



# PRONiCA

## News from Nicaragua

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*Quakers in Solidarity with Nicaraguans for 25 Years*

## Bidding a Fond Farewell to ProNica

Lillian Hall

‘Turn, turn, turn: To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.’

I still remember the joy and excitement I felt when, sitting on my mother’s sofa in her Tucson, Arizona, living room, I picked up my first copy of the ProNica newsletter. I saw the notice ‘Managua Coordinator Sought’ and my heart jumped for joy. I thought, ‘This is my dream job! I would be so great at this!’ I immediately applied, got a phone call from the Florida office, and five months later, after I sadly lost hope of hearing anything, finally got a telegram at my Matagalpa, Nicaragua, post office box asking me to call their Managua office for an interview. As we know, Quaker process can be slow.

Little did I know I would stay in this dream job for fourteen years and help nurture ProNica into a well-known organization both in Nicaragua and beyond. During that time, we expanded our volunteer program, added a thriving delegation program, added new project partners and renovated Quaker House. I served as a liaison for the Canadian Friends Service Committee and other groups, sponsored Alternatives to Violence Projects, and ProNica grew and thrived.

As a single mother, it was both a blessing and a challenge as I dragged little Trevor around on delegations, to visit projects, and to meet with guests at Quaker House often late at night. However, all those experiences also grounded him in Quaker values, helping form the fine young man

he is today. They also most certainly made him an even more interesting candidate for the full scholarship he was awarded at George School, a blessing for which we will always be grateful. And now he has been awarded an almost full scholarship to another fine Quaker institution, Haverford College, for which we are also grateful.



Lillian’s farewell to partners, staff and consejo

ProNica, therefore, has not only had a positive impact on the lives of many Nicaraguan citizens and North American visitors, it has had a profound impact on Trevor’s and my lives personally. I will always be grateful to ProNica for giving me the opportunity to do what I love for the people I love in this very special country that opened its arms and embraced me in its magic. I thank ProNica for giving me a job I could believe in, the freedom to help it grow and develop, and for the vast network of Friends and friends who entered my life. We have been so enriched by the wonderful people, both Nicaraguans and North Americans alike, who entered our lives thanks to ProNica. We will remember you all fondly.

But to everything there is a season, and my season with ProNica has ended. I am now off to other dreams and other groups of wonderful people whom I have yet to meet, but who without doubt will enrich my life and give it meaning and purpose just as ProNica and Southeastern Yearly Meeting did. I hope to be embraced in the magic of the people of Colombia who have been displaced by decades of conflict, and I hope to add my grain of sand in the bucket there just as I did here. Wherever

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### ProNica Board

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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 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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*Farewell* from page 1

I go, I intend to be a bridge between peoples, a bridge of friendship, solidarity and hope.

My parting brings me the inevitable sadness of saying goodbye, but also the joy of welcoming a fresh, young, new coordinator, Laura Hopps. I have no doubts that Laura's seasons to come with ProNica will yield wonderful, new harvests, and I look forward to watching her leadership from afar. She is the embodiment of Quaker values, has a deep love and commitment to the Nicaraguan people, and will be an excellent representative for ProNica. I leave knowing that our Nicaraguan friends and partners, are in gentle, capable, and loving hands. Welcome, Laura! □



Laura Hopps and Lillian Hall at Quaker House

## Legacy Giving

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# Greetings from ProNica's New Program Director

Laura Hopps

Muchos saludos! I am happy to greet you all, and humbled by the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Lillian Hall as the next Program Director of ProNica. Lillian is a woman I admire greatly. When I first came to Nicaragua in 2007 to launch a volunteer program at the Cultural Center of Batahola Norte, Lillian was a guide and mentor. She took me to places like the Los Quinchos center in the city dump, and shared stories of what it was like to live in Nicaragua during the Revolution. She introduced me to the Casa Benjamin Linder, a community that has since become a home for me here.

