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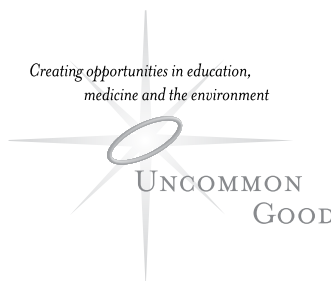
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F O S T E R I N G I D E A L I S M i n E D U C A T I O N , M E D I C I N E a n d L A W

SUMMER 2011 ■ VOLUME 8 ■ NUMBER 1

The Greenspace Groundbreaking: A Community Gathers to Build its Dream for Saving Mother Earth and Her Children

By Marsha Moutrie

On the sunny morning of April 30th, the day the City of Claremont was celebrating Earth Day, Uncommon Good, its partners, and the community gathered to break ground on a potentially planet-saving construction project: Greenspace. It is the first public building in the United States to be constructed of Superadobe – an innovative construction method that protects the environment by using earth from the building site for almost all (90%) of its construction material. Bags filled with the earth, mixed with a small portion of stabilizers, are layered in coils held in place by barbed wire to form thick-walled, graceful earthen shapes.

The project will demonstrate how this modern adaptation of a prehistoric building technique can meet today's urgent environmental imperatives by preserving trees; virtually eliminating the environmental costs of mining, manufacturing and transporting building materials; and otherwise minimizing the environmental degradation that results from "modern" construction methods. When it is complete in the fall of 2012, Greenspace will serve as Uncommon Good's new home for its social services and environmental education.

The ceremony drew a large, diverse and joyful crowd of several hundred gathered to the parking area adjacent to the building site, which had been transformed into a festival ground. Bunches of sunflowers reflected the brilliant morning light; yellow, green and white balloons bobbed in the breeze; banners waived. Uncommon Good families welcomed guests; and college students manned tables displaying brochures about Uncommon Good's service programs, Superadobe construction, environmental issues and the companies designing and building Greenspace: Claremont Environmental Design Group and Oasis Design & Construction. Children played and sampled treats. *[continued on page 4]*



Photo by Ardon Alger

Ground breakers for Uncommon Good's Greenspace: Rev. Sharon Rhodes-Wickett, Claremont United Methodist Church Pastor; Dr. Jerry D. Campbell, Claremont School of Theology President; Sam Pedroza, City of Claremont Mayor; Jonah Swick of Greenspace contractor Oasis Design & Construction; Monica Santizo, Clinic to College Parent Leader; Madelene Santizo of Teen Green; and Nancy Mintie, Uncommon Good Executive Director. Not pictured is Timothy Dillon, Chair of the Capital Campaign Committee of the Uncommon Good Board of Directors.

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Meet One of Our Adopt an Angel Doctors, Edgar Chavez, MD

By Ann Colburn

(Our Adopt an Angel program helps community clinic doctors repay their school loans so that they can afford to serve in nonprofit clinics in poor neighborhoods. Both Dr. Chavez and his clinic partner, Dr. Jaime Lara, are receiving loan repayment assistance through our program.)

Dr. Edgar Chavez's family medical clinic, Universal Community Health Center is, as such clinics should be, warm and welcoming when you come through the door.

An air of calm competency prevails as people wait their turns with Dr. Chavez or his clinic partner, Dr. Jaime Lara. The patients are mostly mothers with small children in their laps and babies in strollers. Twenty-five per cent are uninsured and will pay a modest \$40 fee for their first visit with the doctors; subsequent visits will cost \$30. Too poor to pay even that small amount? "No problem," says Dr. Chavez, a graduate of Stanford Medical School, who likes to take his time with his patients so he can better understand the context and range of their medical problems. Dr. Chavez turns no one away for lack of funds. *[continued on page 6]*



Adopt an Angel physician
Dr. Edgar Chavez

Photo by Ann Colburn

Uncommon Good Groundbreaking Address

By John B. Cobb, Jr.

(Dr. John B. Cobb, internationally renowned theologian, author and professor emeritus of Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University, gave the following address at the Uncommon Good groundbreaking ceremony on April 30, 2011.)

