



PRONiCA

News from Nicaragua

June 2011
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Quakers Empowering Nicaraguans for 25 Years

Women’s Health Outreach

Hannah Bowen, ProNica volunteer

As we drive up the mountain to the *empalme* (fork in the road) to San Pablo, I fight the temptation to squint in the morning sun to admire the dramatic mountains and valleys surrounding San Ramon. The pick up truck rattles along the dusty, rocky road into the center of San Pablo, a large but sparsely populated rural community about 15 km from San Ramon. *La doctora* Chayito and I carry her equipment into a small wooden building. The shady interior allows my eyes to see an equally striking scene. I see a room full of women and their children – a great contrast to the overwhelming male presence in streets, buses, soccer games, and markets of Nicaragua.

As the doctor explains the procedure of the exam, and the importance of acting upon bad results, I note the wide range of ages of these 33 ladies. They have skipped the morning’s house and farm chores to arrive by foot for an examination. Although done privately and discretely, the women of this community may feel it to be very invasive.

I take down their names, ages, *cedula* numbers (social security number), and ask each woman to sign her name as *la doctora* begins exams in a curtained-off corner of the

room. Several women tell me they can’t write their own names and laughingly offered to color their thumbs in ink to make a fingerprint.



San Pablo women wait in the outreach clinic

I expected to find a nervous and uncomfortable crowd, due to the general modesty of campesino culture and the nature of PAP smears, as well as any potentially bad news that might result. Instead I found them joyful to spend the morning with their friends, family, and neighbors, and grateful that we had come to provide a service that they now know is very important.

Babies were passed around and gossip was shared. When it was a woman’s turn for her exam, the other women playfully wished her

“*suerte*” (good luck). For a few women of varied ages, it was their first PAP smear. Most had received one in the past with the same Casa del Niño outreach.

Janeth, a 28-year-old woman with 5 children, received her first PAP at age 26. “The first time I had an exam, I was so scared waiting for the results. I hadn’t known that you could be very sick and not even know it. I thought if I am sick

see Health on page 2

25 years - Quakers Empowering Nicaraguans

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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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Health from page 1

and I die, who will care for my children? But now I'm not scared. I feel good as long as I have a regular check up, and I know that God will protect me, and I will be OK."

Although PAP smears in Nicaragua can be free or low cost, women in communities like San Pablo or El Jicaro where Casa del Niño brings a doctor, rarely leave their community. If they do, it is not for non-emergency medical care. "It's a long journey," 53-year-old Maria Antioneta tells me. "First I walk an hour and a half up the mountain, and then take a bus to get to the doctor. And the buses are expensive now. I usually just stay here in San Pablo."

*The
Ruth Hyde Paine
Fund supports
women's health.*

*To support this and
other projects,
mark your checks
accordingly.*

I ask one of the women how they all knew to reunite on this particular day, spot, and time, as the houses were very spread apart, and without cell phone service.

"Here in San Pablo, we have a women's group. When I see someone from the group, I tell her the message. She will tell another member, and eventually everyone in

the community will know. That way, anyone who wants to come, can."

Many women stay until *la doctora* is finished to take her aside and ask more questions. It was clear to me that these women want to keep themselves healthy and aware of their bodies, just like me. All women, all people, deserve to have this option.

Our next step is to reach the other 15 women who, for whatever reason, did not arrive. □

Update: Pap results revealed 2nd stage cervical cancer in one woman. When Hannah and Dr. Chayito returned to San Pablo, they learned the woman had just died. Earlier detection might have saved her life.

ProNica funded \$1014 for 154 pap tests and fuel for the truck to reach remote women. Your donation saves lives.

*Stretches for Women and Babies
Energetic volunteer Hannah leads yoga
classes for donations. She has raised over
\$150 for Casa Materna in Matagalpa.*

Washburn University Students' Generosity Bring Light to El Limón

Rick Ellis, Professor

In January, 15 students and I came on our fourth delegation to Nicaragua. Lillian and Carmencita were gracious as always and introduced the students to every aspect of Nicaragua. In Managua we painted the Acahualinca pre-school library and felt a sense of satisfaction that the children would return to a fresh, clean library. We played with La Chureca children during their lunchtime. In San Marcos we visited Los Quinchos boys and girls. The students were very impressed with the work of Carlos Vidal and the Los Quinchos staff.

