



# PRONiCA

## News from Nicaragua

September 2009  
Vol 22 No 3

Published quarterly by the ProNica Committee of the Southeastern Yearly Meeting

### What brings you here?

Casa Materna Volunteer and Liaison Kitty Madden

Fifteen-year-old Esmilda has just returned from the hospital with her newborn twins (a boy and a girl) and is warmly welcomed by her “sister-mothers.” Each week we gather with the Casa mothers to review the various “high risks” of their pregnancies that would have made it more dangerous for them to give birth in their rural home communities.

factors relating to maternal death in Nicaragua - teenage pregnancy.

With help from Switzerland, Casa Materna started an outreach program aimed at reducing the number of adolescent pregnancies.

Seneda, a 22-year-old primary school teacher, spent a full day on the road traveling from Mulukuku. “This will be my second child but, like Esmilda, I had my first baby when I was only 14 years old. I am here in the Casa now because I also have problems with my heart and need to be monitored.” What challenges Seneda has overcome these past 6 years - finishing highschool, receiving teacher’s training, all the while as a teenage mother.



Mothers encourage Victorina, age 20, to share the story of the death of her first child when she was giving birth at home two years ago. All are concerned that everything will go well for her. Their loving support is evident.

While Darlene is expecting her first child at age 20 and “all has gone well,” she shares with the others that “my grandmother who is still living gave birth to 19 children; only 11 of them survived.” Sadie who is now 32 was at the Casa Materna in 1994 and 1998 for the births of her first two children and has returned this

Maria, 39, and Jamileth, 38, are expecting their 7th and 9th babies respectively. Both share that their early pregnancies were more “right in a row” but give thanks that there has been better spacing in recent years. Their hard-earned wisdom is gently shared with the younger mothers.

time because of severe bleeding.

The mothers also discuss other problems of previous pregnancies as well as high-risk births such as diabetes, heart problems, epilepsy, and anemia. Of course problems of hemorrhage with previous pregnancies or births.

Two of the mothers, Junieth and Yesenia are expecting their first babies. Junieth is celebrating her 20th birthday today and is wondering if it might also be her child’s birthday. Three times during her pregnancy she was hospitalized as doctors feared she would not carry her baby to term.

These are a sampling of a recent group of 15 mothers. We attend as many as 35 mothers in the Casa and another 5-10 in the hospital. When mothers leave they always give thanks for “the way we have been cared for by the staff, the nourishing food and the wonderful community of friends we have been a part of here with the other mothers.”

These young mothers share one of the most troublesome

We are grateful to all, especially ProNica supporters, who make possible our ongoing work. □

Rushwald Family Memorial Funds have totaled over \$10,000 for Casa Materna in Matagalpa

## News from Nicaragua

published by the ProNica Committee since 1987

September 2009 Vol 22 No 3

ProNica Board

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ProNica's Mission is building sustainable cross-cultural relationships between the people of Nicaragua and North America using Quaker values.

ProNica's Vision is solidarity that empowers and educates Nicaraguans and North Americans.

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

Our 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 everyone. This service project arose from a deep concern over the international exploitation of the Nicaraguan people and resources and a wish to respond in practical and constructive ways.

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.

**ProNica Stateside Office**  
130 Nineteenth Avenue Southeast  
St. Petersburg, Florida 33705-2810  
stateside@pronica.org, www.pronica.org, 727.821.2428

**El Centro de los Amigos**  
Apartado 5391, Managua, Nicaragua  
managua@pronica.org, 011.505.2266.0984

**Quaker House Managua**  
011.505.2266.3216



## Introducing...

Lyn Cope  
ProNica Board Member

As a photojournalist in Haiti in 1979, my coming-of-age experience was the killing of the village turkey to feed two already over-fed North Americans there to document a women's empowerment conference. The pristine white washed cathedral's gilded white Jesus in the coastal town of Jacmel within view of women washing vegetables in sewer water reeking of death. I met my maker in Haiti. When I returned to the States, I devoted even more attention to helping families.

