

May 9 2008

Dear friends of PROJIMO and HealthWrights,

It is with deep sadness that we share with you the news that Marcelo Acevedo died on May 7. The cause of death was brain cancer.

Marcelo was one of the founders of PROJIMO and worked with the program as a brace and limb maker for over 20 years. I (David Werner) first met him over 40 years ago, when he was 3 years old, in the tiny village of Caballo de Arriba, high in the Sierra Madre, two days from the closest road. Both his legs were paralyzed by polio. Project Piactla, the village health program I initiated in 1965, helped Marcelo learn to walk with braces and crutches, and since there was no school in his village, arranged for him to study primary school in a larger village of Ajoia, where the health program was based. In his early teens the Piactla team invited him to train as a village health worker, and for several years Marcelo worked as a health promoter in his native, remote village of Caballo. In 1980 when PROJIMO, the Community Based Rehabilitation program run by disabled villagers, grew out of the Piactla health program, Marcelo was one of the new program's founding members. He apprenticed in orthotic and prosthetic shops in Mexico and the US, and with the help over the years of visiting volunteer professionals became a highly skilled brace and limb maker.



For all his skill, Marcelo was always a very humble and caring person. He got along well with everyone, and was a peacemaker when there were disputes. In his work, he always took the time and personal concern to make sure the

braces, limbs, and other assistive equipment he made was well adapted to each individual's particular needs. For me personally, he made leg braces that – because he included me as a partner and equal in the problem solving process -- worked far better for me than those made for me by highly trained professionals in the US.

In his youth Marcelo married a local girl in Ajoya, Maria de Rosario Castro Reyes, known as Chayo. Five sons were born to the couple: each with very different personalities and talents. Marcelo was one of the most loving, gentle, and devoted fathers I have known.

Marcelo leaves behind him his wife, Chayo, and his five sons: Juan Carlos (23), Jossue (19), Marcelito (14), Jose Luis (10), and Rodrigo (5). He will be remembered with love not only by his family, but by scores of those who have worked with him over the years, and by the many hundreds of persons for whom he did his very best to help them overcome difficulties and improve their quality of life.

Marcelo legs were weakened by polio, and technically he was "disabled." But for those of us who had the privilege of knowing him and having him as a friend, he was one of the most caring and exceptionally "able" persons we have known. His arms and hands were as agile and strong as his lower limbs were weak. In his youth he could do a handstand on a horizontal bar. Indeed it was Marcelo who inspired me to draw the sketch to accompany what has become the slogan of PROJIMO: "Look at my strengths, not my weaknesses."

Many of us are better, more able persons because of Marcelo, and he will live on in our hearts for a long time to come.

A request to those who appreciated Marcelo and care about his family.

Marcelo's wife and 5 children are faced with a challenging future. The family is of very limited means. Four of the five of his children are still in school, the youngest in kindergarten. His wife, Chayo, works in a restaurant, at very meager earnings. The older boys work after school and sometimes late into the night. But wages are very low and the cost of food and other necessities keeps rising.

Those of us who are close to Marcelo's family would like to assure that they have enough resources so that the children can stay in school, and have a

chance to learn skills to serve others and sustain a decent quality of life.

Our California-based non-profit organization, HealthWrights (Workgroup for People's Health and Rights) has just set up a special bank account to assist Marcelo's family. Marcelo's wife Chayo will be able to withdraw funds directly with an ATM card, in order to help meet the family's needs.

We are inviting all those who knew and revered Marcelo to contribute to this fund, if possible with a modest amount, however limited, on an ongoing basis. The best way to manage this is for you to give us a credit card, and tell us how much each month you would like to give. At the start of each month, we'll charge the card the amount you authorize. You can tell us to charge it for a certain number of months or years, or leave it open ended until you tell us to stop charging it at some future date. (Given Marcelo's youngest son is only five years old, the longer you can provide support, the better.) If you prefer, you can also send us a check, or authorize a one-time charge on your card.

Thank you for help.

David Werner

PS: We would like to put together a photographically documented record of Marcelo, his family, and his contribution to improve the lives of disabled children and adults. This will be appreciated by all who have warm memories of Marcelo, and especially his family. We hope to make it available in print, and with an ongoing version on the Internet: both in English and Spanish (www.healthwrights.org/marcelo <<http://www.healthwrights.org/marcelo>>) If any of you have photos you are able to contribute, either in print or digital, please send them to:

healthwrights@igc.org

David Werner and Trude Bock

HealthWrights

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