Actually, I understand the possibility of the explosive element as related to the ways of organizing the experience, with what we learn as we are learning... We may call it education, culture or whatever, and this influences us at the moment of repressing or exploding. In any event, this cultural varnish disappears when our basic necessities are at stake. Then rage strikes out... Until one can understand that "There is enough for everyone".

That's why when we work in a situation where the basic necessities are not satisfied, it's necessary to limit Dionysiac expressions, overall at the beginning.

The important thing is to understand that we are all lacking and complementary and, for that reason, we need to intermix. The road of evolution poses the need for all of us to complete ourselves and complement each other. We all need strength, intelligence and sensitivity.

This outlook can bring us to the contemplation of this Río Abierto Solidarity program as regards health. How would this system look upon the idea of health?

I understand health to be the state of human fulfillment, human plenitude and that is very different from simply an absence of illness. In this case, it's necessary to think about the ideas of "Prevention of Illness and Furthering of Health", and the latter is linked to the possibility of satisfying basic necessities, not just eating, though. These also include work, study, knowing who we are as human beings. That is to say, to know oneself and the potential for self-healing that one possesses.

The population of Río Abierto Solidarity fall ill frequently and go very often to hospitals and health centers. What do you think of this?

Yes, they are full of illnesses, illnesses due to lacks. Lack of proper food, but fundamentally, lack of love... They take loads of medicine and go to hospitals because there, besides the medicine, they receive "attention", they feel attended, worthy of being attended, confirmed in having an identity.

We'd like to end this encounter re-thinking two ideas. The first, how does the system regard the VOLUNTEER?

A volunteer is someone who has a deep need to give. Many people suffer coronary illnesses because they haven't been able to fulfill their heart's need to give. Give what I don't need, yes, clothes, food and also, fundamentally, to GIVE in the sense of radiating LOVE, time, work. Only through GIVING by radiating will the world reach the equilibrium it needs... TO RADIATE is to give in such a way that when I give, I give from my BEING. It means discovering who I am, that I need to GIVE (and, fortunately, there are others who need to receive...) This is a different giving and it's different because we give using our bodies and in this "using our bodies" the auras mix...

The second idea: in many of your classes you tell us that to overcome duality, it is necessary to work on our will, get rid of the "I can't" and breathe... How could we relate this idea to all these concepts of health, voluntary work and solidarity that you have spoken about?

In reality, I don't believe that duality is overcome by means of the will; it's overcome by awareness which can lead to unconditional LOVE. One must overcome fears that are the thousand faces of the fear to death. And overcome, too, one other fear that haunts us, and this one is more difficult to explain, it is the fear we have as a personality, fear to cross that virtual space between "What I believe I am and what I AM". This, then, would be the true overcoming of duality. I cannot fear death if I am eternal.

And in this sense, taken from this viewpoint, what would be the grater aims of this solidarity work?

In giving and receiving, each one must overcome adverse situations, and then, in so doing, we all can:

- Understand that the world is LOVE in spite of its masks of terror
- Recover one's identity in spite of violence
- Become FREE, learning how to let air in and out
- Discover that even hostile environments do not impede the possibility of being whole human beings. When one is able to be present
- Learn to welcome each other in spite of social differences

EDITORIAL

Quite some time ago, when I was a little girl, I was afraid of the forest... In the forest, there were wolves, ogres, darkness. There, like Hansel and Grethel, we could get lost... In the stories that our grandparents told us, the forest was full of hidden enemies, traps, dangers, frightening things...

On hearing these stories, we knew that when little Red Riding Hood, Tom Thumb, Bambi or any other character went into the forest, something was going to happen to them.

I remember that there, the story was told more slowly, the narrator's voice got deeper and deeper... I would grab my grandfather's hand and begin to expect the worst. The worst could be a shadow, a loud and strange noise, you could be trapped by a branch or a witch or the wolf would gobble up someone who was distracted. In this fantasy world, these things never happened in our homes, in our neighborhood... The computer didn't exist and on the TV, we watched "Lassie", "Furia" or "Mr. Ed". At that time, the news programs couldn't show us the dead, the thieves, the blood stains with crying mothers demanding justice... They simply showed what happened in places as far away as the fairy tale forest.

At home or on the sidewalk or in the neighborhood, we felt safe. We got together to play, to hide, to make games and toys with what we could find lying around, to find or hide treasures...

Time went by, we grew up and we began to discover that today many children live in places like this forest. Places where one feels on entering – just like the stories – that the worst can happen here and the worst is violence, abuse, hunger, cold, death, pain – a lot of pain...

In this immense Río Abierto Solidarity we decided to enter into the forest of Bajo Flores to meet with the children. To open a space where you could play and express fear, anguish, anger, pain – intensely... And it was wonderful. At first, it was so hard, everything seemed to be getting broken, destroyed... We worked with puppets and not one came out whole: if he wasn't missing his eyes, he was missing his arms, or his nose or his hair. But in each subsequent meeting, the kids kept on expressing what was happening to them. It seemed that the children didn't mind the fact that everything was broken or damaged. Carlos just showed them what was happening, just observe the puppets, and observe themselves, what they felt. Work with the puppets, with one's own body, imitate the whole puppets and the broken puppets, move around with the puppets, with masks, with the drawings, the games, movement. Each one began to speak, to tell us about the shadows of the city-forest where they live, about the branches or witches that trap them in Shanty Town 1-11-14... the drugs, the violent deaths, the daily violence, crime...

And so, with this work, a few Saturdays ago, the idea of reparation appeared. "Can't you take them to be mended?"... Hey, these puppets need to be repaired, it must hurt"... "Take them to a doll hospital to be fixed"... "It's not the same to be broken as to be whole".

And yes, it's true, it's not the same to be whole as to be broken; the thing is to be aware of that.

So now, we are repairing the puppets and in this work, we are discovering the real meaning of the word and the action "to repair".

"Repair", according to the dictionary*, means: "Compose, fix, correct, regard carefully, stop due to some difficulty, shelter... protect, warn, attend, reflect upon..." and according to our experience in the work, RE PAIR can also mean RE-STAND, STAND-UP AGAIN. (*Note of Translator: A Spanish dictionary, defining the word in Spanish. In Spanish a pun on words, on roots).

Thanks to all who collaborate to make this space possible, so that the children can begin to stand up in a safe place in which they can meet to play together and discover the hidden treasure of life and love amid so much pain.

Charito Alonso
Second Year Student