The uncommon good is what the common good most needs. For the most part, the acts we perform for the sake of the common good, though admirable, are in no way proportional to the needs of our communities now. When we think of the longer term the near irrelevance of most of these acts is obvious. We live in the last days of modern global civilization. Much of it will, no doubt, continue for some time in many places, perhaps especially in the United States. But at a deep level, most of us know that it is not sustainable, and that means that it cannot last. Serving the common good, as this civilization has understood it, is better than seeking simply the good of individuals, a goal that this civilization has made far too central. But there is no longer any chance that it will sustain the global civilization as a whole. To say that that civilization is unsustainable is to say that pursuing efforts to sustain it at most slows its demise. That may reduce the enormous suffering inevitably involved in the collapse of a civilization. It is worth doing. We should all do what we can. But service of the common good in this sense is not, at the deepest level, truly working for the common good. It falls short.

So what should those of us who are committed to the common good really be doing? We should be working for the uncommon good. This is the sustainable good that can be created in the midst of our collapsing world. It is putting in place the building blocks of a new, sustainable civilization.

Most of us have barely begun to ask what these can be. When modern agriculture collapses, how can those who survive grow food? When fresh water is globally scarce, what forms of agriculture will be possible? When fisheries collapse and grain-fed meat becomes scarce, what shall we eat? When there is no fuel for motor transportation, how shall we ship goods or travel ourselves? When modern, global finance collapses, how shall we order our local economies? When we no longer have steel and lumber, how shall we build?

Fortunately, we are not blankly ignorant of possible answers to these questions. As the global system of industrial agriculture collapses, we are already developing some local alternatives here and there. When the modern global financial system collapses, a few systems of local currency will already be in place to suggest other possibilities. And a great deal of attention is being given to improving our housing so that at least it will not consume energy at its current rates.

Nevertheless, the great majority of the improvements in housing are operating in the familiar terms of the modern world. The technological improvements are important. They work against the obvious unsustainability of modern patterns of habitat. They reduce the contribution of buildings to the heating of the planet. Enormous gains are possible. But for the most part they do not end the process of the deforestation of the planet. They do not show us how to build when we really decide that reforestation is crucial.

Today we have come to celebrate what may well be an event of major historical significance. That is, we are here for groundbreaking for the kind of building that will be possible and functional in a truly sustainable civilization. This building models what it means to serve the true, long-term common good by an act of uncommon good.

This is the first public Superadobe building in the United States. When one creates something quite radically different, there are always chances that mistakes may be made, that the hopes for the building will not all be realized. Does that mean that we should withhold celebration until the building has proved itself?

I think not. Even if it turns out that this building cannot as such serve as model for tens of thousands of others, that further innovations and adjustments are needed, this will not detract from the importance of what is happening here today. We can appreciate the gradual improvements of the sorts of buildings that have dominated the modern landscape, but changes of that kind do not give us the new start that is



Dr. John B. Cobb, Jr., addresses the guests at Uncommon Good's groundbreaking.

Photo by Ardon Alger



Tongva tribal representatives Julia Bogany, Mark Acuna and Kimberly Morales Johnson perform a traditional Native American blessing ceremony for the Greenspace land.

Photo by Elizabeth Preciado

required to build a new civilization. We cannot be sure that this experiment will turn out to be the one that does in fact point the way to the building of the new civilization. But we can be sure that this is just the kind of experiment that is utterly necessary if we are to build now for a sustainable civilization that may arise in the ashes of the dying one.

It would be quite wrong to insist that all building for the future sustainable civilization must follow this model. If our hopes are realized the new civilization we hope will emerge will be less, not more, homogeneous than the modern one that is ending. But it would be quite right to say that, like this one, it should be based on truly radical thinking about what is possible and needed in such a hoped for civilization. It should not be less original or less daring.

I personally had nothing to do with the decision of the Claremont United Methodist Church to make this land available to Uncommon Good for the purpose of constructing this building. But as a constituent of this congregation, I take great pride in this. This, too, is an uncommon good in the service of the true common good to which all our churches should be devoted. Although our Christian churches, and especially the Protestant ones, have succumbed to the mindset of the modern world to a great extent, there remains within us, at our core, an element of resistance. We are, at least to some small extent, countercultural. We share responsibility for some of the thinking and understanding that have guided modernity on its path to self-destruction. But we have not given ourselves entirely to that thinking and understanding. As its apocalyptic consequences unfold, I hope that our deeper commitments will show themselves again and again in acts that, at least in the modern culture, express uncommon good.

