

RECYCLING BATTERIES FOR U.S. POISONS AFRICANS

The World Health Organization recognizes a blood-lead level of 5 micrograms per deciliter as dangerous. Residents of Ogijo, Nigeria, tested far beyond that.

25 mcg/dL

This man had a blood-lead level **five times as high** as what is considered lead poisoning.



16.8 mcg/dL

This child's level was **three times as high**.



22.4 mcg/dL

This mother, **four times as high**.



21.7 mcg/dL

This worker, **four times as high**.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARMEN ABD ALI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

In Africa's lead recycling capital, factories are poisoning people. We know because we tested them. Pages 11-14.

'Group' Is a Gift Still Treasured After 44 Years

By KATHERINE ROSMAN

The members of this impossible-to-get-into club have logged a combined 330 years of marriage. Among them, they count 15 children, 27 grandchildren (with one on the way), assorted professions and innumerable tears shed, hands held and assurances given that none of life's difficulties will be faced alone.

In Long Island community centers and therapists' offices, they have met on about 880 occasions and talked, in the strictest confidence, for some 80,000 minutes about pacifiers and timeouts; about feeling overwhelmed by careers and feeling undervalued without them. They have discussed empty nests, dying parents, tensions with adult siblings, marital conflicts, parenting grown children — oh, the worry never stops — retirement, aging, illness and even the death of one of their own.

This is "Group," a generically named, remarkably devoted circle of friends.

Group is six women, all in their



ANNA WATTS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

"We are not swapping recipes," Miriam Caslow, far left, said of Group. "This is hard work."

70s and each married for a half-century. They have been gathering on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month (minus July and August) for 44 years. Over 90 minutes, they share with one another — and a paid facilitator — their worries, struggles and triumphs. It is not, clinically speak-

ing, group therapy. But it is also not a social gathering.

"We are not swapping recipes," said Miriam Caslow, 74. "This is hard work."

Dr. Caslow, a retired physician, sat with other members on a recent afternoon to discuss the role that a group like Group can play in

women's lives. They nestled close on an L-shaped couch at the Greenvale, N.Y., home of one member. There was no music playing in the background. There were no snacks on the coffee table. No one was looking at a phone.

Their group did not start as an

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In Handcuffs After Interview For Green Card

Spouses of U.S. Citizens Could Be Deported

By MIRIAM JORDAN

The married couples filed into a federal building in San Diego this month for green card interviews that they believed would secure their future together in the United States.

Half of each pair was American. Stephen Paul came with his British wife and their 4-month-old baby. Audrey Hestmark arrived with her German husband, days before their first wedding anniversary. Jason Cordero accompanied his Mexican wife.

It was supposed to be a celebratory milestone, the final step in the process to obtain U.S. permanent residency. Instead, as each interview with an immigration officer wrapped up, federal agents swooped in, handcuffed the foreign spouse and took him or her away.

"I had to take our baby from my crying wife's arms," Mr. Paul, 33, said, recalling the moment that agents said they were arresting his wife, Katie.

Ms. Paul was sent to an immigration detention center with hundreds of other people swept up in the Trump administration's crackdown. Her husband had to take a leave from his job at the San Diego County Sheriff's Department to care for their child and try to secure her release.

"It's insane to have them rip our family apart," Mr. Paul said. "Whoever is directing this has completely lost touch with their mission to the country."

In recent weeks, immigration lawyers in several cities have seen a surge in arrests of foreign spouses of Americans during interviews at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services offices. The arrests have come amid the president's widening campaign against immigration.

After an Afghan immigrant was arrested in the killing of a National Guard member and wounding of another near the White House last week, President Trump vowed to re-examine all asylum requests granted during the Biden administration, and to review the green cards of people

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TRUMP TO FREE LEADER WHO LET DRUGS GO TO U.S.

PARDON FOR HONDURAN

Stark Counter to Military Action in Caribbean and Pacific

This article is by Annie Correal, Jeff Ernst and Shawn McCreesh.

Federal prosecutors said last year that when Juan Orlando Hernández was president of Honduras, he received millions of dollars from drug traffickers including Joaquín Guzmán Loera, known as El Chapo, the Mexican drug lord.

In return, prosecutors alleged, Mr. Hernández allowed vast amounts of cocaine to pass through Honduras on its way to the United States. They said he once boasted that he would "stuff the drugs right up the noses of the gringos."

He was convicted, and sentenced to 45 years in prison.

On Friday, President Trump said he was setting him free.

He announced that he would grant "a Full and Complete Pardon" to Mr. Hernández, news that came as a shock not only to Hondurans, but also to the authorities in the United States who had built a major case and won the conviction against Mr. Hernández for conspiring to import cocaine into the United States.

A spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Manhattan, where Mr. Hernández, 57, was tried, declined to comment. A Drug Enforcement Administration agent, who worked on the investigation into Mr. Hernández and spoke anonymously because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the matter, called the pardon "lunacy."

Mike Vigil, a former chief of international operations at the same agency, also reacted with disbelief to the news of the pardon. Mr. Vigil said the move im-

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DELICATE BALANCE Politicians in Honduras are caught between courting the U.S. and catering to potential deportees. News Analysis. PAGE 4

NEW RESTRICTIONS The Trump administration paused all asylum decisions and halted visas to people from Afghanistan. PAGE 16

The Social Services Corruption That Preyed on Minnesota Nice

By ERNESTO LONDOÑO

MINNEAPOLIS — The fraud scandal that rattled Minnesota was staggering in its scale and brazenness.

Federal prosecutors charged dozens of people with felonies, accusing them of stealing hundreds of millions of dollars from a government program meant to keep children fed during the Covid-19 pandemic.

At first, many in the state saw the case as a one-off abuse during a health emergency. But as new schemes targeting the state's generous safety net programs came to light, state and federal officials began to grapple with a jarring reality.

Over the last five years, law enforcement officials say, fraud took root in pockets of Minnesota's So-

mali diaspora as scores of individuals made small fortunes by setting up companies that billed state agencies for millions of dollars' worth of social services that were never provided.

Federal prosecutors say that 59 people have been convicted in those schemes so far, and that more than \$1 billion in taxpayers' money has been stolen in three plots they are investigating. That is more than Minnesota spends annually to run its Department of Corrections. Minnesota's fraud scandal stood out even in the context of rampant theft during the pandemic, when Americans stole tens of billions through unemployment benefits, business loans and other forms of aid, according to

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INTERNATIONAL 4-14

Navigating a Disaster

The deadly blaze in Hong Kong will show how well the rigid political order imposed by China can address a crisis. News Analysis.

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SUNDAY BUSINESS

OpenAI's Quest for Balance

The company had a choice between getting users to return and reducing the risks to some of them. Can a safer chatbot also appeal to more people?

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SUNDAY STYLES

The Potato Shoe Theory

When it comes to footwear that addresses concerns of health and comfort, there's one perfect shape, and we're living in its golden era.

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ARTS & LEISURE

So Long to 'Stranger Things'

As the first episodes of the show's final season premiere on Netflix, the young stars look back on the series and discuss how it shaped them.

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SUNDAY OPINION

Michelle Cottle

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