Throughout the week we learned of the history of Nicaragua and US involvement in their affairs. Since our return many students have now observed current US foreign affairs with the knowledge of how their country has operated in the past. This understanding gained in Nicaragua has made them more thoughtful citizens in their own country.

The second half of the trip we lived with host families in El Limón, a small rural community outside of Estelí. For four days we worked alongside members of the community repairing their only road into town. This experience was probably the most moving. Students repeatedly remarked how welcoming and hospitable everyone was. Each family wholeheartedly shared whatever they had. The students felt that they had become new members of their host families.

For each trip, students raise funds from a number of

sources. Upon returning to Kansas they learned of another donation to offset their expenses that gave each an additional \$125. Simultaneously, we learned that in order to provide electricity to the remaining homes in El Limón the community needed to raise US\$1,500. Without the slightest hesitation the students asked that their unexpected windfall be sent for the electrification project.



Muddy El Limón road

This is just one example of how intense the connections are between the Washburn delegations and Nicaragua. Each delegation has returned to Topeka with a different commitment. Our second delegation in 2008 brought Philip Montalban to Washburn for a benefit concert that raised \$3000 for La Chureca. A 2010 delegate is establishing an endowment to support two El Limón students through school

each year, eventually enabling eight students to complete their schooling. This endowment was our student's idea and she plans to ensure its sustainability.

Our students' commitment speaks highly of them but also speaks volumes about ProNica. The organization of travel, lectures, and personal experiences with the people of Nicaragua is what affects my students to the extent that they continue to maintain their love for the people and the country.

Because of ProNica each delegation arrives as Kansans but leaves as Nicaraguans. Thanks for this important and powerful educational experience for the students of Washburn University. □

Electricity for El Limón – thanks to the hard work of all involved!

Hannah Curteis, El Limón resident

Until you actually experience day to day life without electricity it is very hard to imagine the different ways in which the lack of electricity affects your standard of living.

The main difficulty, as far as my friends in Limón are concerned, is the inability to light your house in the evening and during the night. This is particularly problematic for young people and students who end up having to study by candlelight. It also means that women are obliged to cook

evening meals (on their wood stoves) in the smoke-filled dark, or by the light of a kerosene oil lamp – not an easy or pleasant task.

Another hardship that results from not being connected to the grid is having to iron clothes (and Nicaraguans are meticulous about well-ironed clothes!) with old fashioned irons which have to be heated on a wood stove.

See *Light* on page 4

Light from page 3 The lack of electricity also often results in inadequate living conditions for small children, elderly people and others with special needs – for example those with medical



Doña Josefina heating iron over fire

conditions that need electronic equipment like a nebulizer, or who need to take medication that requires refrigeration.

As the folks who are already connected up have found, electricity makes people's lives easier in many ways, something which is really important in a socioeconomic

context where people confront so many different stresses and set backs in their day-to-day lives.

For the eight years I have lived in El Limón, electricity installation has always been one of the community's top priorities. Not until now, however, thanks to the Sandinista government's strategy to drastically reduce the percentage of Nicaraguan homes still not connected to the national grid, has the community's tireless struggle to ensure electricity for its 250 members come to fruition. Last year half of Limon's 46 families were connected up

as part of a project overseen by the Nicaraguan Energy Ministry, while the other half is awaiting installation in the coming months as part of a project coordinated by the local government.

The community of Limón is very grateful to ProNica and to the members of a Washburn University delegation who stayed in our community in



Doña Engracia Rayo's new light bulb

January and who so generously donated US\$1,500 to the fund our community was required to raise as part of the electricity installation process (local government legislation requires communities to put up 20% of the cost of the projects they are the beneficiaries of).

Members of our community raised another US\$1,500 partly from individual contributions and partly as a result of fundraising efforts. In two successful community fairs food and drink were sold and other fundraising activities like raffles and a popular traditional campesino contest called "carreras de cinta" were overseen by the community committee.

