

Cubans rescued by fishing crew in nick of time

By Serge F. Kovaleski=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

NASSAU, Bahamas — Some 45 miles off Ragged Island in the Bahamas, the crew of about 70 men had just finished dinner and was preparing to move its fleet of three fishing boats to prepare for the next day's lobster dive when crew members spotted a small light shimmering in the distance.

Several hundred yards away someone was waving a flashlight in what was a silent cry for help from nine Cuban refugees, including four baseball stars and a coach, whose dilapidated 18-foot boat was ankle-deep with water and sinking in the darkness.

"If they had been five minutes later getting to us, they definitely would not have made it. They were taking on water fast," Joshua Bastian, 39, captain of one of the boats that rescued the defectors last Friday night, said in an interview Monday. "The first thing they said was, 'We need help. We need help badly.'"

The rescue capped more than a week of fears, false reports and rumors that the Cubans had been missing at sea for 10 days before supposedly landing on the shores of the Dominican Republic. For much of last week, U.S. Coast Guard aircraft and volunteers — Cuban exile pilots from Miami — conducted search missions amid fears that the refugees had perished in the rough waters of the Florida Strait or the Windward Passage.

In fact, the nine men, who reportedly listened to radio reports about their fate, had been hiding in the basement of a house in the town of Holguin in eastern Cuba and in a nearby network of underground tunnels in an effort to evade Cuban authorities. They were waiting for inclement weather to pass so they could sail, and did not depart Cuba until Friday morning.

Although a few of the Cubans —

who had set out with little more than fresh water — had been overcome with seasickness, they all appeared to be healthy and were euphoric to have been picked up after more than 17 hours at sea and to discover they had made it to the Bahamas, Bastian recalled.

"They did not eat at all that night because they were too happy," he said, noting that the next morning they had a breakfast of ham and tuna sandwiches and milk. "They did not know where they had been going. They had just been guessing because they had no navigational equipment," he said. The Bahamian fisherman said that the baseball players and the coach described the four other Cuban men as the crew members of their single-engine boat.

The following day, one of the fishing vessels took the defectors to tiny Ragged Island, the southernmost Bahamian island, 80 miles off the northern coast of Cuba, where they were turned over to local authorities and moved to the Carmichael Detention Center in Nassau on Sunday.

"When we saw (the fishermen), we became ecstatic and started giving thanks to God and all the saints," one of the baseball players, Jorge Luis Toca, 23, said Monday from behind a fence at the detention facility.

Besides Toca, a first baseman, the players are catcher Angel Lopez, 25; second baseman Jorge Diaz Olano, 23; and Michael Jova, 17, a shortstop from Cuba's junior Olympic team. The coach is Enrique China, 41. All five were banned from baseball on the Caribbean island nine months ago because Cuban authorities suspected they were planning to defect.

On Sunday, Miami-based sports agent Joe Cubas, a Cuban American, flew here in a chartered plane carrying legal documents, including requests for humanitarian visas, and clothing for the detainees.

Rene Guim, a spokesman for Cubas, who has assisted a number of athletes from Communist-ruled Cuba

in obtaining lucrative contracts in the United States, said the priority is to prevent the repatriation of the nine refugees and to get them to a "safe haven," which in a country such as the United States, Costa Rica or Nicaragua. Several other sports agents have also shown up at the detention center here and are seeking visas from other countries for the refugees.

Complicating matters is an agreement that the Bahamas has with Cuba to return refugees. Furthermore, a myriad of U.S. and Bahamian immigration laws, as well as Major League Baseball regulations, would have to be dealt with before any of the defectors could sign with a U.S. team.

Three months ago, however, Cuban pitcher Orlando Hernandez, who also had been barred from playing baseball in Cuba and whose half-brother Livan pitches for the Florida Marlins, fled to the Bahamas by boat and soon after arriving was allowed to go to Costa Rica. He has since signed a \$6 million contract to pitch for the New York Yankees.

