



# PRONiCA

## News from Nicaragua

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### Still Many Questions

Jane Seymore, Haverford Volunteer at Mama Licha’s Clinic in Estelí

When I arrived in Nicaragua I was really unsure where I would fit in – for a mere six weeks! That insecurity seemed to dominate my interactions with Nicaraguans. I felt my questions needed answers for me to be productive.

As time passed, those questions remained unanswered. But I do fondly remember my favorite bakery in Estelí; the woman down the street who always called, “*adios*,” as I walked by; and little Miguel, my host-sibling, who eventually stopped hitting me (apparently an major accomplishment for him); and how he drew a new picture for me every day.

Eventually, I found comfort within my work. I created newsletters for *Juntos Adelante* (an organization that helps fund Mama Licha’s) and found new donors. Whenever something interesting happened, I tagged along. During my volunteer service, I assisted a doctor from Chicago as she performed over sixty colposcopies (cervical biopsies) in three days, wrote up patient histories, and accompanied Mama Licha on a Sandinista medical brigade to the outlying community of Condega.

In early July, students from the Yale School of Nursing and their preceptors (*Juntos Adelante* founders Angie Rogers and Bethany Golden) arrived in Estelí for their

community health rotation. How inspiring were their medical stories! Furthermore, Angie and Bethany helped me focus my work on ways to promote the mission of sustainable healthcare for all Nicaraguans.

I still have questions about what my volunteer service meant, to me, Mama Licha, or Nicaragua. Meanwhile, I fell in love with Nicaragua, faults and all. Like every worthwhile experience, it was hard and sometimes exasperating. Sometimes I hated it. Sometimes I loved it. Sometimes I just wanted some homemade macaroni and cheese.

Then there were those days when I felt productive and everything fit. In a conversation my Spanish was intelligible. I made someone smile. Nora, my host mom/sister, brought me arroz con leche (rice with milk, my Nicaraguan comfort food). It was in those moments that I realized those questions may never be answered and that may be just alright. Nicaragua has transformed my life and I am making small changes.



Jane with Mama Licha, Angie and Bethany

To read more about Mama Licha’s Clinic and *Juntos Adelante*, visit [www.mamasclinic.org](http://www.mamasclinic.org) and [www.juntosadelante.org](http://www.juntosadelante.org).

More stories from other volunteers are inside. □

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**ProNica's mission** is to assist in creating and sustaining programs by and for the Nicaraguan people. These projects should hold promise for grassroots growth, arise from Nicaraguan needs and tradition, and provide not only survival but also empowerment.

ProNica's priorities are on community cohesiveness and economic development, training in non-violent procedures, health, education, agriculture and women's empowerment. We seek to link Nicaraguan people with concerned individuals internationally to promote understanding and mutual action. Education of those who seek information or to be of service is part of our mission.

ProNica, Incorporated is a 501(c)(3) tax exempt corporation under the spiritual care of the Southeastern Yearly Meeting, Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) with offices in St. Petersburg, Florida and Managua, Nicaragua. ProNica is a registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Nicaragua. The work is accomplished by an international core of dedicated volunteers and staff who seek to embody Quaker principles of consensual decision making and action and respect for that of God in every person. This service project arose out of a deep concern over the international exploitation of the Nicaraguan people and resources and a wish to respond to that concern in practical and constructive ways.

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## My Corner

by Herb Haigh  
ProNica Board President

When I was a special education teacher/therapist I felt that my most successful students/patients were those for whom I did everything that was required, plus "a little bit more."

It was that "little bit more" that went beyond my job description. It was that part freely given. It was an unexpected gift that made the difference in our relationships.

I am certain that the importance of giving just "a little bit more" than is required is the determinate of success in many other professional endeavors as well.

Certainly, any job under the heading of social justice includes "a little bit more" to be successful. But I am certain it is true in manufacturing, service, and certainly, sales.

Volunteerism, by its very nature, is entirely "just a little bit more." It is what we do to make our world and ourselves successful.

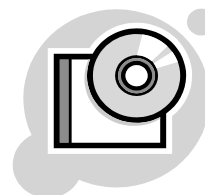
ProNica thanks all of you who give that "little bit more" and encourage others to join us. □

**ProNica** thanks retiring bookkeeper Peg Richards for her diligent work helping set up our new bookkeeping database and for keeping our financial records up to date since 2005.



Incoming bookkeeper Scott Bravard joined ProNica in August. He attends St. Petersburg College earning a degree in graphic design.