Lillian is someone who exemplifies Quaker commitments to solidarity, social justice, and peace. In the past weeks, I've had the opportunity to visit ProNica's partner communities with her. Everywhere we went, people at the Casa Materna, the women's center in Acahualinca, Los Quinchos, Casa de los Niños, Achuapa, and elsewhere, people spoke not only of their gratitude for the institutional support of ProNica, but of their appreciation for Lillian's friendship. Carlos Vidal of Los Quinchos noted that Lillian has been with them consistently the past fourteen years, sharing in their joys as well as accompanying them through tragedies.

Doña Mina of the Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs in Estelí, like many, was in tears when she heard the news of Lillian's departure. Gesturing around the room filled with the photos of the fallen youth of the Revolution, she told Lillian: "I know all of these people, our angels, are blessing you, watching over you, and will accompany you in this next stage of your life." Saying goodbye to Lillian is certainly saying goodbye to a "weighty Friend" whose groundedness, courage, and wisdom will continue to inspire. It is an honor (as well as a daunting task!) to follow in her footsteps, but I hope to be faithful to her legacy and to the legacy of ProNica. I wish for her many blessings in her next new life adventure. I know that many here, including myself, will be waiting to receive her when she comes back to visit (soon!).

I come to ProNica now after finishing a Masters of Divinity degree in Buddhism at Harvard Divinity School. During my three years there, I deepened my spiritual practice, and I began a process for lay ordination in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, Vietnamese Zen Master and peace activist. I also grew in counseling and community-organizing skills, worked iwth the homeless and with trauma and addiction recovery in the HIV+ community.

During this time, I had the opportunity to return to Nicaragua frequently to collaborate with the Youth Movement of Ciudad Sandino, where my partner, Oscar

Mayorga has served as a youth organizer and counselor for the past 12 years. Together we also studied Permaculture, sustainable agriculture, and how climate change is impacting Nicaragua today to better understand how we might contribute to caring for the Earth.

Joining the ProNica team now represents a homecoming and an integration of many parts of my life and spiritual journey. I am grateful for my early Quaker education at

**"It was the seeds planted by my Quaker education that motivated me to seek engagement in issues of justice while also deepening a commitment to spiritual growth."**

George School that instilled in me values of simplicity, social justice, and nonviolence that stems from seeing the Light of God within everyone. I consider myself a Quaker as well as a

Buddhist. It was the seeds planted by my Quaker education that motivated me to engage in issues of justice while deepening a commitment to spiritual growth.

In college I studied in El Salvador at the Casa de la Solidaridad, and worked with communities inspired by Liberation Theology and the vision of Jesus as a radical pacifist working for justice. There I took a philosophy course on Solidarity and Suffering taught by a Jesuit, Mark Ravizza. The central question of that course was: "How do you reinvest in a world that breaks your heart?" When facing the enormity of suffering, the catastrophic destruction caused by our economic system that devours people and the Earth, and all of the many depressing realities of the world today that threaten to drag us into despair, what helps me to reinvest is collaborating with people working to build alternative communities. People like Maria Elena and the women of Acahualinca, Kitty Madden and Doña Jerónima of Casa Materna, Mama Licha, and Carlos Vidal and Zelinda Roccia of Los Quinchos, have, with fierce tenacity, dedicated themselves to the work of compassion.

**"In doing so, they refuse to be complacent in the face of suffering—and insist on possibilities."**

In doing so, they refuse to be complacent in the face of suffering—and insist on possibilities.

The ProNica staff, delegates, and volunteers likewise represent individuals and networks of people struggling to contribute to peace, one grain of sand at a time, with tremendous love. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve with ProNica and to be part of such a community. □

# Health Far Beyond the Physical at Acahualinca

Kelsey Bilek, ProNica volunteer

In a small clinic situated in one of Managua's roughest neighborhoods, there is an entire group of women dedicated to giving voices to the stigmatized, names to the forgotten, and the basic human right of health to all. I arrived there as a ProNica volunteer prepared to conduct public health research and face whatever challenges might come my way. But on my first day at the Acahualinca Women's Center, Raquel and Janet, two health education promoters assigned to supervise my work, took me down the street to the Center's preschool and library. They opened the library and explained that I wasn't going to be conducting research, but instead I would be supervising the library and assisting children with their homework. I felt slightly disgruntled to be apart from the clinic, where such independent and strong women were saving their community. I wanted to participate

in their superwoman

**"I wanted to participate in their superwoman mission of saving the world through education and respect..."**

mission of saving the world through education and respect, and I wondered how I could channel the work of the women from the center into this small library.