From where we stand today we can look eastward to the Claremont School of Theology. I have been retired for twenty years and claim no credit for what is happening there. But just as Uncommon Good is creating the kind of building that fits with the true needs for the future; so also, I think the university project of the School of Theology is the kind of education that fits with the true need for the future. I am proud to be a part of that institution as well, if only in an emeritus capacity.

I am part of a group that is planning a conference in October. Bill McKibben will give a lecture in the distinguished speakers series at Big Bridges on October 27. The next two days we will hold a conference at the Claremont Presbyterian church. We will be grieving the dying of modern civilization, but our focus will be

on celebrating the beginnings of a new civilization that we find all around us. I have discovered that the City of Claremont as a whole is deeply committed to moves of uncommon good for the sake of the real common good. Uncommon Good, the United Methodist Church, and the Claremont School of Theology are by no means alone. Sustainable Claremont works with us and does so with the support of the city as a whole.

There are many reasons for discouragement and even despair. Our national government has had a chance since the seventies to lead the world away from its

disastrous course, but it has in fact only speeded the modern world toward its self-destruction. Our current leadership in Washington is worse than irrelevant when we ask the deeper questions about the common good. But globally there are loci of far more positive responses. And even in the United States there are, in this regard, what George Bush sought, a thousand points of light. One of them, one of the brightest, is right here in Claremont. And the clearest, most consistent expression of this spirit is Uncommon Good, under the leadership of Nancy Mintie. It is for me a great honor to be allowed to take part in this truly important part of its work. ☑

Our Graduates Thank the Rose Hills Foundation and the Ahmanson Foundation



Photo by Elizabeth Preciado

Some of our Clinic to College students who are graduating from our Clinic to College program and going on to college. Back row: Jovanny Gallardo, Roger Adame, Edgar Rodriguez. Front row: Alexandra Marquez, Karina Mendez, Esmeralda Garcia, Marisa Bran.

Uncommon Good has received generous grants of \$50,000 each from The Ahmanson Foundation and the Rose Hills Foundation. These foundations' faithful support of our Clinic to College over the years has helped it to keep its unbroken record of having every one of the graduates of the program accepted to college. This year's graduates include the following students, their colleges, and their scholarships:

- Roger Adame, University of La Verne, Presidential Scholar
- Marisa Bran, Mount St. Mary's College, Carondelet Scholar
- Jovanny Gallardo, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona
- Esmeralda Garcia, Citrus College
- Carlos Llantop, Sacramento College
- Alexandra Marquez, University of La Verne, Trustees Scholar
- Karina Mendez, Pratt Institute College of Art & Design, Merit Scholarship
- Edgar Rodriguez, College of the Holy Cross, University Scholar and Esperanza Award
- Pablo Zendejas, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Other colleges to which our students have been accepted include UCLA, UC Irvine, UC Riverside, Mills College, Lewis & Clark, University of New Mexico, the University of San Francisco, St. John's University and Cal State Fullerton.

We offer our heartfelt thanks on behalf of our successful students and their families to the Rose Hills and Ahmanson Foundations. ☑

Uncommon Good Mentor Starts Music Mentoring Program

Gabriel Friedman, a neuroscience major at Pomona College, has been a devoted mentor in Uncommon Good's Clinic to College program for the past three years. In addition, he has been teaching piano lessons to two girls in our program whose family could not afford music lessons.

An aspiring doctor, Gabriel was inspired to create a music mentoring program for our students last summer when he learned that as few as ten music lessons can produce measurable brain development in children. According to Gabriel, "A lot of preliminary research in children has suggested a wide variety of transfer benefits from music learning, including improvements in spatial, verbal and mathematical performance, and it is thought that the impact may be even greater in low socioeconomic settings."

Gabriel has been awarded a \$10,000 grant from the Donald A. Strauss Public Service Scholarship Foundation to create a program in which he will purchase instruments and then, along with his fellow students, give free music lessons to the young people in our mentoring program. A component of the program will include investigating the cognitive effects of music lessons in the lives of our students. Gabriel plans to write his senior thesis on the developmental effects of musical instrument instruction in low socioeconomic settings, in the hopes of encouraging other programs to bring music to disadvantaged youngsters.

