# hen migrant children arrive

## ...Volunteers are There to Help

### Crop Pickers' Dilemma

By MARGARET HICKEY

Mothers know that their growing boys and girls need the vitamins that tree-ripened fruits and gardenfresh vegetables provide. But how many know the human, often tragic story behind the harvesting of these crops so vital to the family's health? Those snappy string beans admired by Mrs. Smith of Main Street may have been picked by a barefoot, undernourished child who has never romped on a real playground or by an older boy unable to write because the family's dusty truck never stopped in one place long enough for him to go to school.

Crop picking is essential work, so migrant families—more than a million of them—move up and down the country, belonging to no town. Their only shelter may be a shanty, a dilapidated barn, an abandoned freight train, or even a chicken coop.

U.S. Children's Bureau studies have produced striking facts about the unhappy conditions of these transient children's lives. One private organization—the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S. A.—has established a program of concrete help.

Last summer, 150 teachers, school principals and ministers, along with another 150 college students, moved into migrant camps in 12 states. They organized child-care centers for the youngest, high-school classes for the older children and adults; arranged Sunday-school and worship services; provided recreational activities for all age groups. All told, they reached an estimated 100,000 migrants.

A typical child-care center, according to Miss Edith Lowry, leader of the home-missions program, provided breakfast, lunch and two between-meal snacks, including always orange juice and cod-liver oil.

High-school instruction followed the quick and effective method of putting over the three R's originated by Dr. Frank Laubach, literacy expert. Pickers learned to read road signs, count money, make telephone calls, use the post office and the bank.

The activities stirred up by the National Council of Churches have encouraged other groups to help. Boy or Girl Scout leaders are undertaking to bring the Scout program to transient children in Colorado, Florida, Michigan, New York and New Jersey. In California, two 4-H clubs have been organized and a State Migrant Committee is under way.

In Wisconsin, the Governor's Commission on Human Rights urges communities to accept the migrants as temporary citizens, grant them the same privileges that others enjoy. Community interest was first aroused in 1949, when Texas-Mexican children were denied use of the swimming pool in the Waupun area. Now both local and visiting children play together on municipal playgrounds under locally sponsored supervision. Churches and organizations put on family-night programs at the camps and Saturday-night fiestas in town, with both migrant and local families attending.

T was nearly supporting when the doctor beckoned Mrs. Martinez into her office. The mother had been there since eleven, cradling the sick baby in her arms and whispering to it softly in Spanish.

"I'm sorry you had to wait so long." Dr. Elfriede Horst spoke slowly, distinctly, to help her understand. She had seen one patient after another all day, still had three house calls to make before giving a talk at her women's-group meeting. "Why didn't you call to let me know you were coming?" she asked. "Then I could have seen you right away."

Mrs. Martinez smiled shyly. She was a small, very young woman with scrawny arms and a thin face that brightened when she looked at the baby. The neat flowered cotton house dress she wore showed plainly she was expecting another child. "I no understand telephone," she apologized. "I wait."

Doctor Horst had heard this same explanation from other wives of Spanish-speaking migrant farm laborers. Many of these Mexican-American families who had left Texas for the summer to pick onions, tomatoes, string beans and corn on farms near Des Plaines, Illinois, did not know how to use a telephone. And they were afraid to try because it was hard to understand and be understood in English.

"What are you feeding the baby?" Doctor Horst asked as she picked up the pale, listless Martinez child, lean and puny for his nine months.

"The formula," his mother answered.

"What formula?"

"The one the doctor give when he is born."

"My goodness!" the doctor exclaimed. "That's not enough for a growing boy." From her desk drawer she took several sample cans of baby foods. "Your baby needs more than just milk," she explained. "Take these and buy more later. Be sure that he eats three times a day." Then she vaccinated the infant against smallpox and gave him his first inoculation against typhoid, tetanus and diphtheria. CONTINUED ON PAGE 73



In carefully enunciated English, these Spanish-speaking children of farm workers from Texas recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag at the A. A. U. W. Migrant School in Des Plaines, Illinois.

With the help of friendly volunteer teachers, they are learning that, though only temporary members of the community, they are citizens too.

