

Aid in Africa

How One Man Got Rid of \$10 Million

By Michael Gibson

PARIS (IHT) — "What would you do if you inherited \$10 million?" is the sort of question that can feed idle fantasies. To Diego Hidalgo, however, it was no fantasy when he learned one day in 1969 that he had inherited that amount from a trust fund established by his grandfather. The family made its money in tobacco, mostly in the United States and Germany.

The inheritance came as a surprise because, Hidalgo said, "my parents were worried that I might not turn out to be a serious-minded person, that I might be tempted to become a playboy. So they decided not to tell me that all this money was coming to me."

"But 10 years later, Hidalgo is using his inheritance in quite a different way — he has established a foundation to stimulate economic development in the neediest countries of Africa.

"What can you do with so much money?" he asked. "I am a fairly simple person. I don't have a fantastically flamboyant lifestyle and I really don't need it. Anyway, I can always work and earn a salary, and I don't believe in spoiling children or leaving them with a big fortune that would give them a distorted view of life."

"So what are the alternatives? Enjoy it. Invest it so as to make more money still, with a view of becoming a second John D. Rockefeller by the time I'm 78 — with a little care. Another possibility was to do something really constructive with it — something that would help the

people who need it most in the world."

When the news of his inheritance arrived, Hidalgo was 27; he had been working at the World Bank for two years and was earning \$15,000 a year. His first decision was to stay with the bank. A year later he became involved in projects in Africa and by 1971 he had decided that his fortune would be devoted to helping Africa.

Not Purely Rational

"No, the process was not purely a rational one," he said, not reluctantly but with the reserve of a man who does not really see how his private feelings could interest other people. "I had traveled by then — to northeastern Brazil, where I was shocked by what I saw and by tangible instances of inequity; to Asia, where difficulties appeared too overpowering, at least in respect to the means at my disposal. My \$10 million there would have been no more than a drop of water in the desert. And finally to Africa, where, for one thing, I discovered that problems were more manageable for a small institution, which was all I could hope to establish. That was a reasonable observation. But there was also a very deep and emotional factor: I fell in love with Africa. People there are natural and sincere. I even felt that I was breathing better there than in our part of the world."

He intended to take a temporary leave from the World Bank in 1974 to set up his organization. But then came an opportunity to direct the bank's Africa Division of Financing and Industrial Development and acquire experience in his chosen area.

Working directly under Robert McNamara, the World Bank president, Hidalgo ran his division with a free hand and dizzying efficiency. In fiscal 1976, according to David Gordon of the World Bank, Hidalgo's department put through more projects than it ever had.

At the end of 1976 he temporarily left his \$35,000-a-year job to set up what has become the Fund for Research and Investment for the Development of Africa (FRIDA) with his inheritance. "We decided at the outset," Hidalgo said, "to concentrate on a few countries for a few years and try to be very efficient there with our small resources."

One of the countries in which FRIDA operates is the kingdom of Lesotho, an impoverished and eroded dot of land surrounded by South Africa. Lesotho is independent, but most of the men go to South African mines to find work. FRIDA has set up three operations so far in Lesotho, including a tapestry weaving workshop functioning with 150 women. An investment of \$80,000 created two more

workshops and 250 additional jobs. The tapestries produced there depict scenes of daily life in fresh colors and are sold through FRIDA shops in London and Paris; two outlets in the United States are planned.

Hidalgo was born in 1942 in Madrid, the son of a Spanish writer and public figure of the same name who is remembered (unfairly, in his son's view) as the minister of war who promoted Franco to the rank of general and sent him to quell the uprising of the miners in the Asturias in 1934.

"My father made me swear before he died," Hidalgo said, "that I would never accept a political position in Spain. He was an honest man who spent all of his own considerable personal fortune during the time he was minister of war because he did not want to take advantage of the allowances he could have disposed of. He returned to Spain after the Civil War, having withdrawn from politics, and was instrumental in getting 39 death sentences commuted by Franco."

"Franco had a strange affection for him, but he was by no means a Francoist; in fact, when Franco's troops entered his native village at the end of the Civil War, over 100 of his close friends and political associates were massacred, and my father himself was denounced to the authorities as a dangerous revolutionary by cousins who were landowners and who wanted his head. All this marked him so deeply that he never wanted me to get involved in Spanish politics."

A Crazy Life

Young Diego studied law in Madrid, then got a master's degree in business administration at Harvard in 1968. From there he went to the World Bank. He married in 1969 and has two daughters who live in Washington with their mother. The Hidalgos were separated in 1975.

"I lead a crazy life," he said. "With FRIDA I carry on nine different full-time activities. We have offices in London and Paris and



Philanthropist Hidalgo

"I don't need it."

field offices in Ouagadougou [Upper Volta] and Lesotho. Last year I took the plane 217 times. But I try to spend at least one week each month in Washington to see my children."

FRIDA has charity status; all profits from consultancy, marketing and recruiting subsidiaries are channeled back into the foundation. Its objective is to set up about 20 industrial projects by 1983 along with a significant and efficient commercial network for African crafts. If this works out, the Foundation will try to funnel international financing to projects using the human resources of Africa's least developed countries.

The project has been received with warmth and enthusiasm. Hidalgo said, by government and financial circles in the countries concerned. A characteristic reaction was that of a director of the Bank of Togo who used his annual vacation to accompany Hidalgo on a tour of the country.

"Wherever we went, he made a speech to introduce me," Hidalgo said. "He would say: 'Consider this implausible and unusual fact: it has been the white man's habit to come to Africa to take our wealth away. And here we have this man who hardly seems real, and who comes here to give us both his wealth and his work.'"

Dance

Nureyev Disappointing

LONDON, June 12 (IHT) — Rudolf Nureyev has opened another marathon "Nureyev Festival" at the London Coliseum, in which he is scheduled to dance at all 28 performances in four weeks through June 30 — the first three weeks with London Festival Ballet in full-length and shorter classics, the last with the Murray Louis Dance Company of New York.

His opening-night performance in his own production of "Romeo and Juliet" was at a low level of sparkle and personality. A well-defined character was some help in what is basically a muddled choreographic presentation of the tragedy, but the chief dancing pleasure was in the Festival Ballet's Patricia Ruanne as a poignantly expressive Juliet and Nicholas Johnson's buoyant Mercutio.