"As with medicine," he noted, "music requires innumerable hours of individual practice and study, but what matters most in the end is the way it's shared with other people." ☑



Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Uncommon Good mentor, Gabriel Friedman, with his mentee, Guillermo.

The Greenspace Groundbreaking (cont)

[continued from page 1]

Adult guests discussed renderings depicting the project and explaining its many environmental features. Volunteers interviewed the participants and documented the event on film. The Rodriguez family band entertained before the ceremony with 8-year-old Norma Rodriguez making her public debut as a musician.

A Simple And Profoundly Important Project

Uncommon Good Board Chair Tim Dillon began the ceremony by explaining that the project is being funded through a grant from the Reformulated Gasoline settlement Fund. Dillon described Greenspace as providing a model for using wall thickness and outside ventilation to manage sunlight and achieve passive cooling, and for utilizing sunlight to generate the energy necessary for building operations.

Mr. Dillon introduced Nancy Mintie, Uncommon Good's Executive director. She welcomed the crowd and explained that it took the formation of a partnership to move this ambitious and novel project from concept to groundbreaking. The United Methodist Church is permitting the use of its land for the project. The Claremont School of Theology also is allowing the use of part of its property, which will be used to create a bioswale to catch storm water run off. The Gabrieleno/ Tongva Band of Mission Indians, which first inhabited the site seven thousand years ago, also are partners in the project, contributing guidance about native plants for the landscaping and living in harmony with the Earth. Students from the Claremont Colleges are monitoring and reporting on the environmental impacts of construction. Ms Mintie thanked Claremont Mayor Sam Pedroza and former city council member Linda Elderkin, who backed the idea for the project when others were skeptical. Ms Mintie also paid tribute to legendary environmental architect Nader Khalili, who invented Superadobe construction, and to Cal Earth, which fosters its use.

Mintie recounted the genesis of the idea for the project. After years of working to fight poverty, Uncommon Good had come to the realization that protecting the Earth and assisting the needy are inseparable goals because environmental degradation and disasters disproportionately impact poor people. She described the project as "something simple yet profound" that will "embrace a new and yet old way to live, sharing and preserving natural resources as did Native Americans, honoring and protecting Mother Earth whose wild beauty enraptures our souls."

Ms Mintie finished her remarks by introducing her personal "hero" Dr. John Cobb, whose book [For the Common Good](#) inspired both the name of Uncommon Good and its commitment to environmental justice for the poor.

A Day Of Historic Importance

Mr. Cobb hailed the groundbreaking as "a day of historic importance" in the context of a time when mankind's now global society will inevitably "overshoot" available resources and fall into a time of collapse. He provided an historic example to illustrate the danger: hundreds of years ago, explorers sailing the globe carried rabbits on board for food. One crew left a few rabbits on a small grassy island, thinking that when they sailed back the rabbits would have multiplied, thus creating more food for the voyage home. Instead, on the return voyage, the sailors found a barren island, stripped of all vegetation and littered with desiccated rabbit corpses.

Likewise, various human civilizations have flourished unsustainably, eventually exhausting local natural resources. The ensuing collapse forced each to relocate and reconstitute in order to survive. But now, Dr. Cobb explained, human society is global. "There is no place to go... We are in the late stage of the overshooting that can lead to collapse, and the signs of collapse are all around us." Dr. Cobb urged that humans must stop cutting trees, and stop transporting building materials. Thus, he characterized Greenspace is a vital experiment that will help create the foundation for the new local civilizations that will emerge from the collapse and enable mankind to live sustainably. Dr. Cobb concluded by predicting that, given the extremity of the global environmental crisis and the solution that Greenspace will exemplify: "The Claremonter most likely to be remembered in the future is Nancy Mintie."

Prayer For The Earth And A Blessing For The Project

Reverend Sharon Rhodes Wickett spoke next on behalf of Uncommon Good's partner and benefactor, the Claremont United Methodist Church. She commented on the perfect alignment between the church's and Uncommon Good's philosophy and spoke of Mother Earth as our source of life and hope. Her prayer asked God

to enable our work to honor His earth and attain "a vision of love, joy and justice" through "friendship with creation."