When I moved to Florida in the early 80s, I became active in Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) listening attentively to concerns and activism regarding Latin America. By the mid 80s ProNica was taking shape. Ruth Hyde Paine described conditions in Nicaragua at SEYM meetings.

Fast forward twenty years, I accepted a position on the ProNica Board. I witnessed ProNica's good works through Pam Haigh's resurrected beauty school, Herb's descriptive writings, Lillian Hall's presentations, and Davida Johns' direction and inspiration.

"Brilliant," I thought—"theirs is good work." Casa Materna in Matagalpa, midwife Mama Licha's Clinic, the Acahualinca Women's Center serving over 8,000 clients are dear to my heart to say nothing of the daily meals served to the children of poverty living in the garbage dump. With librarians in my family and owning a publishing house myself, I applaud ProNica for funding Nicaraguan libraries. Matching funds mean a \$2000 donation reaps \$5000 worth of books and two computers. Another \$1000 provides school uniforms and supplies for a dozen children. Donations become investments in Nicaragua—helping others help themselves, teaching others to teach others to help themselves. The need is great. On the Board, I will help. □

*Lyn Cope resides in Melbourne Beach, FL. A lifelong Friend, she is involved with Quaker concerns and values. Lyn graduated from Olney Friends School and was Friend-in-residence and substitute teacher at Scattergood Friends School. She traveled for La Leche League International before moving to Florida. Administrative Secretary of SEYM for the past nine years, Lyn enjoys contact with Friends worldwide, does all SEYM publishing, bookkeeping, and assists numerous committee clerks. She shares her office with dog Basil and cat Fiona. Lyn is on the steering committee for Quaker Universalist Fellowship (QUF) and is Recording Clerk for Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP). She is the author of the Little Quaker Sociology Book with Glossary and Beginning Scottish Country Dance, the latter now a collector's item.*

## SEYM Youth Delegation

Chaperone Kathy Hersh

Some questioned my sanity when I agreed to take eleven teenagers (ages 14 to 19) to Nicaragua for two weeks and return them safe and sound. Now I know why.

Responsibility for underage youth in the second poorest country in our hemisphere is challenging, risky, and unpredictable. But, my Quaker faith assured me way would open.

Spanish, though universally taught in Florida schools from K-8, does not roll off students' tongues. Culturally, it's hard for North Americans, to understand that national pride exists despite the pervasive influence of *los yanquis*, Yankees.

Overshadowing all is shocking poverty, hard to comprehend even by seasoned travelers. Our teens had a lot to absorb. Quaker teenagers aren't that different from other teens.

ProNica Program Coordinator Lillian Hall, with suggestions from her 15-year-old son Trevor and me, did an admirable job introducing Nicaragua. It is a country rich in beauty, natural resources, and wonderful people, but unable to overcome its tragic history of political infighting, corruption, and US domination.

I'm not sure our teens could be prepared for what they saw: very young and barely-clothed children begging at intersections clogged with cars spewing smoke, people

living in shacks made from discarded plastic and cardboard, an urban encampment of former sugar cane harvesters dying from the effects of herbicides.

Our teens also encountered a country of astounding natural beauty, overflowing with poetry, music, and the kindness of strangers. It is that Nicaragua that I hope will be etched in their consciousness. In Nicaragua thirty years ago I felt so welcome, even loved, in the midst of a brutal civil war. I came to understand that even though war is the worst fate imaginable for any nation, the survival instinct does not extinguish the daily impulse to reaffirm one's humanity.

I expected nightly blogs written with youthful fervor that offered proof that the trip was worth all the fundraising, expense, worry, and... excitement. But then I recalled that even as a war correspondent there and moved as I was by the countless acts of bravery and generosity I witnessed, I did not keep a journal. My reactions were too complex and startling to process on demand.

Transformation comes on its own schedule, usually unannounced, with unexpected benefits. It is not measurable, certainly not with words and never forced.

