



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

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Quakers Empowering Nicaraguans

A New Lease on Life...thanks to ProNica

Kitty Madden, Casa Materna MAJ volunteer

It was spring of 1992 and the first year of the Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman's service for expectant rural mothers with high-risk pregnancies here in the northern highlands of Nicaragua.

Reyna and husband Manuel arrived early one morning following a 5-hour bus trip from their home near Rio Blanco. As the Casa nurse interviewed 46-year-old Reyna she realized how worried she seemed.

“This will be my tenth birth and, actually, though we have used no family planning, this pregnancy was a surprise. I have had all of my other babies at home and the youngest is now 5 years old.”

And then came her greatest concern. “All of my births,” Reyna said proudly, “have been lovingly attended by my husband and it seems strange (and perhaps frightening?) to be going to the hospital this time. However, Manuel and I both agreed that we cannot afford to have more children and we were told of the possibility of my being operated on (having a tubal ligation) if I came to the Casa Materna.”

Reyna was one of the first of a long line of older Casa mothers to have a tubal ligation. In the early years of the Casa, the percentage of women over 35 and that of those under 20 remained close to 25% for each group. However, in recent years, visitors to the Casa in Matagalpa can note that there are fewer older mothers with 10-15 children each.

In 2010 the Casa received 873 mothers with high-risk pregnancies: 225 were under 20 years, 549 were between 20 and 35, and 99 were over 35 years

Of the 873 Casa mothers in 2010, 87 had Cesarean sections, some of which were emergencies. The protocol of the Ministry of Health (MINSA) is that after a third C-section, women automatically have a tubal ligation.



Casa Materna follow-up group in Montaña Grande

This past January, following up on some of the hundreds of Casa mothers who have chosen tubal ligation as their preferred method of family planning, follow-up staff members Rosa, Socorro and Marcia interviewed leaders of the Casa's Follow-up Groups who gather twice a year for evaluation and planning. These volunteer mother-leaders work with over 400 women in 10 rural communities and are assisted by the Casa staff.

Elida, 42-year-old mother of twelve, shared how a tubal ligation changed her life. “Being ‘operated on’ ... greatly changed my economic condition as I was able to have some income by working outside the home. I also felt that I could better attend to the children I had. I was able to attend the monthly gatherings of the Casa's mutual support groups and receive classes on ways of better attending to my family's health. I would say to other (younger) women that they might follow my example and make their own decisions (about reproductive health). And to the Casa and

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ProNica's Mission is building sustainable cross-cultural relationships between the peoples 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 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, non-violence training, health, education, sustainable agriculture and women's empowerment. We seek to link Nicaraguan people with concerned individuals internationally to promote understanding and mutual action. We educate those who seek information or wish to serve.

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 of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) with offices in St. Petersburg, Florida and Managua, Nicaragua. ProNica is a registered Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Nicaragua.

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Donor Corner

Melissa Ajabshir, Stateside Assistant

A large boulder with no name marks the grave of Sheridan Crumlish, per his request. How fitting for a man remembered as larger than life and as a simple Quaker.

George Fox said, "Walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone." Not only did Sheridan exemplify that cheerful walk, but his generous bequest now answers that of God in the poor homeless children and high-risk pregnant mothers in rural Nicaragua.

Though Sheridan lived his final decades between his New York City brownstone and his Quebec farmhouse, his planned giving focused on outreach to Nicaragua. ProNica first garnered his attention during the 1980's. His smiling face was regularly seen at Southeastern Yearly Meeting gatherings of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Sheridan was one of the original ProNica volunteers who loaded shipping containers headed for war-torn Nicaragua. We are blessed that more than a quarter century after leaving Key West he remembered ProNica so generously.

A dear friend described their first meeting:

Sheridan was the first person I heard speak in Quaker Meeting.

The group is sitting in concentric circles of chairs and I'm facing the door. I'm watching a very tall old, old man walk down the long hallway towards the room with a cane. Meeting for worship has begun and the room has shifted to the deep still of common, silent prayer. Sheridan very slowly, carefully shuffles towards us. He is wearing hunter green wide wale corduroys, a white oxford shirt, and navy blazer. He has a bright pink sweater wrapped around his shoulders and a beret. And on his feet are a pair of hand-woven rattan slippers with red pom-poms. As he walks into the room, I can't keep my eyes off the pom-poms.

He looks exactly like my grandfather, only unapologetically colorful.

He sits down in an open chair in the inner circle, and settles in for about 10 minutes. He is the first to speak:

"I read in the New York Times this morning that despite U.S. bombing, the fisherman of the Tigris and Euphrates are still fishing this week, exactly as they have done for a thousand years. And somehow this gave me a great deal of comfort."

