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Uncommon Good
435 Berkeley Avenue
Claremont, California 91711
909 625-2248
Nancy Mintie, Director

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UNCOMMON GOOD

FOSTERING IDEALISM in EDUCATION, MEDICINE and the ENVIRONMENT

FALL 2012 ■ VOLUME 9 ■ NUMBER 2

College Bound

Uncommon Good's Connect to College program held a dinner in honor of our graduating high school seniors and their families this year as the graduates headed off to college. Each of the students gave a brief speech at the event. We thought you might like to hear some of their voices. 📌

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Photo by Carlos Carrillo

Uncommon Good's 2012 college bound graduating class from its Connect to College program.

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In Memoriam, Dr. Jamie Garcia

Our world lost a loving and compassionate soul with the passing of Dr. Jamie Garcia this year. Jamie was one of the doctors supported by our MED Relief program. I am trying not to let the injustice that surrounded her death cloud my memories of the magnificent gift that was her life: a gift to the poor, the sick and the suffering.

Jamie grew up living the life that her patients live. She was born in Inglewood, California, and spent her whole life in the Los Angeles area, with the exception of her years in medical school. Her family was poor and Latino. As a child, Jamie worked long hours in the hot sun at the side of her gardener father.

Jamie also had severe life threatening asthma. She struggled just to breathe. At one critical moment in her young life, she was taken by her mother to a doctor who said that he could help her. But Jamie's little heart sank when her mother responded that she could not afford the recommended treatment. However, the physician, Dr. Seagle, responded, "What is important is that this child does not suffer. We will work out the money part." Years later as Jamie told this story, she exclaimed, "Dr. Seagle changed my life so drastically. I thought he was the most kind and smartest man I had ever known. So, of course, at nine-years-old I wanted to grow up and help people just like him!"

However, Jamie's dream of becoming a doctor faded because neither she nor her family really understood the importance of education. Her mother told her that people like them did not have the genes to go to college. "To us," Jamie recalled, "college seemed a far off place for people like Einstein (sounds so silly to me now). I didn't think people like me went to college."

And so Jamie dropped out of high school in the 10th grade and got a job in an ice cream parlor. However, during all of her sick days at home as a child, she had amused herself by learning to play the guitar. At the age of sixteen she formed a band and embarked on a career as a professional musician. The band became successful and attracted the attention of major recording labels.

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Building Blocks Helps Low Income Families

Uncommon Good's Building Blocks program provides free energy assessments and upgrades to low-income homeowners. The work is performed by individuals who have received green job training through Uncommon Good and its partners. ☑



Photo by Kevin Varner

Uncommon Good's Building Blocks workers perform an energy audit and retrofit on the home of a low-income family.



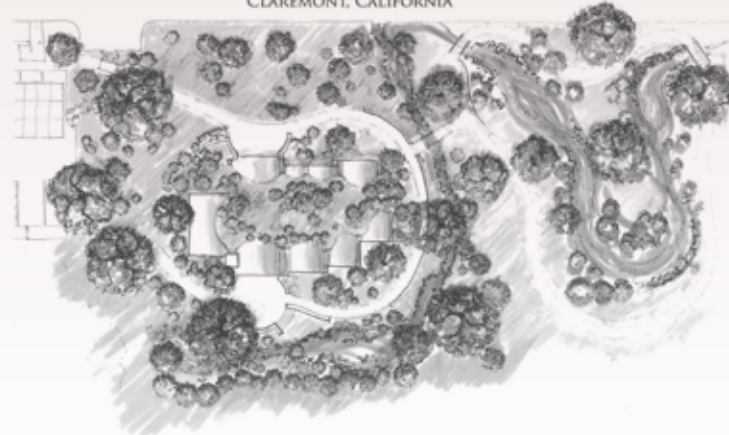
Photo by Kevin Varner

Jose and Lesvita Cardoza (center) with Building Blocks workers who provided them with free home energy improvements.