My prayer is that from this delegation our teens will understand themselves and their relationship to the world better, that the effects of war never go away, that poverty is everyone's responsibility, and that the human spirit thrives, in spite of adversity, in the presence of hope. □

### Hope in a White Dress

SEYM teen delegate Cecilia Rose Haecker

Masked authorities checking for fevers and symptoms of swine flu swarmed around us pale foreigners as we left the airplane. Even for a Florida teen, the heat and humidity hit me full blast. Perspiration clung to my skin. The climate was not the only thing holding me in awe: it was the beauty and strangeness of Nicaragua all around me.

Streets crowded with vendors yelling about their wares, thrusting baggies of water through windows of old school buses, and scrubbing even the dirtiest cars' windows for any bit of change. Small children waved their hand-made woven-grass crafts - a dog, a flower, a monkey- for sale.

We visited a small preschool where adorable, bright-eyed children hugged us. A young girl beat a *piñata* with a stick and soon little feet clambered towards the falling candy. A little boy in oversized pants and huge grin danced. The preschoolers come from struggling families who worked in hard places, such as La Chureca. This is their small haven.

Despite being a cold dose of reality, La Chureca was one of my favorite visits. Mountains of trash loomed over our vehicle as it bumped along a dirt road, throwing us from our seats. But even the violent ride couldn't keep my eyes from the view outside. Houses, made of scavenged scraps and tarps, spread out over the hills and nestled into niches as far as I could see. Men and women hauled wheeled carts, while barefoot children raced around among glass and other hazards.

We finally arrived at the top of a steep cliff, and then into a cement enclosure with long wood tables and benches under a roofed shelter. Children ran to greet Lillian, clinging to her as she led us inside. Beside the narrow pathway into the compound down the steep cliff was... a lake? Garbage floated on its murky waters. As well as tires, discarded toys and clothes. People were swimming and bathing. This disconcerted me, especially when some women captured the water in cups for the children.

see **HOPE** on page 4



*HOPE* con't from page 3

Regardless of my lack of Spanish some children quickly realized how fun I am to climb on. A little girl, about 6, clung to me like a tick, Lillian noted. I remember her gap-toothed smile and her readiness to flash it. Tick and I watched the soccer game between the “dump” kids and US teens. I was probably the only one surprised by the Nicaraguans’ skill. With such agility, two boys kicked the ball back and forth until one of them, with the gracefulness of a dancer, kicked it for yet another score. Such skills in the US would earn him a college scholarship.

## Generosity

SEYM teen delegate Genevieve Rowe

A hard reality was the starving children who are so poor that they sniff glue to relieve the hunger in their grumbling tummies. Fortunately Los Quinchos organization helps street children wean themselves from addictive glue. These former street children are housed, fed, attend school, and learn trades to earn a living. We joined the Los Quinchos’ celebration on their farm with dancing, food, soccer, a magic show, and even clowns! We petted pigs, goats, and cows.

El Limon, a peasant community in the mountains near Esteli, impressed me most. My hosts were Artisteo and his mother, who welcomed us with incredible hospitality. They proudly showed us to their only bedroom in their three-room home. The wall that separated the bedroom from the common area was black plastic framed by branches. They gave us their only beds and they slept on the ground in an adjoining shed. Our pillows were filled the mother’s clothing.



On our way out of the dump, out the ruddy windows I witnessed a beautiful scene. A mother and daughter around 4 years old walked hand in hand down the packed garbage path, dust clouds swirling around them. The young child in a pure white dress, stood out like a beacon of hope amongst the poverty and violence. This child dressed in clothes so easily ruined in that waste land, was a true act of faith. In my eyes that child radiated hope, hope for a new generation in Nicaragua, where all people may live comfortably and unworried about necessities like food, water, and safety. □

Their generosity and sweet nature shocked us.

My most horrifying time was at 2:30am when I had to use the outhouse. Reluctantly I dragged myself out of bed, into the rain, and trudged through thick mud toward the chamber pot style outhouse. My flashlight illuminated something reflective – eyes? – and I heard terrifying noises! Quickly focusing my flashlight, I recognized a harmless large black pig tied to a tree. I slowly and quietly retreated.