And somehow that gave me a lot of comfort, and hooked me on Sheridan and Quaker meeting.

Just as Sheridan's vibrant nature is indelibly placed on our hearts and minds, so too his tenderheartedness and cries for justice beat in hearts of Managua's city streets and across the rural landscapes of Nicaragua. Thank you, Sheridan. □

Friends Fiduciary Corporation assists with
planned giving. Contact them at
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Lease from page 1 those who help them, I give thanks.”

Sandra Elena, 28, mother of 3 children said, “...my life changed dramatically, especially in the aspect of my health as I was no longer intoxicating my body with birth control pills. In my family and with my spouse, we feel more secure and peaceful, knowing that for the children we have, we will be able to provide better food, health care and the education. With this new liberty, I am also able to work outside the home and thus help my husband. There has been nothing negative about my decision and my health has improved greatly. I would encourage other mothers to not be afraid (of a tubal) as it will be very favorable for their personal lives. How grateful I am to the Casa and those friends who help support the work of family planning.”

Victoria, 48-year-old mother of 10 children, thanked the Casa. “I too have been better able to care for my children and I have felt such a great sense of rest and relaxation in not being pregnant and giving birth every 2 years.... I am a very happy woman!”

Maria Vicenta, 47, wrote “I was operated on when I had 3 children because in each birth I had great difficulty and I was told that if I continued to become pregnant and give birth there was a great risk that I would die. Thus, for me, a tubal ligation was the best option. Although it is a beautiful thing to have more children and to watch them grow and develop, I also know that in this country, it is extremely difficult to have enough (income) for a large family. At the same time, I am very proud of our 3 children and of what my husband and I are able to do to help them move forward (in life). For this opportunity, I give thanks to God first and to the workers of the Casa Materna for the efforts they make to support mothers. It is an honor to be able to assist at the educational sessions they offer and to be able myself to assist other younger mothers in my community through sharing my experiences and the knowledge I have gained.”

Maria, age 45, wrote, “When I was married, I thought I would have all the children that God would give me. As time passed, we had 9 children and I realized how hard it was to clothe and feed them and help them have a life with dignity. But my husband did not want me to use any method of family planning. Thus, it was my oldest son who signed the permission paper for me. Before I was operated on, my life was one of bitterness and my husband abused me and I did what he wanted because I was afraid of him. After (the tubal ligation), I felt a great relief and was able to

go out to meetings and Casa Materna classes on health care, alternatives to violence and ways of improving my life. All these 12 years since my tubal, I have not had one health problem, no pains nor dizziness and I still have 3 children in school. Four years ago I separated from my husband. And I feel very peaceful and happy with all of the children we have had.”

Over and over, the stories of the mothers are filled with a sense of liberation, self-esteem, physical well-being and gratitude for the opportunity that they had to have a tubal ligation. So often this opportunity came through the help offered by ProNica.



Casa moms making tortillas

In the early years of the Casa Materna, mothers received tubal ligations through US-supported Pro-Familia. The procedures cost \$7-8 and we encouraged the mothers and fathers to contribute toward this. Today tubal ligations cost \$150 each.

The good news is that in recent years tubal ligations became available in the Matagalpa Regional

Hospital for a nominal fee. In 2010, they made the decision to offer the procedure free of charge with the goal of reducing maternal deaths. Thus the Casa Materna, rather than needing help for payment of tubal ligations, is now requesting help to provide other methods of birth control for women organized in the Follow-up Groups.

It must be remembered that here in Nicaragua, a choice to use family planning other than rhythm or abstinence, means a conscious decision to go against the predominant teaching of the Catholic church, even if that teaching is not well founded in moral theology. These brave women make a difficult choice.

The Casa Materna staff thanks ProNica for past assistance and with our present greatest need of food. □

For more information, visit www.casamaterna.org

*The Ruth Hyde Paine Fund
supports women's health projects.
To support this project, mark your check accordingly.*

To Work is to Play

Hannah Bowen, volunteer

Perhaps because I've never had a full time job, or perhaps because Nicaraguans are overwhelmingly hardworking, it was not until I worked for the majority of daylight's bright sunny hours that I can now understand the reality of my new friends, co-workers, and living companions.

Whether iron-pressed clothes and freshly gelled hair, scars from burning hot vegetable oil, or the rough-callused hand from holding a machete, each one wears markings of an 8 or 10-hour day of hard work.