The ProNica/Washburn donation really took the pressure off our community to fundraise the extra US\$1,500 we needed. This donation was an essential contribution to the realization of Limon's dream to have 100% of homes connected to the national grid. □

Generous donors accepted the challenge to fill the gap between resource and need

From hungry classmates at lunch one day, college students raised one month of food for La Chureca. At his neighborhood fresh market, one inspired man raised \$700 selling maple products. An enthusiastic Canadian raised \$1600 from a comedy night. A Midwestern Quaker Meeting sends their coffee funds several times a year. How creatively can you ease both burdens of affluence and poverty?

- \$1.20 provides one nutritious lunch
- \$50 feeds 45 children one lunch meal
- \$300 feeds these children for one week
- \$1,200 provides food for one month
- \$3,600 provides food for three months
- \$14,400 provides La Chureca children food for one year

Thank you for your continued support to feed hungry children

Taking Away the Occasion of War - ProNica's Early History, 1985-1990

Melissa Ajabshir, ProNica historian researcher

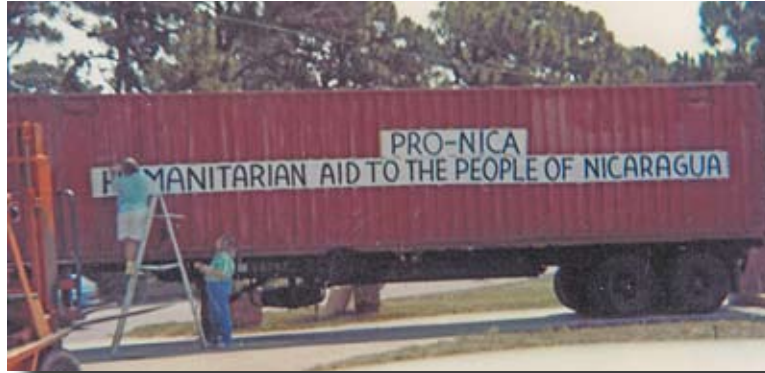
Nicaragua was bloodstained and battered from a half decade of war when Soledad and José McIntire moved there in 1985. Originally from St. Augustine, Florida, they brought nursing skills, solidarity and experience from both Peace Brigades International and American Friends Service Committee.

On a trip to Florida to speak to a regional Quaker gathering, the McIntires' stirring report mobilized a core group to action. Within weeks, funds for a vehicle had been raised, a Land Rover purchased and the McIntires' work given a whole new thrust. The next year, anchored by the Florida Quakers of Southeastern Yearly Meeting (SEYM) and with a growing number of supporters across the globe, this determined couple named their budding organization Pro-Nica.

In 1985 US President Ronald Reagan placed a trade embargo on Nicaragua. By 1987 with alarming reports of scarcity from the McIntires, emergency meetings were organized in St. Petersburg, Florida by Quakers Shawna Doran and Jim Carlson and community activist, Norman Malakoff. They formed the ProNica Peace Shipment Alliance and solicited donations of critical items. Amity House, a hot spot for community activism and the home of Ruth Uphaus, stored the growing collection of contributions. Within months, ProNica's first 40-foot cargo container, bursting with medical equipment, office supplies, toys and clothing launched from the Port of Tampa for Nicaragua.

Early ProNica work focused on helping day care centers, women's networks, health and nutrition initiatives as well as projects for bicycles and gardens. After two years of overcoming supply shortages and bureaucracy, ProNica's first major project partner opened its doors in 1987. The

Olaf Palme Health Post was constructed in one of the poorest neighborhoods on the outskirts of Managua. It was staffed with one doctor and one nurse, both native Nicaraguans.



Cargo container bound for Nicaragua

In 1987 ProNica's first newsletter was written in Managua, then edited and distributed from Florida. *The Friends Newsletter from Nicaragua* announced the opening of El Centro de los Amigos or The Friend's Center – real offices for ProNica's Nicaraguan operations. An article reported, "We are living among people who daily suffer the violence of war, who try to live as much as possible as if they

enjoyed peace. But in fact, they must confront unceasing attacks on their lives and economy... Our goal is to work with Nicaraguans to meet their needs and to deepen our understanding and commitment to peace."

Well-known unicycle-riding clown and civil engineer Ben Linder became the 9th westerner felled by a bullet in the armed conflicts between the Contras and Sandinistas. The heavy coverage of his death highlighted real dangers, especially for solidarity workers.