During the day we worked as a road crew, repairing puddle-filled roads. The money our Quaker community contributed to our trip funded the supplies to repair the road. We sweated pounds off as we shoveled gravel into the potholes. Teamwork was essential to the task. It was back-breaking work, but by the end of the day we had accomplished a lot.

I now understand how ridiculously spoiled we all are. This was truly the adventure of a lifetime and I thank everyone who helped make it happen. My experience in Nicaragua is a memory I will always cherish. □

## My Country

Nicaraguan teen delegate Marián del Carmen Torres González

I am 14 years old. I attend the Saint Teresa’s Academy in Managua. I’m on my 8th grade of bilingual high school. My mom is Spanish; my dad is Nicaraguan. He was a guerrilla before the Sandinista revolution; now he is a farmer. We live on a farm 18 kms from Managua. Volcanoes Momotombo and Momotombito are visible from our farm.

Lillian invited me to join the Quaker US teen delegation. I was reluctant because I would miss school and I would be nervous trying to speak English. But I realized that the trip

was going to help me increase my knowledge of English language and since I’m a good student, a week of missed classes would not affect me so much.

When I decided to join the group, I was a little nervous but also happy to interchange culture, know more about Nicaragua, and make friends! The first days I felt strange, but then I felt good and willing to talk to everybody, and laugh, and translate to my trip mates.

I was surprised at all the resources Nicaragua has but

doesn't use 100%. At Los Quinchos Association, children need love and someone to care for them. Also surprising during the traveling was that our group was always happy and laughing. We helped each other and poor people were friends for us, too. When we went to El Limón, I thought that some of the students were going to feel uncomfortable or shy with their assigned family, but I was wrong. I think all of us learned, and enjoyed so much sharing experiences with these country families.

What I learned was that sometimes I dream about traveling to Italy or Europe instead of thinking about visiting the beautiful places in Nicaragua. So now I know that Nicaragua is a country I want to visit frequently. It is a privilege to be Nicaraguan. Nicaragua has many historical sites, beautiful lakes,

*view video at <http://www.pronica.org/delegations/>*



lagoons, rivers, spectacular islands, natural reserves, animals, volcanoes, and most important - the people are humble and made us feel part of their family.

Teenagers often think that technology and money are essential for happiness. But I would share with other teens that a trip here would be an important and different experience. I recommend this kind of trip to my Nicaraguan friends and to foreign teens. They might change their way of thinking, meet different people, learn how humble families live in the country

side, and how many resources Nicaragua has!

I made a lot of friends, my English is better than before, thanks to this trip. □

## Nicaragua Feminism

ProNica volunteer Colleen Hotchkiss

I am a junior at Haverford College in Pennsylvania where my major is Spanish with a concentration in Gender and Sexuality Studies. With a grant from the Center for Peace and Global Citizenship I was an international intern this summer. Through ProNica I worked with Grupo Venancia in Matagalpa, an organization that has worked for gender equality in Nicaragua since 1991. What attracted me to Grupo Venancia was our shared feminism. Their goals are to empower women, build networks between women and men, build female autonomy, and educate in Matagalpa and surrounding communities. I identified with their goals and was thrilled to volunteer with such amazing, strong women.

I created an online archive of their publications and helped finish their new website. My efforts make Venancia information and materials more widely available: in Matagalpa, throughout Nicaragua, and internationally. Anyone anywhere may download workshops guides on a variety of themes (self-esteem, sexuality, etc.); information about women's health and safe sex; and women's rights and politics. This tangible contribution broadens their outreach and furthers their goal of gender equality.

I also participated in their regular workshops, usually once or twice a week. Themes ranged from Sexuality, to Democracy and Citizenship, to Meditation, to workshops

specifically for youth. We shared opinions in a completely open atmosphere and I learned about the many issues Nicaraguan women face.