"We were suspended from baseball because we were not trustworthy. We were possible immigrants," Toca said of the four players on the boat. "If we returned we would be jailed. Cuban security was always after us. We would like asylum or to go to a third country."

In the meantime, Toca, as well as other detainees at the detention center, complained about what they described as poor living conditions, particularly for the 11 children held there. "We are sleeping on the floor, there are no mattresses, the food is no good, there is no medical attention and there is not enough milk for the children," Toca said.

Phone calls to the Bahamian Immigration Department were not returned. The four other defectors rescued on Friday were identified as Ernesto Perez Toma, 28; Giovanni Pena Gonzalez, 25; Pedro Ferrer Chacon, 30; and Jose Roche, 27.

Fund draws criticism by using Diana's name on margarine

By T.R. Reid=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

LONDON — Memories of the elegant Princess Diana tend to evoke images of fabulous jewelry and floor-length gowns, of long limousines and lavish balls, of champagne glistening in crystal goblets beneath sparkling chandeliers.

But margarine? In plastic tubs?

The charity fund established as a memorial to the Princess of Wales — already under fire here for commercializing Diana's memory — expanded the late princess' legacy Monday by announcing its first consumer product endorsement. The recipient of this honor is Flora margarine, a British brand previously best known for its slogan "High in Essential Polyunsaturates."

Flora on Monday began selling its basic margarine in white plastic tubs bearing a large purple replica of the signature "Diana." The package also bears a logo indicating an official endorsement from the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, the charity set up to handle the flood of money contributed in the princess' honor since her death in an auto accident in Paris in August.

In return, the margarine maker will contribute proceeds from the sale of the special packages to the Diana Fund. Further, this year's running of Flora margarine's annual London marathon will be turned into a fundraiser for the charity. Flora estimated Monday that the charity will net about \$2 million from the arrangement.

Diana, the divorced wife of Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, was by far the most popular member of Britain's royal family when she was alive. Since her death the national esteem for "Princess Di" has approached religious fervor. Seven months after her death, newspapers here still find ways to get her picture on the front page several times a week, and anything bearing her image seems to sell.

Accordingly, Flora's maker, Van den Burgh Foods, presumably will realize a commercial boon from putting her name on its tubs. It has promised not to charge extra for the official Diana margarine, which will be sold for the standard price, about

\$1.10 for a 9-ounce container.

But spreading the royal image to a polyunsaturated spread is almost certain to fuel the growing criticism here of the Diana Fund and the ways its managers have chosen to exploit her exalted memory.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has publicly complained about "tacky" souvenirs emblazoned with the late princess' famous smile. Just last week Diana's friend Elton John — who dedicated all proceeds from the massive global sales of his memorial song "Candle in the Wind 1997" to the Diana Fund — argued that the "Diana industry" has gone too far. He said commercial tie-ins and promotional events for the charity should be curtailed.

This backlash has created problems for Diana's brother, Charles, the ninth Earl of Spencer. He is planning a memorial rock concert this summer in Diana's memory at Althorp, the Spencer country estate, where the princess is buried. Initially, it was promised that all the greatest names in "Brit Pop" would perform at this gala recital of an art form Diana particularly enjoyed. But many of those great names, including Elton John, Paul McCartney, Phil Collins and the Spice Girls reportedly have declined to take part.

There was also criticism here this week of a new plan to invoke Diana's name in a campaign to get auto passengers to buckle their seat belts. The general response was typified by an editorial in today's Daily Express, which called the seat-belt plan — and its unstated evocation of the car crash that killed the princess — "macabre."

But the margarine tubs that went on sale Monday have drawn the most biting criticism. Dame Barbara Cartland, the romance novelist who was the late princess' step-grandmother, launched a zinger at margarine in particular and the exploitation in general.

"She should remain magnificent in our memory," Cartland told the Daily Telegraph newspaper, "not attached to something I have always considered a poor substitute for butter."