Save The Date! April 20, 2013

The Grand Opening for Uncommon Good's first-of-its-kind green building will be on April 20, 2013 to coincide with Earth Day. We call the structure a Whole Earth Building (or WEB, as in "web of life") because it takes into account the entire ecosystem: earth, water, air, energy, plants, animals and humans. Built by hand, using simply on-site earth for 90% of the building material, this zero net energy building will be the new home for Uncommon Good. We hope that our Whole Earth Building will demonstrate how we can "live simply so that others may simply live." Plan to come celebrate with us on the grounds of the Claremont United Methodist Church and the Claremont School of Theology, which have partnered with us to allow us to build our WEB on their property. ☑

UNCOMMON GOOD GREENSPACE
CLAREMONT, CALIFORNIA



Future Home of Uncommon Good



Drawing by Erik Peterson

Fiddleneck Farms

The Fiddleneck is a humble flower native to these parts whose stem resembles the curved neck of a fiddle. Early European settlers noticed that if their cattle ate too much of the plant, they became ill. So they considered the Fiddleneck a noxious weed and tried to eradicate it. However, the Native Americans of this region had a deeper understanding of this plant and knew how to use it safely for medicine and food.

When we were searching for a name for our expanding urban agriculture enterprise, we adopted the humble Fiddleneck. For us, it symbolized working in harmony with nature, with an understanding of the role that each plant, animal and human being plays in a balanced ecosystem. It seemed a good symbol of the kind of farming that we are doing in which we respect the health of the land and water by not using harmful chemicals and pesticides, we respect the well-being of animals by treating them humanely, and we respect the dignity of the farmer workers by paying living wages.

Uncommon Good's farming adventures began in 2010 when we launched the Pomona Valley Urban Agriculture Initiative, an effort to provide jobs for the families we serve who were suffering in the recession, and to grow healthy fresh food for the region. We obtained a grant from the USDA to create the first farm under the initiative. We partnered with a struggling family farm in Ontario and provided the money for the farm to hire parents from our Uncommon Good program and to make necessary upgrades to its infrastructure. Now that farm has been spun off as an independent business.

Our second farm enterprise, Fiddleneck Farms will be a network of organic farms throughout the Inland Empire. We began with a partnership with our local mental health agency, Tri-City Mental Health Services, to establish a teaching farm that would offer horticultural therapy for veterans, foster youth and low-income families. Our first land partner was "The Garden," which had been a half-acre organic nursery in Pomona that had been destroyed by fire. With the help of state mental health money and many community volunteers, "Fiddleneck Farms at The Garden" was opened this year as a site for horticultural therapy, community classes and organic nursery supplies. Some of its property also has been reserved for commercial production to help underwrite the expenses and to employ a farmer. This portion is being put into production by our Uncommon Good farmers through a generous grant from Trinity United Methodist Church in Pomona.

Uncommon Good is now in negotiations with an additional land partner to give Fiddleneck Farms sufficient acreage to create a self-supporting farm that will be able to pay a living wage to more Uncommon Good farm families. Details about this exciting new partnership will be forthcoming in future editions of this newsletter. 📧



Harvey Mudd College students and Teen Green members dig irrigation trenches at Fiddleneck Farms at The Garden in Pomona

Photo by Carlos Carrillo



Teen Green students build at rock wall for Fiddleneck Farms

Photo by Carlos Carrillo



Claremont McKenna College students working at Fiddleneck Farms at The Garden in Pomona

Photo by Nancy Mintie

Uncommon Good Honor Roll of Donors:

January 1, 2012 through October 11, 2012



Uncommon Good offers its most grateful thanks to you, the generous people who make our work possible.



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In Memoriam (con't) [continued from page 1]

Through her travels in the music world, Jamie met many people who had gone to college and who recognized her intelligence and potential. They encouraged her to complete her education. So when her band broke up, Jamie decided to try college. She majored in philosophy and ethics at UCLA, then followed her childhood dream and enrolled in the University of Washington School of Medicine.

She chose to do her Family Medicine Residency at Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center in eastern Los Angeles County. She was moved by the great poverty and unmet medical need that she encountered among her residency patients there. Upon graduation, she partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health to operate the original Pomona Community Health Center. There she was the sole administrator and only physician, with the exception of two doctors who volunteered one or two half days a month. Annually, the clinic served 5,100 patients in two tiny exam rooms.

In 2006 Jamie contacted us about our Medical Education Debt Relief (MED Relief) program. Overwhelmed with a six figure educational debt from college and medical school, she was renting in an unsafe neighborhood and driving an eleven-year-old Volkswagen bug. She didn't qualify for any federal loan repayment assistance because she was doing too much! Because she was working both as her clinic's Medical Director and as its Administrative Director, she did not fit into any of the federal aid categories. We awarded her an educational loan repayment grant through our program, which we were able to renew every year thereafter, through the generosity of the California Community Foundation's Robert C. Fraser Fund and the California Wellness Foundation. These funds gave Jamie the peace of mind to pursue her work, knowing that she also could pay off her education loans at the same time.