We look forward to Scott's efforts as much as Peg looks forward to her retirement. □



## ProNica DVD

One DVD with two segments. First about all ProNica projects; second about the beauty school. Send \$10 for yours to share.

## Happiness in Nicaragua

Rose Mary Maestre, Haverford Volunteer in San Marcos

When I decided to go to Nicaragua with the Haverford delegation and summer of volunteerism, I knew little about the country. I knew I would be working with former “street children” in a program called Los Quinchos. I did not understand the meaning of Nicaraguan street children. In the United States street children are usually those who grow up in poverty-stricken areas, who might be using or selling drugs, dropping out of school, joining gangs or committing crimes. One reason might be their families’ lack of money to survive capitalistic U.S. society. Both groups are similar.

However, the drugs Nicaraguan street children consume are quite different. U.S. children are more exposed to smoking marijuana or drinking alcohol. The Los Quinchos children I worked with had been addicted to sniffing glue. Glue quells hunger; even poor mothers routinely give glue to their hungry, crying children. U.S. street children that I know consume drugs to forget about their problems. I’m sure hunger-masking drugs exist in the U.S. but child hunger and overall child abuse is not so upfront and personal as it is in Nicaragua.

Almost every week that I was in Nicaragua a child would come up to me asking for money. Although I was not sure what the money would be used for, I knew it was probably for some form of survival. U.S. children ask for money usually to raise money for graduation or some sports event in school. I have never witnessed children walking around barefoot in the U.S. or with torn up clothing like in Nicaragua. Most children in the U.S. do not give the impression that they are facing starvation, abuse, or any form of problems by the way they are dressed.

The physical appearance of the Los Quinchos children demonstrated the many problems they faced. However, when I talked to them they never revealed any signs of abuse or other problems. Especially, the boys from the *finca*, or farm, always appeared to be happy and enjoying every minute of life. Of course, there were moments of dispute and, like all children, fights erupted.

An outside observer, with little knowledge of their background and history, would think that these children are perfectly normal, because of the happiness they exude.

However, these assumptions are questioned when one of the kids steals another’s money to help his parents pay rent or to buy some food for the household.

Happiness is also questioned in other ways. Homework assignments to ask their parents about their families reveal that some children lack either parents or families. Such children won’t complete this homework assignment. Others cry. At times, one of the kids makes fun of another for being thirteen years old and not knowing how to read, write, or do math.



Rose Mary with Los Quinchos

Constantly, I questioned my assumptions about the happiness of the children and my co-workers, even my own happiness. Was it okay to be happy knowing that some days these children will not have enough food to eat or be unable to go to school because they lack a pair of sneakers?

Although I am not affluent by U.S. standards, I am privileged to not worry about such necessities. I still have enough money for food on my table, something these kids do not always have. However, what I have learned from my kids and co-workers at the *finca* is that we should not feel guilty about our privilege, but instead, find ways to utilize our privilege to help others in need.

During my volunteer service at the *finca* I made sure I shared my privilege to help these children and I will continue to do so for the months to come.

The Los Quinchos children are amazing and deserve all that will remove them from that category of street children and just be kids who want to learn to succeed and be truly happy in life. □

## Haverford 2008 Delegation

Delegations come for two or three weeks to experience Nicaragua first-hand. This summer students from Haverford College in Pennsylvania spent one week in Spanish immersion school to raise their language skills. Then, two weeks in delegation in which this group’s service project was planting trees and shrubs on the Estelí library grounds. Afterward, students volunteered for six more weeks at various ProNica projects. □



## Heroes and Martyrs

Madeline Kreider Carlson, Haverford Volunteer at Heroes and Martyrs Museum

To put my classroom Spanish to use in the real world and help out at a museum, I came to Nicaragua with the Haverford delegation. My site was the *Galería de Héroes y Mártires* (Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs), a grassroots historical museum that formed in the wake of terrible revolutionary fighting that devastated Estelí. A group of mothers, whose children, husbands, and other relatives were killed in the fighting, gathered photographs, personal mementos, and stories of their fallen soldiers. Ensuring that the great sacrifices of the people would never be forgotten, this collection became an exhibit that grew into the Galería. “*Es una historia publica* (It is a public history),” as Doña Mina, my host mother and the Galería’s coordinator, described it: “*Nadie es dueño aquí* (No one is the owner here).”