Olaf Palme Health Post

1988 reports from the *Newsletter* included attacks on mining towns, sabotaged power plants, fuel shortages, drought, malnutrition, inflation, devaluation of the Cordoba by 1,000%, and devastation by Hurricane Joan. The confluence of these events proved too much, and ProNica's operations in Nicaragua halted. The McIntires, however, were determined to restructure, and within a few months, work forged ahead. There was much to be done at the new Olaf Palme Health Post. They obtained water and electricity for the facility and opened a rehydration unit. They supplied a physiotherapist for the children's center and breast pumps for the Mothers' Milk Bank. They even added a playground, foliage and sidewalks to the only park in the community of 26,000.

See **Founding** on page 6

Founding from page 5 St. Petersburg Quakers Jan and Bea Reiner sponsored trips to promote ProNica's vital projects at major Quaker gatherings and events across the US. In 1988 they sent Shawna on her first trip to Nicaragua, where she witnessed the desperation firsthand. Upon returning to Florida, she called for the assemblage of a special Christmas cargo container; it would be the fourth one filled and shipped that year. Requests for toys, clothing, powdered milk and even sheet metal roofing were answered by generous supporters, including the donation of a VW Van. And once again, volunteers descended on Amity House to load the shipping container headed to the scarred yet beautiful land of lakes and volcanoes.



Shawna and Soledad

out the ProNica coordinating committee in the McIntire's absence.

A 1989 *Newsletter* reported, "Nicaragua is now on the brink of peace" and "We have witnessed the signing of historical accords, one of the fruits of which is the steady progress towards peace in Central America." And then in 1990 the tortilla flipped, as Nicaraguans colloquially say about a regime change. Eleven years of Sandinista leadership ended when President Daniel Ortega lost the election. Pleased with Violetta Chamorro's win, US President George H. W. Bush lifted the trade embargo.

It was the end of an era for the Central American nation and for ProNica – an organization suddenly lacking clear direction. The Peace Shipment Alliance in St. Petersburg dispatched cargo container #11 - with uncertainty about its future, as regular shipping channels had reopened. For similar reasons, parent organization SEYM, solemnly discerned whether or not to extend its relationship with ProNica.

By 1989, still cramped into a large closet at the St. Petersburg Friends Meeting House, the ProNica Stateside office desperately needed more space to edit and distribute newsletters, procure material donations and raise funds. Anna France, civic activist and prior Clerk of the St. Petersburg Friends Meeting, contributed seed money for the construction of the spacious new Peace Room behind the meeting house, and construction commenced.

That year Dorothy Granada and Charles Gray, who had worked with Peace Brigades International and Witness for Peace, signed on as interim coordinators while Soledad and José took a much needed sabbatical.

In the US, sawmills were purchased and loaded in cargo containers headed for the Miskitu-Sumu tribes on the west coast of Nicaragua. Hurricane Joan had laid waste to vast acres of forest, and there was an urgency to salvage fallen timber to rebuild razed villages. Getting the mills from ship to truck to barge and then navigated to remote villages that lacked phone or electricity, proved tricky. However historian and journalist Jorge Hernandez successfully coordinated the event. Soon after, he was asked to round



Mother's Milk campaign

Norman Malakoff remained at the helm of the Peace Shipment Alliance. Jim Carlson continued as chief editor of the *Newsletter*. Shawna Doran departed her role as stateside

coordinator to pursue midwifery and nurse practitioner studies. The McIntires moved to Italy where José took a position with the United Nations and Soledad continued to work with women's projects.

And, in the midst of all the upheaval, in stepped Ruth Hyde Paine, who became a guiding force for ProNica's evolution through the 1990s and beyond. □

ProNica's transformation into peace time Quaker service continues in the September newsletter

A Volunteer Reflects on Her First Trip to Nicaragua

Gloria Vidal, Haverford College delegate and returning volunteer

August 2008: I'm sitting in a movie theatre with my sister watching the newly released *Slumdog Millionaire*. The movie shows the main characters living in a community within a large landfill – there is garbage everywhere; children and adults alike are sifting through the waste for food and recyclables. My sister reacts with a cry of pity for the characters. I exclaim, “that is just like La Chureca in Managua!” reminiscing about visiting the city dump only weeks before. My sister was horrified to hear that these landfills, filled with not only garbage, but also people, actually exist in our world – they aren't just sets in Hollywood movies. I was faced with this reality, and many others, when I spent five months in Nicaragua as an international volunteer for ProNica.

