

SCHOOL TAMES TOUGHS

Missionary's sons back on mean streets of E. Harlem

HANS HAGEMAN, SON OF A Methodist missionary and a graduate of Princeton and Columbia Law School, sat on a bench yesterday morning under the shade of two tall trees in the backyard of the East Harlem house where he grew up.

But the sprawling five-story structure, sandwiched between abandoned and boarded up buildings on drug-infested E. 103d St., has turned into more than a mere boyhood home.

It is now the kind of school to save this city's future.

Last year, Hageman and his younger brother, Ivan, who holds bachelor's and master's degrees from Harvard,

abandoned successful careers — one as a downtown lawyer and the other as a suburban teacher — to return up-



JUAN GONZALEZ

town and found the East Harlem School at Exodus House.

It is a refuge for children so emotionally damaged that the average public school system can't handle them. Youths bordering on delinquency. Kids whose parents may be in jail or have AIDS. Victims of sexual

abuse or of beatings by crack-addicted mothers.

Yesterday morning, while a dozen of the school's students were shooting hoops against the lone basketball rim in the school's small playground, Hageman talked excitedly about the coming second year for the school.

A thousand light-years away in Washington, D.C., the White House and the Republicans were fouling the summer air with their idiotic debate about a "crime bill," midnight basketball and whose pork barrel is bigger.

"There's two things you never want to see made," Hageman said. "Sausages and laws." Hageman has some knowledge of this. He once served as staff director to a U.S. Senate subcommittee, which helped convince him

you prevent crime by refusing to give up on children when they're young.

"After the fourth grade, most boys in this neighborhood get lost," said Hans. "That's when you have to reach them." Hans is lucky. He survived thanks to parents of uncommon strength.

Back in 1962, a young Methodist minister from Wahoo, Neb., the Rev. Lynn L. Hageman, married Leola Johnson of Chicago. This act scandalized the Methodist bigwigs who, when they learned that the German-descended Hageman was engaged to a black woman, even offered him a church of his choice if he would only call off the marriage.

But love won the day over sanctimonious prejudice and soon the couple found themselves as missionaries in Spanish Harlem where Hageman made the neighborhood heroin addicts his parishioners.

In 1965, the minister and his wife founded Exodus House as a residential drug rehabilitation project of the East Harlem Protestant Parish. There they housed as many as 25 recovering addicts at a time while rearing Ivan, Hans and their sister, Erika, in a fourth-floor apartment of the same building.

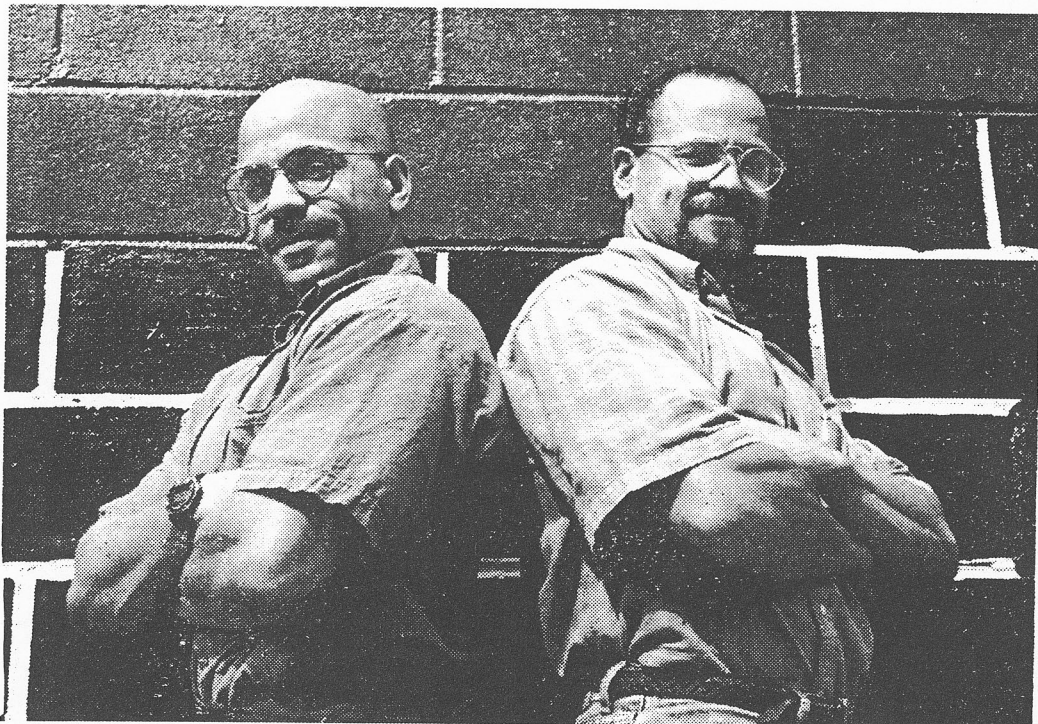
"We were all like family," Hans recalled of the residents. "We would exercise with the guys, go out on picnics and family days."

All three eventually went on to prestigious private schools — Hans became a classmate of John F. Kennedy Jr. at the Collegiate School — and Erika eventually graduated from Harvard in 1980, the same year as Ivan.

Their father, a powerfully built man in his youth, always taught his children physical conditioning, and so it was that Hans and Ivan both developed not only brains but perfectly chiseled muscles.

Each of the brothers has a brown belt in Okinawan karate, and Ivan, the school's principal, established a full weight room and has made martial arts instruction in Capoeira, an Afro-Brazilian martial arts, a requirement for all students.

For a while after law school Hans worked as a Manhattan assistant district attorney, assigned to special nar-



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THE BROTHERS Hageman, Hans (l.) and Ivan, carrying on in tradition of their minister father.

See **GONZALEZ** Page 22

GONZALEZ FROM PAGE THREE

cotics. "But I got tired of running into old friends from the neighborhood who had been locked up," he said. "They would ask me to represent them, and I'd have to tell them, 'Defend you? I'm here to prosecute you.'"

By the mid 1980s, after their father suffered a stroke and their mother contracted Parkinson's disease, the drug rehab program was forced to close. But their parents refused to move out of East Harlem. Now in their 70s, they still live in the same apartment.

"Their love for the commu-

nity and their sacrifices stayed with me," Hans recalled.

Finally, Hans and Ivan decided to chuck their budding careers and return home to rebuild Exodus House as an intermediate school. Former classmate Kennedy Jr. helped them secure some funding from the Robin Hood Foundation, and a string of wealthy philanthropists and their former Ivy League friends began donating money to the cause.

Last year, they began with 14 students, and this year will nearly triple enrollment to 40. They ask \$100 a month tu-

ition but many parents pay with in-kind services to the school.

Yesterday morning, one of those students, 12-year-old Nicholas, was waiting with his class to go on a field trip to the Jewish Museum. Not so long ago Nicholas was a chronic truant headed for bigger trouble. In the school he's settled down.

A visitor asked him how this school compared to Public School 109, where he'd gone before.

"In the other school there was always pee on the floors of the bathroom," the boy said. "The teachers yelled at

you all the time and they never taught you anything hard. Here, you have to learn."

Hans keeps trying to bring Wall Street types into closer contact with what the future will bring if more attention isn't paid to these kids.

"There's an incredible lack of awareness downtown," he said. "They have no idea the nightmare that awaits them beyond an untrained work force."

Determined to follow in his parents' footsteps, Hans is reading an apartment on the school's fifth floor for his wife and 3-year-old baby.