On my second day on the job, electricity flickered off. During rainy season, this happens frequently. Since almost



every job depends on computers, during power outages we searched for something else to do or just hung out. Lack of power didn't affect an in-session workshop about sexuality. Lea, a German volunteer, suggested we join it. Everyone wrote one or two questions on pieces of paper and passed them to the leaders. Then, in small groups we discussed questions and prepared a skit in the form of a call-in radio program by a "sexologist." In my group were three women my age and one in her fifties.

We discussed issues of sexuality, especially amazing in this culture where this is still taboo.

My project was complete when I left. See it at [www.labarored.org/venancia/index.html](http://www.labarored.org/venancia/index.html). I received many intangible things: memories, friendships, and the experience of feminist activism in an environment very different from the one I am

*see Volunteer on page 6*

*Volunteer from page 5* accustomed to at Haverford.

Second-wave feminism was very much a white, Western movement, often to the exclusion of people of color. I broadened my own experience with intersecting issues of race and gender and gained insight that helps me grow as a feminist and activist.

To me feminism is not just about gender equality, but about

eliminating oppression, not only patriarchy but all violent and exploitative systems. Feminism is an entry point to address racism, classism, ableism, and homophobia. This is why I felt it worth dedicating not only this summer, but perhaps my entire life. I am very inspired by the strength and dedication of the Grupo Venancia women and hope to visit again in the future. □

## Nicaraguan Reggae Musician Philip Montalban in Concert

Washburn University Professor Rick Ellis

Since 2006, two student delegations from Washburn University of Topeka, Kansas, traveled to Nicaragua with ProNica. Spending time with Los Quinchos food program in La Chureca, the students became aware of the immense need for the one meal a day children receive with ProNica's support.

When the students heard that ProNica had lost a large amount their Los Quinchos funding, the students wanted to help. Coincidentally, during the time the students were discussing plans to host a fundraising event for Los Quinchos, word came that Philip Montalban, a Nicaraguan reggae musician, was visiting family in Florida. With underwriting from Learning in the Community (LinC): The Center for Community Service and Civic Engagement, the students planned two fundraising concerts in Topeka.

On April 9th and 10th Philip Montalban performed all acoustic shows which included songs and stories of



Nicaragua. Each performance was well attended by both the university and the community. In addition to Philip's performance, the students showed a montage of pictures of La Chureca and also educated the audience about life in Nicaragua and the needs of the children.

The students also organized two media opportunities for Philip. He appeared on local television news talk shows and promoted the performances and shared the story of the La Chureca children.

Through the efforts of these Washburn Delegation students we raised over \$3,000 for ProNica's work in La Chureca. To these students, the trip to Nicaragua hasn't ended with the return home, nor has it ended with graduation (half of the delegates graduated last May). It is clear that they made a connection to the people of Nicaragua and will continue to be a part of ProNica's work. In addition, the students are planning a return trip for Philip. This is the power of the interaction of people. □

*Rick Ellis, Ph.D. is Director, Learning in the Community (LinC): The Center for Community Service and Civic Engagement. He leads Washburn University delegations.*

## Materially Poor, Rich in Spirit

ProNica Program Coordinator Lillian Hall

Nine years ago, Achuapa community organizer and troubadour Brigido Soza and I shared a crazy dream of hosting an international music and solidarity festival in the small village of Achuapa. There was so much local talent: theatre about poverty and injustice, songs about soil conservation, artists of all kinds. One young man made his own mandolin. Achuapa is fertile with creative spirit amidst material poverty.

Amazingly, with no real budget, we organize this major event, year after year. It is now a reference point for Achuapans who migrated elsewhere in search of jobs. Instead of returning for Christmas, they return for this summer festival. European solidarity brigades plan their annual trips to Nicaragua to coincide with the festival. It is popular with ProNica delegations as well. Performers from

the United States pay their own fares just for the festival.