"Don't get up," Mr. Bryson said, "please. Roger hopes we can both be down at State Street at half past nine tomorrow morning. I hope that isn't too early."
"Oh, no," Willis said. "It will be a real

pleasure to see Mr. Roger again."

"I can drop by and pick you up," Mr. Bryson said. "I forgot to ask where you were stopping,

"Thank you very much, sir," Willis said. "I'm at the Ritz."

Well, that will be no trouble at all," Mr. Bryson said. "I suppose if we don't go upstairs we will be criticized."

"That's right," Edward said. "Bess gave me the word for us to come up as soon as possi-ble, and you know Bess."

"Oh, yes," Mr. Bryson said, "we all know

"Come here and sit beside me, Willis," Mrs. Harcourt said, "and please tell me some more about the children."

Willis said, "there isn't much to tell about Paul except that he's a pretty hefty youngster, Mrs. Harcourt, but Al's quite a boy-just in what I think is called the toddling stage. I wish I had a snapshot of him here.

"Why did you name the second one Paul?" Bess asked. Her voice came to him from across the room, showing that she had been listening all the while.

"Sylvia named him after her grandfather," Willis said. He turned quickly back to Mrs. Harcourt and to little Al and Paul and Sylvia's ideas of decoration and nurses and hospitals, all subjects which Mrs. Harcourt understood and commented on intelligently. "You're quite right, Mrs. Harcourt," Willis said, "Orange is hot for Sylvia and the children in the summer,

but she and the children do get off to Lake Sunapee for a month. The Hodgeses have a little camp there by the lake.

Willis stood up when he had finished talking about Lake Sunapee.

"It's been delightful renewing old associations, Mrs. Harcourt," he said, "and thank you for asking me to dinner. I've enjoyed every minute of it, but I must go now so that I can be ready for Mr. Harcourt in the morn-

He shook hands with Mrs. Harcourt. Then he squared his shoulders, assuming the alert posture that he had learned at Beakney-

"Good night, Bess," he said. "It's been a real pleasure seeing you again. It's been just like

Bess had assumed her most tantalizing expression-at least it had been tantalizing

once. "Well, not quite like old times," she said.

"Well, no," Willis said, "not quite, Bess." She dropped his hand, but she was still "If you finish all this business," she said, "that you have to be so fresh for in the morning, would you like to come and have tea with me, or something stronger? You'll need it after a day with Cousin Roger."

"Well, I wouldn't quite say that, Bess," Willis said, "but it would be a great pleasure to have tea and to talk over old times with you and Edward."

"Edward won't be there," Bess said. "He has to have his squash at teatime. It will be just you and me. The children never come to tea.'

"Well, that will be all the better, Bess," Willis said, and he laughed. "Tea for two is a wonderful idea. As soon after four-thirty as

(To be Continued)

#### WHEN MIGRANT CHILDREN ARRIVE

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When Mrs. Martinez left, Doctor Horst washed her hands, hastily applied pink lipstick and patted her smooth blond hair, which she combed straight back (for practicality's sake) and rolled snugly at the neck. The house calls would have to wait, she decided, or she'd be late for the meeting.

That was in May, 1948. The Northwest Suburban Branch of the American Association of University Women was newly organized that year with twenty-five members, most of them young mothers; a few, like Doctor Horst, business or professional women. It started out to be just an ordinary meeting with a talk and refreshments . . . until Doctor Horst made a spur-of-the-moment decision. Crumpling up her original sketchy notes, she began telling the story of the Martinez baby and the other Mexican-American children she had treated:

Elisa, the twelve-year-old with long dark pigtails, who had so proudly showed the doctor her report card from Texas. The card revealed that Elisa was in the second grade and had attended class only twelve days in the entire year. . . . And the three Gomez boys, who had just arrived from Texas with their parents in a big truck. They were making their summer home in a converted chicken coop on one of the farms, went without shoes all year round and now the soles of their feet had become as tough as shoe leather. . . . And little Esperanza, who lived in one small cluttered room in a barracks building with her parents, two brothers and new baby sister. The outhouse, about fifty yards from the barracks, was always infested with flies, so the mother kept a "potty" in the room for the children. She carried all the water for washing and cooking from a faucet outside.