Tongva tribal elder, Mark Acuna, whose Tongva name means "Walking Earth Keeper," echoed and amplified the theme of harmony with creation. He explained that his Tongva ancestors lived on the site eons ago. To them, it was the sacred "place below the snowy mountain," where they lived in harmony with nature. He and other tribal elders blessed the partnership's effort to return to that relationship with the Earth in the Tongva way: burning sage in a basket, fanning the pungent smoke to the north, south, east and west, and calling upon the Sky Father, Earth Mother, the gods of the Sun and Moon and the Morning and Evening Star, and the Great Coyote, who laughs and interrupts human endeavor, to all smile upon the Greenspace project.

The Community Begins Building The Dream

After the blessings, the first bags were filled with earth shoveled by the young and the old, the Uncommon Good families, spiritual and civic leaders, Native Americans, and students.

The inspirational idea for this project — fusing ancient ways of building with green technology to protect both the Earth and its children — had united a community. Now the community was building Greenspace. In this sacred place beneath the snowy mountain the work, so long imagined, had begun. 📌



Guests at Uncommon Good's ground breaking.



Uncommon Good Board Members Timothy Dillon and Suzanne Hall welcome our guests.

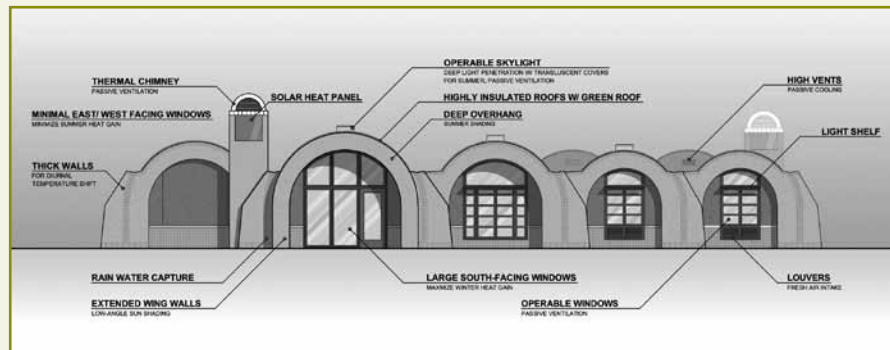
Photo by Elizabeth Preciado

Photo by Ardon Alger

Giving Opportunities for the Uncommon Good Greenspace

The construction of Greenspace has been funded through a grant from the Reformulated Gasoline Settlement Fund. Created as a result of an antitrust class action, the purpose of the Fund is to achieve clean air and fuel efficiency benefits for California consumers.

However, Uncommon Good needs the continued support of the community for its ongoing programs. Below is a list of ways that you can help. In 2011, any donation of \$100 or more will also give you the opportunity to choose one of the ways below in which you would like to have your name, or the name of your family or loved one, inscribed at Greenspace.



Claremont Environmental Design group rendering of Greenspace

1. Contribute to the Clinic to College education program. (\$50)
2. Help the Adopt an Angel program to support young doctors and dentists serving in low income communities. (\$50)
3. Contribute to the Green and Gold job creation fund. (\$50)
4. Support the development of the Pomona Valley Urban Agriculture Initiative. (\$50)
5. Contribute to the environmental education fund. (\$50)
6. Sponsor a child to create a tile with his/her environmental painting or message that will be displayed in the garden. The child could be someone in your own family, or you could pay for a child whose family cannot afford to have him or her participate. (4 inch tile: \$100, 6 inch tile: \$125)
7. Have one's name inscribed on the Building Donor "Tree of Life" mosaic wall. The leaves would be different colors and sizes with each color/size representing a donation level. (\$100 to \$199=green; \$200 to \$299=yellow; \$300 to \$399=orange; \$400 to \$499=red; \$500 to \$599=silver; gold leaves would be for gifts of \$600 or above.
8. Pay for an educational computer. (\$1,600)
9. Sponsor the education amphitheatre which would have a plaque bearing your name. (\$2,000)
10. Sponsor the following landscape plant communities in return for a plaque bearing your name:
 - The Valley Sage Scrub Chaparral: California Buckwheat, California Sagebrush, Basketbush, White Sage, California Lilac, Coffeeberry, Golden Yarrow, Scarlet Bugler (\$2,000)
 - The Canyon Chaparral: Canyon Yucca, Bush Poppy, Manzanita, Redtwig Dogwood, Mountain Coyote Mint, Ceanothus, California Buckwheat, Cleavland Sage, Penstemon (\$2,000)
 - The Valley Grassland: California Buckeye, California Fuchsia, Idaho Fescue, Deer Grass, Meadow Penstemon, Sky Lupine, Yarrow (\$2,000)
 - The Seasonal Wetland: California Rushes, Torrent Sedge, Delta Verbena, Yerba Mansa, California Thule, Annual Golden Monkeyflower, Owl's Clover (\$3,000)
 - The Bird, Butterfly & Bee Corridor: Mix of perennial shrubs and annual wildflowers, Desert Encelia, Seaside Daisy, Chuparosa, Manzanita, Giant Wild Rye, California Poppy, Monkeyflower, Penstemon Sp., Blue-Eyed Grass (\$4,000)
 - The Oak Woodland: Coast Live Oak, Western Redbud, Toyon, Evergreen Currant, Salvia Sp. (\$5,000)
11. Sponsor a garden bench with your name or quote inscribed on it. (\$6,000)
12. Sponsor one of the two landscaped water detention/percolation basins. (\$6,000)
13. Any of the above options dedicated in memory or in honor of someone.