With my paint-stained clothing and blistered palms, I now include myself in this group. Although the word *trabajo* often leaves my mouth in conversation, the positive spirit of working Nicaraguans reminds me that many ancient indigenous languages used the same word for work and for play.

In the fields, workers scream, shout, and sing as they work. A work day never passes in La Laguna (the community where I work) without a chorus of gut-splitting, tear-jerking laughter. On those days I work at Casa del Niño, I enjoy a tranquil office atmosphere. With the many projects the small staff has, one might expect chaos. Casa del Niño touches the lives of children, adults, and elders through programs ranging from arts and crafts, microcredit, women's health, community tourism, and natural medicine.

Beginning as a prayer group of women whose sons were off fighting in the war, Centro Promocional Cristiana para la Paz y Vida (CPCPV) is a perfect example of the passion, strength and fullness that drives a focused day of work. In the late 1980s, with the guidance of a Brazilian Nun,

Hermana Maria Lourdes De Camargo, this group of women went out into communities to see how to put their strong Christian values into practice. They were overwhelmed by the number of children who were malnourished and



Hannah with founders, Adilia Siles, Margarita Sanchez, and Estela Salmeron

psychologically traumatized by the violence and scarcity of goods caused by war. They began a nutrition campaign which prepared and served soy milk to children, as well as art classes to create cards and drawings to send to their fathers and brothers who were fighting in the war – thus the nickname “Casa del Niño.”

These years later, they have grown, now opening their doors

to all who are interested in developing skills in painting, sewing, crafts, and artesenary. Their center includes a natural pharmacy for those seeking natural medicine consultation and products, as well as low cost conventional care. At the same time, CPCPV brings its presence to the rural communities of the Municipality of San Ramon in the form of microloans, youth groups, old folks groups, and, thanks to ProNica's donors, gynecological healthcare in a comfortable, accessible environment.

Whether it be creating a soccer field, teaching English, or discussing the medicinal properties of wild plants, each day I breathe in inspiration in the form of the work, the stories, the kindness, and patience. A few months ago, anticipating becoming a volunteer in Nicaragua, I hadn't expected to be the one receiving so much. □

El Limon Electrification Project

El Limon needs \$4000 (20% of total cost) to bring electricity into their rural community of 45 families. If they don't raise the funds by mid-April, it will be offered to another community. Twelve of the poorest families are unable to contribute their share. The community plans a festival with music, food and games and expect to raise over \$2000.

To support this, or any other project, mark your check accordingly. □

2011 Project Partner Grant Awards

\$40,000 in grants were disbursed in January to:

- \$ 700 to Acahualinca library for library books
- \$2300 to Achuapa library to build book cases and receive matching funds from Books for Life!
- \$1776 to Esteli library for children's arts and crafts supplies
- \$1950 for the Quinchos librarian
- \$4879 to Acahualinca clinic for medical procedures and education
- \$1014 to Casa del Niño in San Ramon for medical procedures and fuel for education outreach
- \$5000 to Casa Materna in Matagalpa for medical procedures and utilities
- \$2650 to Casa Mujer in Rio Blanco for outreach, workshops and utilities
- \$6218 to Mama Licha clinic in Estelí for medical procedures and office supplies
- \$3633 for La Chureca food
- \$3633 for Yahoskas food
- \$4845 to Acahualinca beauty school for supplies and instructor
- \$1402 to Martin Centeno Co-op for agriculture tools and seeds

2011 grant proposals totaled over \$77,000 and ProNica is still raising funds to continue to feed the children in La Chureca and the Yahoskas girls home. Your donation will help ProNica fund these vital projects. □

Thank you for your continued Support

Our goal is to send all donations to projects. Toward that end, we host delegations which provide income for operating expenses.

Increased delegations meant hiring additional Nicaraguan staff. This newsletter you're reading is created, printed and mailed – all with a cost. A generous supporter hosts the website; a knowledgeable tehy maintains our computers bug free so we may communicate efficiently with volunteers, delegations and donors – this technology has a cost. The database that keeps track of each of you, office rent, fuel for the vehicle to visit project partners, transportation to fund-raising events, creating brochures,

copying DVDs, postage, non-profit fee to the state, CPA fee to file federal forms, small salaries for our small staff – these administrative expenses keep ProNica Empowering Nicaraguans, ProNica's 1st goal.

Delegations are invaluable in ProNica's 2nd goal: which is to introduce North Americans and Nicaraguans to each other, enhancing understanding and mutual empowerment for the betterment of both peoples.