That afternoon many children came into the library asking

for books and homework assistance. The preschool had closed earlier in the day, and many of the students' older siblings came in to study and prepare school projects. I was surprised when one girl in particular came up and asked for a book of poems by Rubén Darío, a celebrated Nicaraguan poet and the "Prince of Spanish Literature." I was a little startled at the request, judging Darío's works to be slightly out of her age range and beyond her reading level. I found the book "Azul," which Darío began writing when he was 19 years old, and I handed it over. She left the library with the book, which I was unsure about, especially since it was my first day at work and people weren't supposed to take books without checking them out. I was caught in a dilemma but stopped myself from chasing after the girl and demanding the book back, which I'm sure would have made an even more memorable first day. I was relieved about an hour later when the girl returned with the book and thanked me. I asked her what homework she had been working on and she responded "It's not homework, I just like to read poetry." She proceeded to read me her favorite poem that she had found and copied down carefully in

her notebook. After she left in the afternoon, I asked one of the preschool teachers about her, wondering about this young, aspiring Rubén Darío. Apparently the girl lived right around the corner from the library, which seemed to have changed her life. She had left the preschool a few

years earlier, but she still stopped by the library every day to read poetry or look up words in the dictionary. "This library has changed her life," the teacher told me. It was a quiet place for her to complete



Kelsey volunteers at the library

her homework. It was an

archive of literature for her to explore. It provided her with an opportunity to grow and learn in ways that many students do not have. "She's definitely going somewhere in life," the teacher said, and whether she was talking about just around the corner in Acahualinca or on the other side of the world, I knew that the teacher was right.

After working at the Acahualinca Library for the summer I realized that the idea of health that the clinic supports is more than physical wellbeing. It's even more than feeling respected and cared for, which I felt that the Acahualinca Women's Center strives to deliver to all of its patients. I learned that opportunity and education are necessary for a healthy life as well, and the library provides the children in the community with just that. It gives them space to not only complete their homework with books for support, but also a space to read for pleasure, expand their interests and grow. I sought to help through tutoring or finding them poetry books, but I ended up growing and learning with the students. As they learned about word structure, culture, biology and more, I became aware of how drastically the smallest resources and opportunities can empower a community. While the women at the Acahualinca Women's Center opened my eyes to the power of respect in maintaining the health of a community, working at the affiliated Acahualinca Library taught me the importance of opportunity and education in creating and supporting community health. □

To support ProNica's literacy efforts in Nicaragua, earmark your contribution: [Libraries](#).

# My Humbling Immersion in Nicaraguan Culture & History

Kate Page, ProNica volunteer

Last summer I spent six weeks as a ProNica volunteer at the Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs in Estelí. After four hours each day of intensive Spanish classes, I would help out at the Gallery—where I was so fortunate to have been able to apply my love of history and my fascination with Nicaragua.

There, I was given three main projects. The first was to work on the Gallery's Facebook page and promote it (so of course you can find them on Facebook as Galería de Héroes y Mártires, Estelí). The second project was to conduct oral-history interviews with some of the local mothers who lost sons or daughters in the Revolution and Contra War. When first explained to me, this project seemed impossible, but I am glad to report that it was accomplished with only minor road bumps. The third project would become my favorite. The walls of the Gallery are lined with beautiful, colorful, floor-to-ceiling murals with what seem like countless overlapping images and emerging faces. Collecting the history that is painted into each of these murals and writing about them in Spanish and English became the third project.