Jamie dreamed big dreams for her clinic. Her goal was to expand it from the little two-room threadbare operation that it was when we first knew her, to a larger, more professionally staffed, and securely funded facility. To be able to do this Jamie embarked on the arduous journey of learning to be a major fundraiser. She drew up plans, formed partnerships, created a board and researched federal funding opportunities, ultimately raising 1.4 million dollars. When the critical federal grant came through, Jamie jubilantly announced on her Facebook page, "We're buildin' a free clinic! We have liftoff!"

However, while Jamie had been working alone for many long, stress-filled months on the hundreds of pages of complex documents that were necessary for the federal grant application, she had begun to feel ill. She knew something was wrong, but also knew that if she took the time off to go to the doctor, undergo tests, and sit through medical appointments, she would not be able to finish the federal grant application by the required deadline, and therefore the future of her beloved clinic would be in jeopardy.

After the grant had been submitted, Jamie finally went to see a doctor. Tests showed that she had advanced cancer. When she told me this tragic news, she admitted that it was unlikely at that point that she could be cured.

Jamie continued to work intensely, both seeing patients and bringing her laptop into treatment rooms and hospital beds. She told me that she had taken to drinking double lattes on meeting days to give her the energy she needed. On July 9th of this year, her gleaming new twelve bed clinic opened its doors in Pomona, where 24,000 patients will be treated this year. Yet three days earlier, Jamie had



Dr. Jamie Garcia, Nancy Mintie of Uncommon Good, Dr. Helen Currie

Photo by Courtesy of the Robert C. Fraser Fund

been admitted to the hospital once again, and was told that she had a large inoperable tumor and that she should go home and prepare to die. She passed away two weeks later, surrounded by her beloved partner of seventeen years, Suzanne Verrault, and several doctors from her clinic who were trying to find space on her bedroom wall to display her many awards.

Among her many honors, Jamie was named Woman of the Year in 2010 by the California State Assembly, was recognized as a Hospital Hero by the National Health Foundation, was chosen as one of the region's top doctors by the Inland Empire Magazine, and received awards from National Project Homeless Connect and the House of Ruth.

My memories of Jamie are bittersweet. I am angry and outraged that finding the money for doing the work of healing and caring for the poor is made so terribly difficult and insanely stressful. It shouldn't be so bloody hard to do the essential works of mercy in this society. In Jamie's case, she may well have sacrificed her life so that her clinic could be funded. This is a hideous choice and I rage against it. I even reacted with bitterness when Suzanne told me that the U.S. Congress had adjourned in Jamie's honor after her death. If the government hadn't made it so difficult for her to get the funding her clinic needed, perhaps she would not have died.

Yet I do not think that Jamie would want me to dwell on the tragic aspects of her death. And so I try to remember the wonderful things, the sweet things, the comfort she brought to her patients and the love she extended to everyone, including me. She embraced her patients, including the homeless ones who had not had a bath for a while. She laughed and cried with them. Once when I visited her clinic I found her with her arms around a patient who was a mother who had just lost her son in the current war. Both women were weeping. Never taking her supporters for granted, she wrote me many thank you notes, assuring us that Uncommon Good was an important part of her work.

Jamie usually ended her emails with the quote "God is the good in things." I always had intended to ask her why she did that and what she meant by it. I'll never know now what her answer would have been, but I have spent some time pondering that simple statement in my heart. And I've found that it makes me happy. ✍️



Photo by Nancy Mintie

College Bound (cont') [continued from page 1]



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Karen Uribe
Grinnell College

"I want to thank Uncommon Good for being here for me since the fourth grade and for nominating me for a POSSE Scholarship because through them I got a full ride to college. My parents said they worked so hard for me and my brother to give us an education because that is the one thing no one can take away from us."



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Madelene Santizo
Bates College

"Honestly, I've been so blessed my whole life to have so many wonderful people who saw something in me. People say, 'I'm proud of you' but I am proud of my parents. They are immigrants who came with nothing and created a beautiful family. They are my inspiration to accomplish my dreams."