As we strive to keep administrative expenses low, we appreciate your understanding that we operate as efficiently as possible. Thank you. □

An Encounter with the Divine Human Heart

Christine J. Sabas, Esquire

My first visit to Nicaragua was too brief so I eagerly joined the ProNica Friends Witness Tour. Two other family members and I were warmly greeted by Lillian Hall, ProNica Program Coordinator and Carmen Gonzalez, Delegation Leader. At Quaker House we met the other three delegates. Quaker House is everything, and more, as described on the website. It became our relaxing home away from home.

We visited ProNica projects (Acahualinca Women's Center, Los Quinchos, Casa del Niño, Casa Materna, Mama Licha's midwifery clinic, and La Chureca) and several historic and natural sites, including the Gallery of the Heroes and Martyrs in Estelí and the volcano crater lake, Apoyo Lagoon.

Throughout the delegation, I was constantly reminded,

as quoted from "Jesus Lives in Egypt" published by the Progressive Christian Alliance, that violence initiated remains degrees worse than violence imagined. Indeed, violence initiated was once violence imagined, which is horrible in and of itself. Moreover, violence includes more than physical acts of aggression between people.

For instance, at Los Quinchos we heard the shocking story how street children were victims of Cold War political whims. The Contra invasion of Nicaragua decimated the population, in so many ways. Many youth ended up on the streets, addicted to Resistol, a glue banned in the US but still manufactured by H.B. Fuller Company in Minneapolis. Although the guns have long been silent, due to endemic and systematic poverty, the streets and glue still claim countless lives. Los Quinchos assists these children in multi-faceted ways. Violence continues

see *Divine* page 6

Divine from page 5 today as companies readily market this type of product in Nicaragua. This knowledge significantly impacted our delegation, all from the US. We were simply horrified.

The Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs is an essential stop to understand Nicaragua's tumultuous history of dictatorship, revolution, and war. Located in Estelí, the focal point of the Sandinista uprising against dictator Somoza, the Gallery commemorates the last century of Nicaragua's history. It highlights the Revolution of the 1970s and the subsequent Contra invasion in the 1980s. In 1982, a group of women, whose children were killed during the conflicts, formed the Association of Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs, and started the Gallery. Thousands who died "fighting for freedom and revolutionary ideals" are honored. The mothers volunteer at the gallery and meet visitors. The walls are lined with photographs of young men and women, forever silenced. Their faces appear to come alive, intently staring back,



Friends Witness at Quaker House

beckoning, pleading, asking for understanding as to why violence in the imaginations of some is initiated with total commitment and devotion by all.

One mother painfully recounted her story – involvement in the Revolution, family divisions due to the conflict (e.g., which side are you on?), and the loss of her teenage son. Witnessing her pain and how easily the tears flowed, caused me to question whether violence-imagined, even in the name of "justice and freedom" could ever be "just." Incredibly, she emphasized the need for reconciliation.

At one point, she oversaw Contra prisoners and demanded they receive fair and adequate treatment. To paraphrase her, "they were not bad people" but were simply caught up in the political cat-and-mouse game. I heard no call for retribution. No desire for punishment. Only a need, that while in remembering and paying tribute to the frozen faces in the gallery, her country look forward: together.

Despite the pain, violence, exploitation, and the fact that Nicaragua is second only to Haiti as the poorest country in the western hemisphere, the spirit of its people is truly uplifting. Indeed, empowering. ProNica endeavors to empower Nicaraguans in a variety of ways. I, however, sense, that in many ways, Nicaraguans empower us. I was empowered. And, God willing, I will return to Nicaragua and be more in touch with my own humanity and rediscover my own Divine Human Heart. □

Rio Blanco Foot Bridge Maintenance

The 20-year-old foot bridge over the river is the only access to the town of Rio Blanco - upper schools, markets, transportation, medical services - for the rural community of Martin Centeno Cooperative. Sixty families, 225 inhabitants, depend on it for survival, especially during the rainy season when the rushing river rises above safe levels.

Without maintenance, peeling paint allows metal surfaces to rust and wooden steps to rot. Some cables are worn and some protective fencing is missing. \$1000 will buy wire brushes, lumber, paint, nuts and bolts; the community will supply the labor. Dry season (February to April) is the time to safely hang below the bridge scraping rust and painting.

To support this project,
mark your check accordingly. □

Find this newsletter (PDF with color images) on
the News page at www.ProNica.org



Every Dollar Counts

Ava Coleman

Two women appear seeking medical help at Mama Licha's just as she and I depart for a thirty-minute drive to a mobile health clinic. For one who dedicates her life work to the care of others, this is not unusual. Her clinic serves all – those who can pay or not, women whose work keeps them from the local Red Cross station during its operating hours, and anyone who wants to learn about illness or the body. This hands-on, fiery woman, long past Nicaragua mandatory retirement age of 65, is known for her tireless efforts to educate young people about safe sex, detect and treat uterine cervical cancer, and provide pre- and postnatal care for mothers and babies.