These people were American citizens, the doctor emphasized, but always "outside" the community because of their lack of education, inability to speak fluent English and low standard of living. What was worse, she brought out, their children were growing up without a fair chance to better themselves. Yet these farm workers were performing a needed service in helping harvest crops that brought fresh vegetables to the tables of city dwellers. Couldn't A.A.U.W., as a group of young mothers interested in other young mothers, do something to make these people feel welcome and encourage them to send their children to schools and to health clinics whenever possible"

Before Doctor Horst had finished, nearly every member was thinking the same thing. And before they went home, they had appointed a committee. By July, several weeks and numerous planning sessions later, they were ready to announce a half-day play school for migrant children-an experimental twoweek project, to be held in the basement of a Lutheran church, with several volunteer 'teachers." The farmers, when queried, agreed it was a good idea, but couldn't predict how the workers would feel about it. So Mrs. Phyllis Bentley and another member drove

out to the farms to find out. Their first stop was an attractive white farmhouse encircled by wide green lawns,

shrubs and flowers. But walking up the driveway past the main building and barns, they saw the workers' small shacks and barracks covered with tar paper and imitation brick, as described so vividly by Doctor Horst. A large dark-haired woman stood fanning herself with a red fly swatter as she idly watched two small

children playing in a mud puddle in the yard.
"Hello," Mrs. Bentley called as she walked
over and introduced herself. "We came to invite your children to a new play school that opens next week. We'll pick them up and drive them home if you'll let them come.

The woman shook her head and looked away. I guess she doesn't understand-now what do I do? Phyllis Bentley wondered.

At that moment her six-year-old son, who had been waiting impatiently in the car, came running up the driveway. "It's too hot in there," he yelled.

> I have made mistakes, but I have never made the mistake of claiming that I never made

-JAMES GORDON BENNETT

The dark-haired woman suddenly turned back to Phyllis, but now her eyes were bright with interest. "Will your children go to the school?" she demanded.

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"Why, yes," Phyllis said, remembering that the "teachers" would have to bring their own children because they had no place to leave

"All right," the woman agreed, "my children go too.

Phyllis Bentley had a hunch the school was

oing to be a success. Her hunch was right. A simple play school that first year, it grew each summer, adding new features and moving into larger quarters through A.A.U.W.'s determination to make it a real community project. Contributions making this growth possible have come from local churchwomen's groups, civic organizations, the Illinois Council of Churches (which hired two college students to direct the project) and the Community Chest. Last July the migrant school celebrated its seventh year by moving into six rooms at Old North Elementary School for four weeks and enrolling more than 200 children in preschool, primary, intermediate and elementary classes. The total budget had climbed to \$2354.89, included two big chartered buses and a rented car for the student workers.

It is no longer a play school, except in the preschool room, where youngsters aged two to five have a wide choice of toys and crayons and paints. (There is a large supply of tissue on hand, too, for runny noses.) The teaching program, carried on entirely by volunteers, some professional, mostly laymen, covers instruction in reading, writing, handcrafts, dancing and rhythmics-and practice in getting along with other children.

This morning the primary children are learning songs and rhythmics with Mrs. Ruth Ralph seated at the piano with her small redheaded daughter close by her side. The children watch her lips as she plays and sings, "I know how to brush my teeth, brush my teeth," to a simple melody. Then they sing along with her, moving their hands up and down in front of their faces as though they were holding a toothbrush. In the next verse, they pretend to brush their hair. These little songs, Mrs. Ralph feels, help the children learn English words and pronunciation as well as good health habits.

Upstairs, children in a senior class have just finished a reading lesson, when Mrs. Julia Abbott calls them out into the hall to learn a waltz for the parents'-night program on the last day of school. As the pianist strikes up Let Me Call You Sweetheart, the girls move about methodically, taking great awkward steps. Mrs. Abbott holds out her hand to a boy, but, too bashful to dance, he slides farther down against the wall and out of reach.