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Karen Contreras
California State University
at San Bernardino

"I want to thank God, my parents, Uncommon Good and Carlos Carrillo" (Uncommon Good's Education Coordinator)

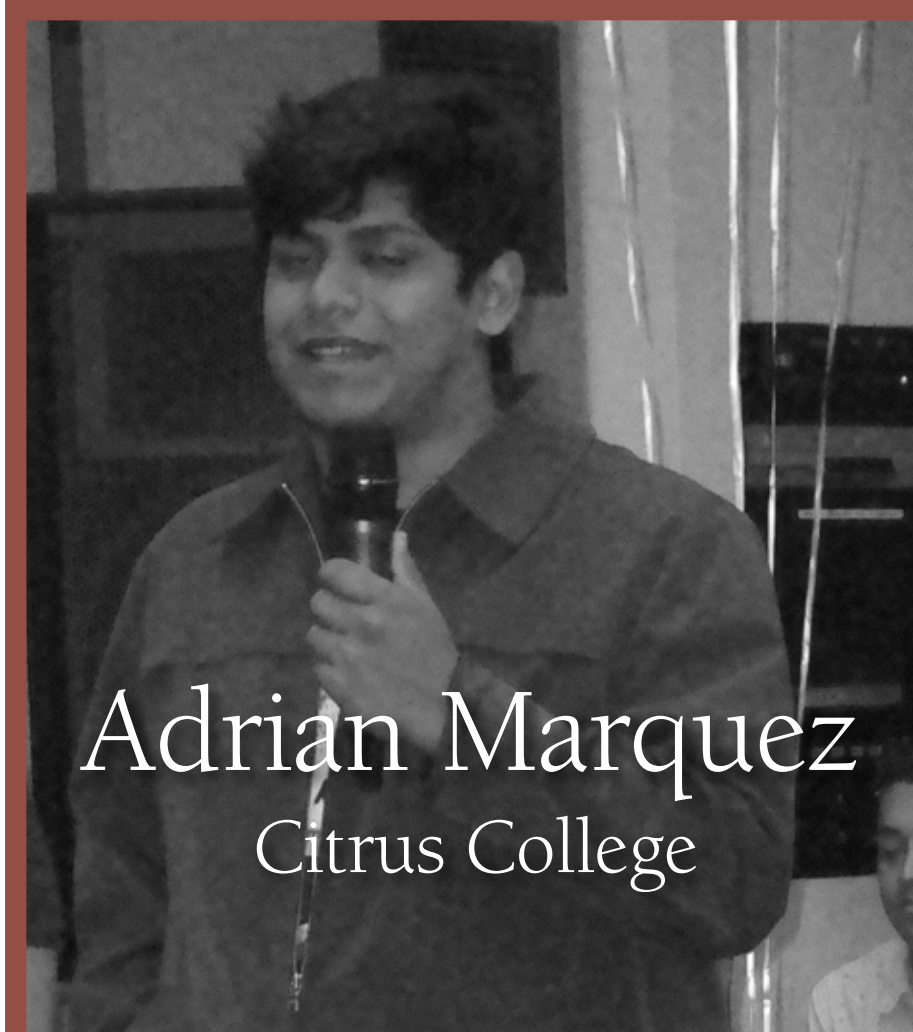


Photo by Nancy Mintie

Adrian Marquez
Citrus College

"I plan to major in music and I want to thank Uncommon Good for letting me be in their program since the fourth grade."



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Erick Rodriguez
University of California
at Santa Cruz

"Uncommon Good gave me a great mentor. I think that Mentors are the most under-appreciated members of the Uncommon Good family. I had such a great mentor (Seth Halsell) who was there when I needed him most. One time, with only two days notice, he drove me into Los Angeles and waited two hours for me to have an interview and then drove me home. He would see me every week even though he had a long drive to get here and he had to work at night. Yet he still had the energy for me."



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Jessica Gonzalez
University of California
at Riverside

"I want to thank Uncommon Good for your hard work, dedication, and your patience, which was a big factor. You never gave up on me. I plan to major in social work because now I want to give back to my community."



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Monica Olvera
California State Polytechnic
University Pomona

"Thank you Uncommon Good. I made you mad a lot but you got me here!"



Photo by Nancy Mintie

Juan Carlos Aguilar
and Paul Carmona
California State University
at Los Angeles and
University of California
at Riverside

Juan Carlos Aguilar: "I want to keep graduating as much as I can - a Masters, Ph.d., etcetera. I want to have lots of diplomas to hang up on the frig!"