"Her name, her image, everything about her memory is being commercialized," Cartland said, "which is very sad and a great mistake."

6 jailed American activists freed by Serbians

By Tracy Wilkinson=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

PRISTINA, Yugoslavia — Six American activists arrested by Serbian police over the weekend were freed Monday and expelled across the border into Macedonia, but only after jail authorities shaved their heads, U.S. officials said.

The arrests and stiff jail terms had provoked an expression of "outrage" from Washington, where officials accused the government of Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic of attempting to harass foreign aid workers and journalists in the wake of a Serb anti-terrorist operation that left scores of ethnic Albanians dead.

The activists arrived in the Macedonian capital of Skopje Monday afternoon and seemed fit, officials there said. They ran afoul of Serbian law when they failed to register with the police as required by law and on Saturday were sentenced to 10 days in jail.

"They seemed pretty happy to be here," U.S. Ambassador to Macedonia Christopher Hill said in a telephone interview from Skopje. "They were not too happy about their hair cuts."

Hill said they had gotten a military-style buzz cut: it is routine in Serbian jails for new prisoners to be shorn of their hair. Otherwise, there was no sign the five men and one woman had been mistreated, U.S. officials said.

The Americans had traveled to Serbia's southern Kosovo province

Sleepless in Seattle City Hall

By Terry McDermott=(c) 1998, Los Angeles Times

SEATTLE — If the mayor has his way, Seattle might just become the first city in history to build a new city hall because the old one is too nice.

Since taking office three months ago, Mayor Paul Schell has presented a dizzying array of proposals on housing, transit and other big issues facing the city. Last week, he added yet another, sketching out a plan to demolish the current city hall, sell the building the City Council intended as its replacement and build a bunch of new buildings to replace the replacement.

If this seems complicated, it's probably because being humble is hard work.

Here's the problem. A couple years back, the local government — strapped for both office space and money — stumbled onto a great deal on a nearly new, mostly empty 62-story skyscraper. The building owners were in default on their mortgage. And the banks, stuck with the debt, were eager to unload it. The economy was in a slight recession, so the city was one of the few buyers in the market able to purchase the building, which it did for \$120 million — about 60 cents on the dollar for what it cost to build.

The city then began moving its employees out of a collection of old, seismically unsafe buildings into the skyscraper. The council planned to move itself and the mayor there as well.

Schell has other ideas. He grants that the city got a great deal on the building but says, in essence, that he would be embarrassed to live there.

"It was designed as a symbol of corporate power," Schell says, not a quality with which he wishes to associate the city. Schell thinks the symbolism of city government's occupying the high rise would be "undemocratic."

To say that Seattle wears its egalitarian politics on its sleeve is like saying Microsoft is ambitious. This is a city where the amount of public participation in government often doubles or triples the time and effort it takes to get things done. Fostering undemocratic practices is as close to mortal sin as politicians here can get.

So it comes as little surprise that the mayor is reluctant to take up residence in a skyscraper. Still, Schell's proposal received a tepid reception. His aversion to civic ostentation ran smack into another highly prized civic virtue — a love of thriftiness.

The city got such a great deal on the building that replicating it for anything near the same amount of money would be impossible. Schell says the sale of the building would finance all of its smaller replacements, but few members of the council really believe it.

City halls have a bad history here. For decades, the city shared space with the local county government. When it finally built its own building, the City Council — acting as the design jury — picked a blueprint intended for an office park in Texas. They don't even call it City Hall. Its proper name is the Municipal Office Building, and it is about as generic as the name implies.

Schell, a former dean of the University of Washington's architecture school, wants to replace it with a new civic center of appropriate scale and style. He has enlisted some of his architect buddies to help sell the plan, which at this point he is careful to say is very preliminary. "A visual description of a vision," is how one of the architects put it.