Today, the Galería is a museum filled with photos of those who died, some of their clothing and personal possessions, bomb and weapon remnants from the fighting in Esteli, photos of the guerrillas in the mountains, and original artwork depicting revolutionary figures, accompanied by written historical summaries of the revolution. My work began by digesting all this material to strengthen my patchy knowledge of Nicaraguan history. This also improved my rusty Spanish.

After a few days, I listed ways I might contribute, and began work with many of the mothers. An English guide, translations, and signage were the first priority. As an outsider, I was able to see some of the gaps in the historical narrative written by Nicaraguans steeped in their own history. I hoped to provide more context for foreign visitors who are often moved by the photographs, but lack understanding of the complicated politics of Nicaragua’s revolution.

I also interviewed some of the mothers who organized the museum, designed a website to better advertise the museum, and worked on some fundraising projects to help

maintain the building and the exhibit. I was deeply moved and motivated by the hard and often thankless work that Doña Mina and other mothers do to preserve the stories and memories of their families.

For me, a history major, the Galería’s emotional punch is the power to humanize war, to turn the lofty words “hero” and “martyr” into real people. Each time I stepped into the Galería I was reminded that the faces around me were young men and women who could easily have been my brothers, sisters, cousins, friends, or boyfriends – had I been born in another time and place. The history on display in the museum is not the dry stuff of textbooks. It doesn’t attempt to be too objective; history rarely is. It celebrates the value of individual stories and serves to create human understanding of conflicts.

By summer’s end, I had created the English guide and website, set up a small greeting-card sales project, and helped better advertise the museum around the city. I left with a wealth of knowledge about the past turbulent decades of Nicaragua’s history gleaned from many personal stories, some of which I audio recorded. Someday, I hope to compile those stories into an audio supplement to the museum – a great reason to return.

If you’re ever in Estelí, I encourage a visit to the Galería. Admire the bold murals, chat with the mothers in rocking chairs on the porch, step into the museum and feel the weight of so much potential extinguished and so many stories half-told.

Those faces will remain imprinted on my heart forever. Regardless of my lasting mark on the Galería, it has certainly left its mark on me.

Learn more about the *Galería de Héroes y Mártires*, visit <http://www.galleryofheroesandmartyrs.blogspot.com> □

## Yearly Meetings Update

Nine Yearly Meetings displayed ProNica informational this year. ProNica newsletter readers represented ProNica at their local gatherings. Two ProNica presentations at Friends General Conference were well-attended.

Many thanks to those who helped share ProNica’s mission with the wider Quaker community. And beyond. □



Madeline with mothers

## The More Books, the Better

Maggie Bishop, Haverford Volunteer at Los Quinchos Library

Before departing for Nicaragua, I learned about the Quinchos library and the wheels in my head began turning. My ideas produced forty-three personalized fund-raising letters to family, friends, and teachers. The result was \$1600 raised for the library!

The Quinchos library housed about 200 books enclosed in wooden bookcases in a small, well-lit room. The books were relatively disorganized and lacked labels or easy access, but I saw great potential in *la biblioteca*, the library. I realized a great deal more could be accomplished beyond just buying new books.

Doña Ivana, librarian and my host mother, was very laid back, yet excited about my ideas. We traveled to Managua on several occasions to buy posters for the walls, school supplies, games, and more books. Some of our favorite purchases were books about physical and sexual child abuse, homosexuality, and a book about “all you need to know about your period.” We also chose some books about animal care and rights, and a children’s meditation book.

Schools do not provide textbooks. Students listen to teachers lecture and then attempt homework without any references. Therefore, libraries provide textbooks used in school. Extra texts were included in our purchasing adventures.

Rose Mary, another Haverford student volunteer, and I completely reorganized the library - sorting and piling books, old and new. We created categories such as History, Social Sciences, Geography, Sports, Math, Science (with sub-sections of Geology, Astronomy, Chemistry, Biology), and a “How to do Things” Section. An entire bookcase is now devoted to children’s books, organized by level of difficulty.

As we worked, curious children kept mixing up our organized piles and asking, “what is this about?” Their young faces expressed their desires to grow intellectually. I’ve never known children so eager to absorb information.

The result was better than I could have ever imagined. We hung posters, cleaned and straightened the library, and then watched as the kids arrived after school. Everyone marveled at the bright atmosphere. It was now easy to find books in the various sections and the children were more engaged by the positive reading space. They were also

really excited to read. I took new books to their homes on various occasions and implemented fun reading contests.