A few days earlier I had just returned from my stay in Nicaragua. I had taken a semester off from Haverford College to travel to Nicaragua with a grant from my college's Center for Peace and Global Citizenship. During my time there, I participated in a delegation with other students from Haverford and Bryn Mawr Colleges, and spent the majority of my five months volunteering at the Los Quinchos project working with former street children in a housing development. Participating in the delegation allowed me to traverse a large portion of Nicaragua. I was awestruck by its natural beauty and by the amazing people I met along our way. I was able to see harrowing images, such as the La Chureca landfill, and inspiring ones, such as women helping each other toward healthier and more stable lives at the Acahualinca Women's Center.

As a cultural anthropology major I studied the importance of representation of peoples within relevant contexts. On the delegation, our leader, Lillian Hall, did a fantastic job

supplying us with information to correctly place these images into historical, political, and economic contexts. Participating in the delegation was empowering in this way, as we were given the necessary tools to understand these images as ephemeral and/or transforming according to political, historical, and economic events, and not just as stagnant representations of Nicaraguan culture.

Initially, I decided to travel to Nicaragua to explore another country, learn more Spanish, and contribute toward the betterment of our global community. By the end, I received so much more than I would have ever imagined. Both on a micro and macro scale, my perspective of life

has changed completely. I no longer imagine myself merely as a US citizen living in my own bubble – I see myself now as a first-world citizen with privileges and responsibilities to foster change. I think of the implications of my actions, and my nation's decisions, on a global scale. I long for justice for those people without

clout who are affected by economic and political decisions made beyond their control.

Compassion and a sense of responsibility for our global community can't be learned in a classroom. My experience in Nicaragua provided this perspective. Nicaragua still holds a very special place in my heart, and I look forward to my third trip there in June 2011. □

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News page at
www.ProNica.org

15 Good Reasons to Donate to ProNica

You Empower Nicaraguans by...

1. Putting textbooks into public libraries
2. Helping women have healthy babies
3. Helping improve their standard of living by repairing roads, bridges, and clinics
4. Improving a community's sanitation and reducing sickness
5. Supporting a beauty school that trains poor women in a viable trade
6. Improving family hygiene and health through outreach and education
7. Feeding a hot meal to the children whose families live and work as scavengers in the Managua city dump
8. Helping families have only the number of children they can afford to feed, shelter and educate
9. Bringing nonviolence training to Nicaraguan communities, organizations and prisons
10. Ensuring that North American students learn the realities of lesser-developed nations
11. Helping maintain Casa Cuáquera (Quaker House) in Managua
12. Supporting a model farming coop of families hard hit by the contra war
13. Living the Quaker testimonies of peace, integrity, simplicity, equality and community on an international level
14. Informing the North American public through ProNica's newsletter and bilingual website
15. Living in that spirit which takes away the occasion for war

What's
your
reason?
How
will
you
help?

*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.
In this issue, we share ProNica's founding. In future issues, the story continues.
Thanks to your support, ProNica continues to Empower Nicaraguans.*

Rio Blanco foot bridge...

...is 20 years old and long overdue for maintenance. During rainy season, it is the only access to upper schools, markets, transportation, and medical services for 60 families/225 inhabitants of rural Martin Centeno Cooperative. \$1,000 will purchase wire brushes, lumber, paint, nuts and bolts; the community will supply labor. You can support this project with your tax-deductible donation. □

Friends Witness 2011

5-14 August and 7-16 October

Join a small group of 4-6 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. □

How to support ProNica

- * Signup for automatic donations direct from your bank to ours - contact us for details
- * Mail checks to the stateside office, 130 Nineteenth Ave SE, St Petersburg FL 33705-2810
- * Visit our website for secure PayPal donations
- * Name ProNica as a beneficiary in your estate planning - contact us for details
- * Friends Fiduciary Corporation has plans for now and later giving - contact us for details
- * 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-calligraphied certificate acknowledging your financial donation



Quincho's homework