At the mobile clinic, women emerge from the shade of a tree to wait in the hot sun. This donated, medically-outfitted vehicle makes it possible to treat women in distant towns, but the doctor lamented that though they have the skills to perform a variety of procedures, they lack supplies.

ProNica funds serve peasant women in the most-rural towns where lack of education and medical testing can result in unnecessary deaths. Several times a year Mama Licha teams don backpacks loaded with equipment and travel to communities around Estelí. They give pregnant women ultrasounds to determine the health of their fetuses, pap smears (582 in 2010), and treat those detected with the Human Papilloma Virus. With little funding, staff and supplies, Mama Licha's success is credited to her dedication, devotion, openness and warmth.



Mama Licha welcomes all

Mama says "We are so grateful to ProNica for the amazing economic help for our clinic. Your donations have saved the lives of many women. For the clinic's many successes, there are still things to improve. We hope that in 2011, with ProNica's help we can expand our programs." For Mama, this means outreach to the homosexual community, to sex-trade workers, classes to prepare couples for parenthood, psychological counseling for young mothers, (49% of women have their first child before the age of 19) and never turning away anyone who comes for help or advice.

Mama Licha's warmth radiated when a nineteen-year-old told me how Mama helped her seventeen-year-old sister through her first pregnancy. I felt that warmth when a fifty-three-year-old man praised Mama for saving his wife from cancer.

When used by such an amazing woman, donations go a long way. \$50US provides for ten pap smears. \$250US pays for prenatal care and a natural birth for one patient. \$1000US stocks the clinic's pharmacy with antibiotics, vitamins, and

contraceptives for one year. When one

condom could change a girl's life, one blood test could detect HIV, and one cotton swab for a pap smear could detect an illness early on, every dollar counts.

I knew of Mama's work long before I arrived and now I've seen her work first hand. Mama embodies what it means to care unconditionally, raise up those around her, and lead a life that allows others to live. □

Ceramica Nicaragua

Lin Jorgensen

Nicaraguan potters' industriousness, inventiveness, and perseverance is impressive. US potters go to their local clay company to buy a 25-pound block of perfectly usable clay in a plastic bag. Nicaraguans dig their own clays from local streambeds and process it on the ground with their feet. Many mine local colored clays for surface decoration and spend a week working on a piece that might sell for \$75US.

Potters for Peace (PFP) and ProNica have both helped the

people in Nicaragua come into the 21st Century, while preserving their cultural heritage. Both organizations are devoted to socially responsible development and grass-roots accompaniment. ProNica funded PFP for the production of life-saving ceramic water filters.

ProNica again connects with Potters for Peace to produce an exhibit of Nicaraguan ceramics during the March/April 2011 conference of the National

see *Ceramica* page 8

Casa
Cuáquera



José and Panchita welcome you

Quaker House

Hospitality house offers travelers simple lodging in Managua. Located in a quiet residential neighborhood, convenient to shopping, banks and restaurants. Individuals, groups, meeting space, wifi, fully equipped kitchen or catering available.

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2011 marks 25 years of service to the Nicaraguan people. We will share ProNica history, struggles, lessons learned, accomplishments, hopes for the future. Look for these and more in upcoming issues. Thanks to your support, ProNica continues to Empower Nicaraguans.

Ceramica from page 7 Council for Education in the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) in the Tampa Bay, Florida area. All pottery was purchased full-price directly from potters' workshops.

If you're in St. Petersburg, visit our exhibit at Milagros Gallery to experience the diverse representation of "Ceramica Nicaragua."

Visit nceca.net for more info. □

Friends Witness 2011

5-14 August and 7-16 October

Join a small group for a life-changing experience, visit project partners, volcano crater lakes. Only \$950 includes all in-country transportation, meals, lodging, any excursion entry fees. Bring only your camera and souvenir money.

Send \$100 to reserve your space. □

More ways to support ProNica

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- * Visit our website for secure PayPal donations
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- * Monthly gifts provide enduring/sustaining support - contact us for details
- * ProNica coordinates volunteers, work study delegations, and Friends Witness Tours
- * Send a Gift of Life in memory of a person or event - ProNica sends a hand-calligraphed certificate acknowledging your financial donation



A Quincho's homework