When they enter their newly renovated library, the children’s smiles illuminate this successful project. With new books, posters, rugs, games, math tools, a clock, and fresh school supplies, the Quinchos and the surrounding

community have a positive retreat whenever they feel the urge for intellectual stimulation.

Back home, after this summer of a lifetime, I realize I learned more from the Quinchos than I could ever hope they learned from me. Every minute was well worth it. I was

easily motivated in such a positive atmosphere, and I now hope the

Quinchos are equally motivated in their newly renovated *biblioteca*. Those wheels in my head brought me to a far more beautiful place than I ever imagined. □



Maggie with books

## Dreams Caught

Dina Rubey, Bryn Mawr College

My high school graduation celebration included a dream catcher tattoo to remind me of my hopeful ideals. From work in post-conflict areas of extremely poor countries, I learned that it takes more than good intentions to overcome the “new world order” which leaves many behind. Facing obstacles to poverty alleviation (politics, corporate media, instability, cynicism, hopelessness), my dream catcher tattoo keeps my idealistic spirit alive.

This summer I lived and volunteered in Estelí where a hopeful spirit pervaded every organization I encountered. Everywhere are murals with messages like: “*Nosotros debemos ser, el cambio que queremos ver*” (Be the change you wish to see in the world [Gandhi]) or “*Todos tienen derechos iguales*” (Everyone has equal rights) or “*Cada gotita cuenta!*” (Every drop of water counts!).

These murals are the ongoing project of Funarte, an organization that offers free art classes for women and children of all ages. Each group chooses an issue they consider important to their community - literacy, equality, education, AIDS, children’s empowerment, and women’s

see *Dreams* page 6

*Dreams* from page 5 rights and self-esteem. Their sketches illustrate the progressive hopes and ideals of the new generation of Estelians. The result is a socially conscious youth, a beautiful city, and a confident young population.



Dina's workshop

We learned the importance of Funarte's mission at *Radio las Cumiches* (Kid's Radio). This radio station is run by and for young people to advance children's rights and self-esteem. We learned about pervasive generational discrimination and that many children are considered parental property. This leads to low self-

esteem at best, and emotional, physical, and sexual abuse at worst.

At *Radio las Cumiches*, children express themselves, with changed names on the air, without censorship. The staff not only empowers children by providing a public space for broadcasting, but supports and protects those who have experienced abuse.

Our trips to Funarte and *Radio las Cumiches* showcased a sense of responsibility, a creative approach to improving the world and everyone in it. Esteli is an intentional community to the nth degree. The "yes we can" infection is contagious, and I caught it.

This summer, in addition to supporting *Radio las Cumiches* by creating a website (in Spanish for outreach, and in English for international solidarity and support), I began a children's theater project at the library in Esteli. It was wonderful to watch shy and nervous children blossom into honest, outspoken actors.

I brought dream-catcher kits for the theater workshop. Each child made one and wrote or drew about their dreams for theirs, the community's, and Nicaragua's future. "I want to save the environment and beautiful Nicaragua's natural resources," a seven-year-old explained. "I want to be a doctor because so many people in Nicaragua are sick and no one helps them," wrote another. "I'm going to be a teacher because learning makes people happy." One six-year-old said, "I want to be a true Sandinista President." Whoaaa, he couldn't even write!

The *taller*, or workshop, was for kids between four and eleven years old. This summer I relearned, after frustrating experiences in international service learning work that We the People are more powerful and more effective than any government, international financial institution,

or corporation. Nicaragua thrives on creative grassroots approaches to strengthen the national community and quality of life. It was incredible to be a part of these efforts, more than I imagined. My dream catcher caught many precious dreams. □

## A Walk in History

Amanda Roy and Cheri Stortz

During our two-week Washburn University delegation this summer, we met many unforgettable Nicaraguans, but one man stands out. When we met Marcelino Perez in Lagartillo, we had no idea how our lives would change. He guided us on a walk through a small hamlet where we came to a stop.

"This is where I stood to fight off the Contras," he said. Instantly, he had our attention. On that very spot, he told us what happened on December 31, 1984. Six people died in an attack by the U.S.-supported Contras. Many more would have been slaughtered had they not received a warning from a neighbor. Marcelino explained, in vivid detail, where the Contra soldiers were located and where one of his closest friends died. Our delegation fell completely silent.