The first couple of weeks passed without much work on the two larger projects. My Spanish had to reach a basic level before I could really get going. At times during these couple of weeks I thought things like: "Why would ProNica ever agree to take me; I can't even explain that there's no toilet paper in the bathroom!" I had to remember to be patient with myself, and at times I felt very much like a child. Often when I went on walks with one of my host family members, I had no idea where we were going or why. In some ways it was a refreshing break from my life in the US where I thought I knew everything and knew exactly where I was going. I gained so much from this experience. Above all, the first couple of weeks taught me compassion toward individuals who cannot communicate in the dominant language. Through this immersion experience, little by little I began to comprehend and communicate more. It was like growing up again. I will be impressed with the capacity of the human mind from this point forward.

The day came to start the mural project, and Enoe, my host mom and the Secretary of the Gallery, sat down with me and began writing what she knew of each mural. It quickly became evident that large amounts of information were missing about many of the murals. I came to learn that all the information on the murals had been lost when the roof of the Gallery was redone two years prior. It would take another three weeks of digging and phone calls for us to produce a name and a number of a man that could fill in these gaps. With my time running short at the Gallery and in Nicaragua, I finally had the basic information on the murals in hand, and the next days were a haze of research, writing and translating!



Mural at the Gallery of Heroes and Martyrs

I came to find out that the murals were painted in 1989 by the Chicano muralist Roberto Delgado of Los Angeles, who volunteered his work in solidarity with the Nicaraguan struggle for freedom. Knowing how old they were, I began to understand better the reasons for their stressed and worn looks. After 23 years of the daily dirt of life, the murals are in desperate need of restoration. The paint that was used cannot be washed and in many places has been removed altogether. These murals represent the principals and

culture for which so many thousands fought and died. The task of collecting their multiple stories has just begun and is of utmost importance, as those who remember these stories are aging. The restoration and further research on their meaning would be a service to the history and culture of Nicaragua. I welcome the advice or assistance of anyone who reads this and wishes to become involved with the development of this cultural asset.

This past summer reinforced my love for history and made me entertain a future in teaching. The stories these murals tell of the fight for freedom from oppression are only valuable when remembered. Sharing them with today's youth in ways that make history real and alive is invaluable and impossible without further work. Many thanks to the women of the Gallery and to ProNica for this amazing experience! □

# Lillian Hall - Companion on Casa Materna's Journey

Casa Materna Staff

At our August staff meeting, we reflected on all that Lillian Hall's presence has meant for us over the past 14 years. The conversation was lively as we remembered Lillian's first visit to the Casa Materna here in Matagalpa on behalf of ProNica in 1998. She had known the Casa in the early 1990s, as women from the farm community of La Cumplida (Lil's home in the 1980s) were some of the Casa's first high-risk pregnant mothers.



Laura, Doña Jerónima & Lillian at Casa Materna

When Lillian became coordinator of ProNica here in Nicaragua, she came not only to see how the Casa was functioning but also to come to know each of the staff personally. It was a time in our history when funding was scarce and Lil encouraged us to look at ways in which ProNica might best be able to assist our development. "Always Lillian was looking for ways to help the Casa, and assisting mothers with family planning was identified as a major priority. ProNica's help was especially important for those mothers choosing tubal ligations after having given birth to 10-15 children."

Some phrases about Lil that came to mind in our staff's conversation were: committed to the people, open, a good listener, flexible (in helping us develop our requests according to our needs), a person who inspires confidence, responsible, humble about her role as a bridge with the

donors of ProNica, a good mother to her son Trevor, a person who also seeks advice from others...

Over the years, Lil has been with us to celebrate our successes and share our challenges. "She was present at every major anniversary: 10 years, 15 years, 20 years as we recounted and gave thanks for the Casa's service to rural mothers." And now in August of 2012, the number of mothers served is well over 15,800, including, unfortunately, two maternal deaths. Lil was here with us in November of 2009 when our second mother died. Susana Zeledon was just 30 years old when she gave birth to her 3rd child, a birth that was followed by uncontrollable hemorrhaging.

When food was scarce, it was Lillian who helped us connect with local farmers for more favorable prices for beans. And, time after time, together with Ruth, Davida and Melissa in St. Petersburg, she helped connect us with ProNica donors who have continued to be life long friends of the Casa. Throughout the years, Lil has brought countless visitors to come and know first hand the work of the Casa.

