

him. He had so much honey, he said, that it was far too much for his family's use, even with bread and honey and honey cakes and the thousand uses and recipes they had tried. So he sold the surplus and, with the money, bought more hives and more bees. The next year he sold even more honey and did the same again; after a while, the bees kept him too busy for railway work, so he gave up his job and became a professional beekeeper. Eventually, he was the proud owner of a thousand hives.

After a number of successful years, he sold his bee business and was set for the rest of his days. And that's how he retired early. He grinned again and looked very happy. Then his expression

changed. He looked momentarily sad, wistful, as if he were talking of a lost love. He sighed and then he started to tell me how wonderful the bees were and how he looked after them, and his face took on a beatific expression.

"You know," he said, "I loved those bees. On a warm sunny day I would go to the hives and watch them fly in and out and then I would lie on my back in the grass and look up at them. Hundreds and hundreds of them flying around, this way and that way, carrying honey, carrying pollen, busy, busy, busy. And you know..." (here he rolled his eyes and, suddenly, grinned a wide grin that revealed a couple of gold teeth) "...you know, I would lie on my back in the

grass, and look up at them and think, 'How wonderful, thousands and thousands of bees, and each and every one of them working for Mr. Mavrocki!'"

I can still imagine him lying on his back in the long grass laughing at the world, his teeth flashing in the bright Canadian sun, and all around him flying to and fro and humming and buzzing gently as they went, thousands and thousands of busy yellow bees and every one wearing on its back a little yellow M.

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Lifeworks

Eye on Uraba

A family practice clinic in Ottawa's Lowertown is not where you'd expect to learn about armed conflict in Colombia. But for Kevin Pottie, assistant professor of family medicine at the University of Ottawa, a busy health care facility whose clientele includes diplomats, artists and refugees is as good a place as any to promote internationalist perspectives. By the broadest definition, Pottie remarks, health comes "from opening things up." With some technical help from the National Gallery of Canada, a stone's-throw away, Pottie has transformed the main hallway of the Elisabeth Bruyère Family Medicine Centre into "The Bruyère Gallery," a place to reflect on cultural and societal determinants of health in our own communities and around the world.

The gallery's first installation, on view in November 1999, was photographer Ian Brown's *Lost Between River and Sky*. These 36 black-and-white images document the Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders (MSF) project in Uraba, northwest Colombia, a region of waterlogged jungle adjacent to the Panamanian border and separated from the rest of Colombia by mountains. There are no roads in Uraba; the only



Ian Brown, *Lost Between River and Sky*. "Riosucio, where MSF has their field base, is the most strategic prize in the Uraba conflict. Whoever controls Riosucio controls the Atrato River basin and the region."

link to the outside world is the Rio Atrato, and travel within the region is by dugout canoe along the river's many tributaries. Uraba's strategic importance for arms and drug trafficking partly explains why, at the time the MSF project was be-

gun in 1997, the region could be described as "the most violent area in the most violent country in the world." The region is beset by armed conflict involving four distinct guerilla fronts, the paramilitary and state forces.

Over 1 million Colombians have been displaced by conflict. Colombia has the fourth largest internally displaced population in the world; in 1998 alone, 300 000 people were forcibly displaced: this is equivalent to 8 families every hour. Given little or no support from government, these people lack access to food, shelter, sanitation, health care and education.¹

In Uraba, MSF mobile brigades brought basic health care, including malaria diagnosis, treatment and prevention, to 20 000 people in 26 villages before acute security risks forced the suspension of the project in August 1999. The hospital at Riosucio, the only medical facility in the lower Atrato basin, has one doctor for a population of 30 000 and is often without power, fuel, refrigeration and supplies. Local staff refuse to travel upriver for fear of being abducted or killed. Uraba's villages are subject to repeated incursions by armed groups whose identities and allegiances are not always clear; when one group moves on another moves in, meting out violent retribution to anyone suspected of sympathizing with an opposing faction.

Neutrality is crucial to the people of Uraba, and this is respected by the reticence of Brown's photographs, which



Ian Brown, *Lost Between River and Sky*. "Peace communities have been created to try and protect the civilian population. These communities impose rules that help maintain their neutrality amidst the conflict. Persons with guns are not allowed and community members cannot support any of the armed groups. It is a step to return people to the land of origin and a sign of hope for many displaced people."

represent a political situation without pointing the finger at any particular group. A soldier's uniform is a synecdoche for terror; a lump of melting ice sums up the limitations of material cir-

cumstance. These are not images from which one instinctively turns away; one wants to look at them more closely, to read between the lines, especially in view of the disjunction between the serenity of many of the photographs and the basic information provided in the captions.

The Bruyère Gallery provides an opportunity for a community to become more involved in its local health care centre. And, in a subtle way, its focus on international issues redefines the community it serves. For populations living in conflict zones, some increment of security comes from increased visibility in the world's eye. As MSF workers resume their project in Uraba, it is our responsibility to keep watching. The optimistic view is that every bit of awareness helps, even when it is cultivated in unexpected places.

Anne Marie Todkill
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Reference

1. Deng F. Don't overlook Colombia's humanitarian crisis. *Christian Science Monitor* [Boston]; 1999 Oct 6.



Ian Brown, *Lost Between River and Sky*. "Ice is invaluable, especially during brigades. Without appropriate temperatures the vaccines will spoil and become useless. Enough ice must be transported by the MSF team to maintain these cool temperatures for up to six days. A formidable task when working deep in the jungle."