We knew that this historic walk would be interesting, but the raw emotion from Marcelino was much more than we had expected. On a tree was a cross with a name and date. "And this is where my brother was killed."

There, we learned how little time there was to determine an appropriate defense strategy. We heard how the terrain was different, and how his brother did not have much chance for survival because of where his hideout was located. In the school yard, two more were murdered. This was hardest for Marcelino because his fourteen-year-old son Javier and his son's best friend were killed defending their village. "No fourteen-year-old should die fighting for his home. It was not their battle to fight, but they did, and this is where they died." He did not shed a tear as he spoke those words, but his eyes said it all.

The last destination of our walk was where 20-year-old Maria Zunilda fell defending her village. The only woman who fought, Maria suffered from polio and refused to retreat with the other women and children saying, "They're not going to make me leave my home. I will stay and fight." On top of the hill stands a beautiful memorial for those who lost their lives that day. It has a portrait of each person who so unselfishly gave his/her life. As we read about Doña Tina and the Contra attack, among our entire group there wasn't a dry eye.



Later Marcelino led us down the trail where the villagers fled from the attack. He described how the fleeing people felt. “They could hear gunshots as the battle raged, but could not see any of it. Some were barefoot, pregnant, even sick. Adults grabbed any child they saw and ran. Some did not even know where their own children were.”

The trail is steep, rough, and long, but it does not compare to what the people of Lagartillo had to endure while fleeing. In 1984, there was no trail; they had cut through jungle. By the time we hiked down to the end of the trail, it was almost three hours, exactly the same time it took the people of Lagartillo to flee for their lives.

Those six people who gave their lives defending Lagartillo

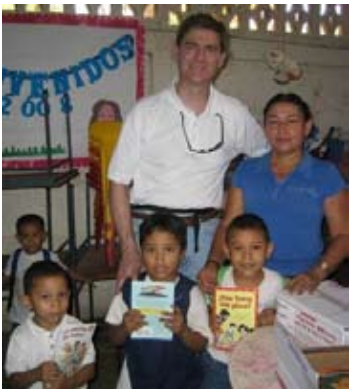
are heroes. Their story continues to inspire the community, and it definitely inspired us. The historical walk in Lagartillo was the most intense and emotional experience of our delegation.

This caused many of us to rethink the way the U.S. functions around the world. We feel obliged to retell this story to increase awareness of others. The two of us, personally, reflected how we can use this experience for the betterment of others.

We now have a passion to educate others about the trials Nicaraguans endured due to our government. We cannot undo what happened, but we commit to doing what we can to prevent anything like this ever happening again. □

## One Book, One Kid at a Time

David Forsee



David shares books

In the last year I have traveled three times to Central America. On the first trip I was the manual labor on a church medical mission. We went to the remote village of Guadalupe in Nicaragua and brought 300 Spanish easy reader children’s books. At the school, at our makeshift clinic, and in homes, it was clear that these books were the only

books in this community of several thousand. A Bible in the church and maybe a few workbooks to share in the school. That was it.

As we met kids in schools, on playgrounds, or hanging around, I was impressed with the similarities to my own school-age kids. Curious, smart, playful, dreaming, ambitious, hopeful – just the same. The difference - no resources, no clear path out of poverty. There is no one thing that will fix the problem. But I could get more books. And that would be a small start.

My passion is literacy and learning. I believe that opportunities for learning can be the basis for helping children and countries rise up from poverty. Yes, many problems are connected, but here seems a good place to start. We have resources to make that start – one book, one kid at a time.

In April I met ProNica Program Coordinator Lillian Hall in Managua and we distributed 2000 children’s books.

Lillian and I visited several schools and the La Chureca dump in Managua. We visited schools and the town library in San Marcos (few books – none for lending - in a dark mud floored open air room); and several groups working with mothers and kids. Very easy to get books to kids – harder to think about national literacy programs.

Our group’s next steps are to determine how to get more books to kids. Lending libraries are one idea. Also simply getting books directly to kids is another option. Our group has the resources to expand this program.

Thanks to all who support the great work of ProNica. The compassion and support I saw at the centers and schools supported by ProNica are truly making a difference. My personal thanks go to Lillian for helping make this trip happen.



David with readers

Note: Reach Out and Read is a U.S. non-profit organization that distributes books to low-income children through a doctor at a one of 3000 clinics. Doctors encourage moms to read to their kids. What a joy for everyone. For more information, contact David at [daforsee@yahoo.com](mailto:daforsee@yahoo.com). □

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