The piano can be heard in the intermediate classroom next door. When the pianist switches to Chiapanecas, the Mexican clapclap song, the youngsters, who are supposed to be studying, join in the clapping. Miss Clara Louise Slack, their teacher, signals for silence, and points back to the alphabet on the blackboard. Working with non-English-speaking children is a new experience for Miss Slack, who teaches third grade in Lake Forest, Illinois

In the migrant school it's sometimes difficult to divide the children according to age and grade levels, because some have had previous schooling and speak a little English, and others have had little or no classroom training. Five-year-old Jorge, who speaks only Spanish and should be in play school, refuses to be separated from his eight-year-old cousin José, and sits alongside him in intermediate class every day. Miss Slack tried to tell Jorge's mother that the work was too difficult for him, but she replied casually, "He's got to learn sometime." Although Jorge never says anything in class, he smiles and nods when Miss Slack counts and has learned to recognize his own name in print. With José guiding his hand, he can even write his name

No one has to ask Orelia and Rosita what they like best about the school. They duck out of primary class almost every ten minutes, dragging four-year-old Raquel by the hand into the girls' room. Orelia, seven, the oldest and tallest, turns on the faucets, and Rosita, six, and her little sister stretch up on their toes to slosh their hands around in the water. (On a visit to the home of one of the teachers, Orelia could hardly wait to ask the question: "How many bathrooms do you have?" Her own home, a small two-room shack, has a brand-new TV set, but no bathroom.) The girls' stolen recess is soon interrupted when twenty-year-old college student Faith Enke finds them out and orders them back to class. They don't mind too much, because there's always another time-and they love to hear Faith speak Spanish, just as casually and competently as though she had known how all her life.

Faith, who is majoring in Spanish at Monmouth College, Illinois, worked with migrant children first as a high-school volunteer in 1951, then as one of two students hired by the National Council of Churches (at \$40 a week) to help direct the project during the summers of 1953 and 1954.

On Thursdays every available volunteer hand is needed for the rummage sale. Even husbands are recruited to haul huge cartons of clothes and toys out of storage rooms and attics-cartons the A.A.U.W. has been filling all winter long with the help of church-women's groups. Promptly at nine each Thursday, when the school doors open, a crowd of migrant workers' wives surges into the basement of the school. Bargain hunters dream of prices like these: old fur coats sometimes as low as 50 cents; women's hats never more than a dime; toys for a penny or so. Yet, despite the low prices, the sales sometimes bring in as much as \$400 in a single day.

Upstairs in the health-clinic room, Doctor Horst is finishing her Thursday examination of babies, aided by members of the Des Plaines Junior Woman's Club. The small room is full of people getting in one another's way: Doctor Horst's own five-year-old Katy, interested in everything her mother does; two young daughters of Mrs. Faye Mercer, who keeps the health records; a volunteer interpreter; Doctor Horst's nurse and another from the public-health service; and last but not least, three farm mothers with crying babies. Doctor Horst shows the amazing ability to examine a small patient on her lap and talk to other people at the same time.

As she grips the foot of the infant between her knees to hold him steady while giving the inoculation, she explains that she is pleased by the improvement in health among migrant children since 1948. "I've seen no cases of head lice this year, and only a few with malnutrition." She is bothered, however, by the number of young rotting teeth. "Parents indulge the children too much—let them eat all the candy they want," she says. But more and more migrant patients are asking for inoculations and vitamins, she adds, something they never did

Improvement in health is one concrete result of the A.A.U.W. migrant school. The growing interest of the community in the farm worker is another. But Mrs. Dorothy Bishop, 1954 chairman, feels that education is still the greatest need. "We're amateurs and we're doing the best we can. But the summer instruction really should be taken over by the publicschool system, using public-school methods. And there should be classes in English for adults." Since there is the problem of limited public funds for education, Mrs. Bishop is not likely to realize her hope any time soon.

Clinic and the rummage sale over, children race out to the buses. Just one day is left before the end of the term. Two high-school girls help Mrs. Bishop lock up, then wave good-by to the children. "Gosh," wonders one, "what am I going to do with myself for the rest of the END