But while the architects talked about the need to visualize city streets as rivers of commerce and new buildings as armchairs — firm on the sides, soft in the middle — the real issue loomed overhead. The skyscraper that would be the new city hall is anything but generic. Which isn't the same as saying it's a handsome building. Key Tower, named after a tenant, is big, brown and tall. 62 stories of Finnish granite with a gabled roof that looks for all the world like a bright green shower cap.

Serial killings in Spokane

By William Booth=(c) 1998, The Washington Post

SPOKANE, Wash. — Kathy Lloyd misses her little sister very much — her sly sense of humor, her tough smarts, the good things. "We were a lot alike in many ways," the elementary school teacher remembers. "She was my best friend. But she had her problems."

The last time Lloyd saw her sister, she was alive in November on a seedy stretch of East Sprague Avenue here — the local stroll of adult book stores, nude dancing joints and terminal honky-tonks, where streetwalkers gather on the windy corners, get into dark cars and drive away with strangers. Addicted to heroin, a high-dollar habit, McClenahan, 39, worked as a prostitute.

In a note McClenahan sent to her sister in December, she asked for forgiveness for the drugs, prostitution and disgrace, and spoke of her hope of getting clean in a methadone program. Tell the rest of family, she wrote, that "I love them, and I'm still alive."

The next time Lloyd saw her little sister was the day after Christmas, after her crumpled body was found near an overgrown gravel pit by the side of a lonely road a few miles from town. "I went up there," Lloyd said. "It's where people dump their garbage. But my sister wasn't garbage. She was a person with a family that loved her."

There is a serial killer at work in Spokane, who is murdering women who are involved, as the police put it, "in highly mobile lifestyles associated

with the streets." Most are working as prostitutes or involved with drugs like heroin, crack or methamphetamine. Their work on the streets enables them to maintain their habits, the vicious feedback loop of addiction.

Since late last fall, investigators say, at least six women — five here in

might have been given off by a decomposing body. They found nothing.

"I'm personally very concerned about Linda," said Spokane Police Capt. Chuck Bown, a co-leader of the task force formed here to end the killing spree.

Bown is a man with a lot to be concerned about.

Almost all of the 19 unsolved murders involved women with known histories of prostitution or drug addiction. Most were shot. A few were strangled or bludgeoned to death. One had her throat slashed. They were killed and dumped in lonely spots — overgrown lots, city alleys, the banks of the Spokane River, abandoned gravel pits and eerily, along Hangman Valley Road.

There were three women murdered and found in the summer and early autumn of 1997. There was another cluster of three murders in 1990 that police believe were committed by one assailant. All were shot and all the bodies had traces of a green carpet fiber.

Bown said the task force has not linked all 19 murders, though investigators have been reviewing evidence from all the cases and re-interviewing witnesses. "Some might be added, some not," Bown said.

Bown said the investigation to date has produced no suspects and surprisingly little evidence. A "profile" of a possible suspect has not been offered to the public, though FBI agents with the agency's Serial Killer Unit have been to town. "We don't have a lot," Bown said. "We have very little physical evidence and there's only so many appeals you can make to the public for information."

Spokane and another in Tacoma — have been murdered by a serial killer or killers. It is possible that many more have been slain by the same assailant. There have been 19 unsolved murders involving prostitutes or drug users or both here since 1984.

All of the six most recent murder victims were associated with the streets. All the women died of gunshot wounds. All were dumped in the same forlorn temporary graves.

The police are keeping most of the gruesome details out of the press: the caliber of weapon; location of wound; other marks, fibers or clues. Police refuse to discuss whether the women were killed soon after their abductions or kept for awhile, as some family members fear, before they were slain. The family members pray that it was done quickly, that the killer is not some kind of collector.

The victims range in age from 16 to 39. The most recent body, of Sunny Oster, was found in February. A seventh possible victim, Linda Maybin, has been missing since November. Last month, police spent several days flying over the outskirts of Spokane in a helicopter affixed with infrared sensors, searching for the heat that