Your Name: _____

Your Address: _____

Your telephone number, in case we have a question about your order.
Your number will not be used for any other purpose:

Amount: _____

Desired inscription, if applicable: _____

Please circle the giving opportunity that you have chosen and submit this completed form with your check to:
Uncommon Good, 435 Berkeley Ave.,
Claremont, CA 91711.



Photo by Ardon Alger

Rev. Ignatio Castuera, Pastor of Trinity United Methodist Church and a young community member help Jonah Swick of Oasis Design & Construction to fill a superadobe earth bag to begin construction of Greenspace.

Meet One of Our Adopt an Angel Doctors (con't)

[continued from page 1]



Photo by Ann Colburn

Adopt an Angel physician Jaime Lara, who is Dr. Chavez's business partner at their Universal Community Health Center.

Dr. Chavez's clinic sits in a modest strip mall, just blocks away from where he grew up from the age of 12, in South Los Angeles. Formerly called South-Central, this area is better known for drive-by shootings, gangs and graffiti, the impoverished, the underemployed (and since the financial crisis, the unemployed) than it is for low-cost community health clinics. People here are really poor and most live in homes without what most of us consider the bare essentials: a working kitchen with food in the cupboards, a working toilet and bathtub or shower. They often share their small houses or apartments with other families.

Dr. Edgar Chavez earns your trust immediately. He excelled at Stanford Medical School and in his residency at White Memorial Hospital in East Los Angeles, and could have practiced anywhere. Kaiser offered him a job at the first interview; he gave the offer some thought. After all, a guaranteed income, a pension plan, hours you could count on. What wasn't there to like?

The answer for Edgar lies in his past, before he lived in Los Angeles, before he even lived in this country.

Edgar was born in 1976 in El Salvador, which in 1980 entered a twelve-year brutal civil war. When he was three, his mother immigrated legally to the United State to find work to support her family, leaving Edgar in his grandparents' care. "I didn't really remember my mother until I met her again in the US when I was six," he says.

His mother remembered him, however, and worried about him, especially after the war began. When he was six, she encouraged the family to find a way to help him come to the US. Immigration laws were different in those days, and an uncle was able to procure a visa for his own son. Because Edgar's mother was so eager for Edgar to be with her, the uncle offered to take Edgar in place of his son.

Edgar and two of his uncles rode a bus as far as Texas - safe enough, Edgar's uncles thought, to be "home free" - but something or someone tipped off the immigration officials that Edgar was not the boy named on the visa. Both uncles were arrested and sent to hard labor camps and, since there was no juvenile detention facility, six-year-old Edgar ended up in the women's jail.

He was released after three or four months to his mother, who was in the US legally. The family now had a stepfather and things were looking more stable. Edgar gained a little brother, born on US soil, and went to school, but only for a few months before his family moved again.

Edgar's grandmother, living in Mexico, became ill, and the family took what they thought would be a quick trip to Cuernavaca to look after her; they ended up staying six years. The industry in the region was sugar cane production, so they worked in cane for a while. Edgar's mother also had some nursing train-

ing, so he spent some time with her in a local farmacia, where he watched as the pharmacists diagnosed and treated their customers. Edgar decided that he would like to be a doctor, a real doctor, when he grew up. His decision was strengthened by an incident he witnessed in the pharmacy.