2009's two-day festival was the best ever. Children participated as folkloric dancers and singers. Brigido's father played the quijongo, an indigenous single-stringed instrument connected to a gourd. Most people in Nicaragua have never even seen a quijongo, thus this performance was both educational and entertaining. Performers in their 80s and 90s played the guitar, mandolin, and sang traditional songs. Normally, people their age would be forgotten in a rocking chair at home. Festival applause for their talents made them glow. It was very moving.

International participation came from Edward Grigassy, a professional guitarist from Houston, Texas. For the second year in a row, he played bossa nova and flamenco. Former



ProNica volunteer Gloria Vidal played a violin-guitar duo with him. The crowd loved it. A brigade of the UK-based NGO Raleigh International, doing water projects in the area, composed their own song thanking the people of Achuapa for their hospitality. This 30-strong brigade of people from different nationalities, races and languages sang an encore at audience's request.

Especially memorable was the participation of well-loved Nicaraguan singer-songwriter Salvador Cardenal, of Duo Guardabarranco. This year's festival was dedicated to him.



He has struggled for years with a chronic liver and kidney disease. Salvador spent Friday connected to a dialysis machine and yet made the hot, dusty 4 hour drive to Achuapa in order to sing two songs with the same passion as ever.

The ProNica-hosted Wilmington College delegation and two former ProNica volunteers, Gloria Vidal and Maggie Bishop, accompanied me in an *a capella* version of One Voice whose beautiful lyrics express exactly what the Achuapa International Music and Solidarity Festival is all about: *This is the sound of one voice/ one people, one voice/ a song for every one of us/ this is the sound of one voice....*

Music unites and overcomes barriers of language, race, nationality, and political and religious differences. In Achuapa, voices of thousands joined the human family. □

view video at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7-C\\_19QUXI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i7-C_19QUXI)

## University of Florida Delegation

UF student delegate Danielle Meservey

I came to Nicaragua as part in a study-abroad program. Our objective was to learn about Nicaraguan culture as well as the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the second poorest nation in the Western hemisphere. ProNica was one of three NGOs we worked with. Six weeks in this beautiful country changed my outlook and the way I live.

With ProNica we experienced both urban and rural home stays and heard about politics and social issues. These presenters opened my eyes to issues we rarely notice in the United States. For instance, we visited several women's clinics that promote awareness of women's health as well as women's rights. The clinics provide many free or reduced services to the women. They respect traditional midwifery and incorporate traditional medicine when appropriate.

Casa Materna in Matagalpa truly impressed me. Their goal is to reduce maternal and infant mortalities. Rural women with high risk pregnancies come there for pre- and post-natal care and education. While there we spoke with mothers, one as young as fourteen. Some traveled several

hours by foot and bus to arrive at Casa Materna before their births. What touched me was that all of these women, even though they didn't all plan their pregnancies, looked forward to the new addition to their family. One eighteen-year-old mother had put her educational and career goals on pause, but this first child gave her the motivation to reach those goals to create a better life for her child.



ProNica allowed us to experience the types of lives these women live and the conditions their children grow up in through a rural home stay. In El Limón we lived in homes without electricity where children rarely received education beyond primary school. Schools are miles away by poor roads and children are needed to help at home or to generate income.

Our home stay gave us the chance to bond with people who were so willing to share their culture. I was inspired by my host mother Doña Rita, who *see UF back page*

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### *UF con't from page 7*

works as cleaning lady at a hotel. She took her vacation week just to host our group. Doña Rita's generosity is only one example of the open-heartedness of the Nicaraguan people.

One thing I'll never forget about Nicaragua is the people who no matter how little they have, are so willing to give. They seem always joyful with music and dancing for every occasion. We were surrounded by a happy atmosphere with friendly people and breathtaking landscapes in Nicaragua. □

The December newsletter will feature our annual review, project partner news, and ways you can help them reach success



*Your generous  
financial  
support assists  
projects such  
as school  
supplies and  
uniforms for  
La Chureca  
children.*

*On behalf of  
our project  
partners in  
Nicaragua  
who depend on  
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assistance,  
ProNica  
thanks you.*