It was also Lillian who first connected us with Ev and Kit Pilgrim whose trainings in Alternatives to Violence have permeated our work with mothers in the Casa and also our outreach to midwives and mothers organized in mutual support groups in their home communities. And again, it was Lil who suggested that the Casa Materna be included in the ProNica documentary so artfully crafted by Alice and Nathan Ford from Australia, a documentary that we include on our website. And the list goes on...

**"ProNica's help was especially important for those mothers choosing tubal ligations after having given birth to 10-15 children."**

As Lillian now extends her life journey beyond the borders of Nicaragua, we want her to know that we will always think of her as friend and sister "as part of our Casa family and a companion on the journey." Lil, may your life with your beloved companero Ricardo, and with the people of Columbia whom you will come to know, be blessed with great love and peace and joy! Here at the Casa you will always have a home on your visits to Nicaragua. Hasta pronto (until soon). □

**To help mothers in rural Nicaragua manage the size of their families,  
earmark your contribution: Casa Materna.**

# Doña Santos' Chickens at Casa Materna

Jemma Benson, ProNica volunteer

Doña Santos promised to draw me a chicken. It was for a game with the mothers at Casa Materna—a center that prevents maternal and infant mortality in rural Nicaragua—and the location of my summer internship. Doña Santos drew intently until she revealed a fantastical, patchwork of color chickens. From then on, whenever the women expressed themselves artistically, a favorite pastime at Casa Materna, Doña Santos drew chickens. Her chickens became moderately famous. I often heard other women exclaiming over her talent in drawing them. Ironically, chickens are my biggest fear, fodder for gentle teasing among the mothers at Casa Materna on a frequent basis. But Doña Santos, pregnant with her 13th child, was not afraid.

Doña Santos lives 11 hours away from Casa Materna: six hours by bus, half an hour in a truck and finally two and a half hours on foot. She had gone to a maternity house in Waslala that attends mothers with lower-risk pregnancies, but she was transferred two days later to Matagalpa because her risk was high due to multiple pregnancies and age. Casa Materna in Matagalpa is safer due to its proximity to the hospital and superior medical attention. Doña Santos sent a message to her husband over the local radio with the news of her move to Matagalpa, but she didn't know whether he got it. For all he knew, she was still pregnant in Waslala.

One morning at 11 AM, Doña Santos went to the hospital with labor pains. At that time she had some bleeding

and was diagnosed with placenta previa, necessitating an emergency Caesarean section. Placenta previa causes extreme bleeding in many cases, and can lead to death of the mother or baby. While operating, the doctors offered her a tubal ligation. Even though she hadn't planned on having the operation beforehand, because the birth was so difficult, Doña Santos welcomed it. (Assistance for tubal ligations is one of the programs sponsored by ProNica together with post-operative medicines to help prevent infection).



Jemma holds Doña Santos' newborn

We were sitting and talking in the post-partum bedroom at Casa Materna, which houses four beds for mothers who stay on a few days or even a week at Casa Materna after the birth. Doña Santos was waiting the obligatory seven days to get her stitches out before returning home. The lights were dim, and her baby girl lay sleeping on the bed next to her. The baby wore a tiny, knitted white hat and had a head full of thick dark hair. She was safe and healthy.

On her last day at Casa Materna, after getting her stitches out, and just before heading back those 11 hours to her home, I asked Doña Santos if she wanted to help with another project. This time, the mothers were drawing pictures of themselves and their families to place inside a large montage. Doña Santos sat down and eagerly drew. So now, nestled among the drawings of pregnant women and their families, sits a family of purple, orange, and blue joyful chickens.



Doña Santos' chickens

All the mothers at the Casa stood outside to wave goodbye to Doña Santos as she left for the bus station. As I watched her go, I thought back to the conversation we had several days before: "What are your hopes for your daughter's life?" I had asked. "La última como la primera." she replied. "Take good care of her—the last baby just like the first one." □

*Casa  
Cuáquera*



José and Panchita welcome you

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# **PRONiCA**

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La Chureca girl at lunch