One day a mother brought in her three-year-old daughter for treatment. The little girl was running a fever, so one of the pharmacists offered the mother a pill. The mother gave the pill to her daughter, who began to choke on it. The customers and pharmacists all watched the child struggle for breath, not knowledgeable enough to do anything to help her. No one knew how to dislodge the pill. The child turned blue and, before everyone's horrified eyes, died on the pharmacy floor.

That incident triggered in Edgar a desire to help. Why, he wondered, could no one help her? He felt helpless watching the adults unable to save this tiny girl.

Working in the cane fields was back-breaking work for his parents. Desperate to better their lives, they decided to return to the US.

But this time, things were different. Mrs. Chavez's exit visa had expired and she now had a daughter, born in Mexico. The family could not return legally to the US. They came anyway, all five of them.

The trip was not easy, since it involved walking across desert and fording the river. They were caught twice, put in jail and sent back to Mexico, but later returned to try again. The third time they made it and went first to San Diego. Edgar was 12.

The family had nothing but the clothes on their back. Their first night in San Diego, they slept in the doorway of a church. In the morning, some passers-by saw them and drove off, returning a short time later with a McDonalds breakfast for the whole family. Edgar still remembers this kindness as a signal of hope in his new country.

Settled in a small apartment in Los Angeles with several other relatives and their families, Edgar went to school immediately, but his first foray into American schools was "tough," he says. Edgar, who spoke no English, was thrown into English-speaking classes. It was total immersion from day one. Determined to crack the English language, he made himself watch English-language cartoons on TV. It took about a year and a half for him to become comfortable with English, but he succeeded.

His math skills, in the meantime, were strong. Encouraged by his math teacher and his mother, Edgar soon grew to love math and school. "School became the thing for me," he says. His love for science also developed quickly.

When he was in high school, Edgar and his family became legal residents and then US citizens. An incident during his immigration physical expanded his idea of doctoring to include a community health clinic for "people like me," the minority communities, the underserved, the poor.

At 16, Edgar was sent to a community clinic in South-Central for his immigration physical exam and vaccinations. "I was horrified by how dirty the clinic was," he says. "I was put in a filthy examination room and asked to remove my clothes. Then I waited for the doctor. He finally opened the door and stood in the doorway just looking me up and down. Then he left. And never came back.



Patients of Dr. Chavez and Dr. Lara

Photo by Ann Colburn



Photo by Ann Colburn

Dr. Lara examines a patient.

I waited again. A nurse came in and told me to dress. I told her I hadn't had my physical, but she said the doctor had 'seen' me and that I could go.

"I decided I wanted to be the antithesis of that doctor. I wanted to really care for people."

Edgar attended Manual Arts High School in South Los Angeles, where he excelled, especially in math and science, and was accepted into the One Voice College Scholar's program, a competitive local college guidance program.

Through the counseling program at One Voice, Edgar applied to and received almost a full-ride scholarship to Colgate University. Unfortunately, Colgate's support system for minority students was minimal. Frustrated that no one was offering him any guidance into medical school, Edgar scrambled to transfer to Pomona College in Claremont, California, where the counseling support turned out to be just what he needed. He had a lot of catching up to do, which he regrets kept him from having a broader college experience, but he learned the real meaning of, "You really have to work for what you want." It's a lesson he never forgets.

After graduation, he used a gap year to better his MCAT scores, apply to medical schools, and earn some money. He answered a help wanted ad for a "health education worker," where he learned about community clinics from the ground up. His time as a health education worker extended Edgar's curiosity, his flexibility and his inventiveness.

Edgar had no training as a health educator and had never worked in a clinic. His job sent him to parent centers at public schools in Pacoima, an impoverished area in north Los Angeles County. Teaching himself on the fly, Edgar set up classes on parenting topics, well baby care, STDs, contraception, immunizations, and teenage pregnancy. He did grass roots community outreach and health screenings in schools and churches.

He was amazed that so many people didn't know how to access health care clinics; he saw more than a little domestic violence, helped several women out of abusive situations, and worked with nurse practitioners in prenatal education and care.

One nurse practitioner was so impressed with Edgar that she hired him to become a community health organizer. He worked from 7:30 am – 4:00 pm, five days a week. But, with medical school in his future, he still needed another job.

At this time, cheap PCs became available for the general public. He saw an ad for a computer repair specialist, thought, "I can do that," and bought a three-inch thick computer repair manual to teach himself how computers worked. He answered the ad and was soon working for a professor of economics at a local

community college. The professor, like Edgar, had become fascinated by the new technology and repaired PCs on the side. He asked Edgar to choose one of three broken computers to repair as his job qualification test. If Edgar could diagnose and repair the computer, he would hire him. Edgar aced the test and got the job. He worked this job from 4:30 pm – 8:00 pm, fixing computers at night after his day job in the health clinic.

His interest in and facility with computers grew over the years and has stayed with him through medical school, his residency and into his own clinic.

During his gap year, Edgar wrote an initial application to 14 medical schools; when he was invited by ten schools to write a second application, he chose to apply to eight. He also worked as a research assistant at the University of Pennsylvania during the summer before applying.

UC San Diego wanted him right away because of his research experience, but Edgar didn't want to go into research. He wanted to help communities as a family health doctor. At the Stanford interview, Edgar was impressed by the university's commitment to diversity, so Stanford was his pick. He loved Stanford, did well and even considered a specialty in urology for a short time, but his old dream held true. He took a lot of family medicine courses and fell in love with the field. His experience in the San Fernando Valley had given him a real taste for it and he continued to dream of opening his own non-profit clinic one day.

White Memorial Hospital in Los Angeles was Edgar's choice for a residency because the hospital was encouraging residents to go into family medicine in low-income communities, even offering grants for residents willing to do so. The residency was patient-centered and dealt with many battered women, so Edgar's prior experience was helpful.

Edgar had a problem, however. His handwriting was almost illegible. His college access program, One Voice, gave him a grant to buy a laptop, and he took all his clinical notes on it. White Memorial staff noticed and used Edgar's methods to begin their own electronic note-taking plan. Today there is a big push to get all doctors to use computers, to network those computers and to move to electronic patient records. Edgar and White Memorial were ahead of the curve. White Memorial now gives all its new residents laptops and expects electronic record keeping. So does Edgar in his own clinic. He continues to sit on a committee at White Memorial to expand the network to include all local community doctors.

At the end of his residency, when Kaiser Permanente offered him a job, the interview depressed him. "It felt like going to jail," Edgar says. "I would have been institutionalized. There would have been limits on what I could and couldn't do. I felt like going to Kaiser would have been cheating myself."

Dr. Hector Castillo, a physician four years his senior, approached him. He was working at a community clinic near Main and Washington, Edgar's old neighborhood. Would Edgar be interested in joining him? White Memorial offered Edgar one of its year-long salary grants. It was a perfect fit. A short time later, the doctor who owned the clinic, for whom Edgar and Dr. Castillo worked, retired and wanted to sell the clinic. Edgar and his colleague decided to try to buy it.

Through the White Memorial credit union, they borrowed \$300,000. Edgar still had medical school loans to pay back, was married and had a young daughter. In the end, he found himself about \$30,000 short of being able to swing the deal. Edgar's wife, Jackie, told him that she had been putting her own salary money aside to use in charity work for her church. She actually had \$30,000 to loan him! Her deal was that members of the congregation who could not afford medical care would come to Edgar and he would pay down his loan with each church member he treated. He has already paid back his loan.

Within a few weeks of finalizing the deal, Dr. Castillo's plans changed and he had to bow out. Edgar now found himself six months out of his residency alone in his clinic. He had no business experience, but his electronic expertise helped him set up e-records and the rest he has figured out, just as he did when he took up computer repair. His brother, George Chavez, who studied business in college, has now come to work in the clinic on the business side and a new partner, Dr. Jaime Lara, also a White Memorial resident who has received a community grant, has joined them, too.

Edgar has embarked on his dream, but not without overcoming challenges that would stop a person with less heart, less courage, less resiliency and less creative intelligence. One of his biggest challenges arrived with the birth of his daughter, Sophia. Now six, she was born with cystic fibrosis. When she gets even the slightest cold, Edgar cannot go home for fear microbes picked up from his patients will tax her fragile immune system. He stays with Dr. Lara, his clinic partner, during those too-frequent episodes.

It is characteristic of Edgar that his reaction to Sophia's illness is, "It has helped me become a better physician. I can look at things from a parent's perspective." ■