


SISTER ISLANDS

SÍ

SOMOS ISLEÑOS

*"You must be the change that
Usted tiene que ser el cambio*

Rainy Season 2004

*you wish to see in the world"
que quiere ver en el mundo*

Mahatma Gandhi

In July a delegation from Beacon Hill Elementary School in Seattle traveled to Ometepe to formalize its Sister Schools relationship with Balgüe Primeria. The delegation was led by Kim Esterberg and Chilo Granizo, the Hispanic bilingual specialist at Beacon Hill. Chilo is from Nicaragua, and taught there before coming to the U.S. The visit resulted in an astonishing camaraderie among the teachers, parents and children, and "only the beginning" of what will surely be strong and fruitful ties between the two schools. The Association is thrilled to see this expansion of Sister Islands activities to include the wider Latino community in our area.

Coming Home to Nicaragua

by Chilo Granizo, bilingual teacher at Beacon Hill Elementary

What can I say about our experience in Ometepe? How can I express everything I learned in just one paragraph? Every experience that I had would soon add up to create a book that should have been published years ago.

I was born into this culture, yet I needed to see it through the eyes of the other delegates to more fully understand my people and the admiration I have for Nicaraguan teachers' dedication. I saw the children whom I learned to love and through their innocent eyes I re-learned that education is the only way to leave behind a life filled with poverty. I looked at the teachers in Balgüe who give their lives to knowledge, and I saw myself before I came to the United States. Thanks to this trip, my co-workers at Beacon Hill also saw a part of me they had yet to meet. They saw my childhood. I too grew up like these children. I lived like them.

I would like to express my great admiration for Kim and Ela. You have no idea how you have affected the lives of these children who see few of life's luxuries. You have given your hearts and dedication to a world that is far away from your own. I thank you for the things that they can't express. My fellow travelers, I offer you my gratitude for taking my people into your hearts and opening your arms wide to new experiences in my beloved culture. You took in our traditions with eyes wide open with wonder. As the people in Ometepe said often, "*Mi casa es siempre su casa.*" Thank you for sharing these experiences with me and I hope to see you again next summer!

Editors' Note: Upon returning, Chilo Granizo learned she had won the 2004 KCTS Golden Apple Award for Excellence in Teaching. Besides teaching in classrooms, Chilo works on empowering Latino parents in Seattle. On this recent trip, she led her co-teachers through eye-opening and heart-expanding experiences on Ometepe. Congratulations, Chilo!

Fruitful Delight

by Andy Pickard

Slivered moons encircle the gift
Presented to you to do what you wish
Senses alert, fingers a flutter
Tastes and aromas surround and awash
Buffet of the moment, fruitful delight
Juices of mango stream down the cheek
Embracing the choices, so many in all
A faraway land with pleasure so near



A trip to Balgue floods the senses

A poem by Andy Pickard, Beacon Hill teacher

The eye sees new sights, too many to recall,
volcanoes, rainforest, animals, stars, lightning and the
beautiful people of Ometepe.

The ear is filled with the sounds of children laughing,
monkeys, birds, dogs, roosters, and one loud explosion of
thunder.

The nose breathes in the lush tropical air and smells
flowers, fire, and food.

The mouth enjoys the tastes of Ometepe – beans, rice,
coffee, and various meats, but the
fruit, oh the fruit, delightful, fresh from the tree, ah!

The skin experiences ice cold showers, the warmth of a
swim in Lake Nicaragua, the hug
of children, the sway of a hammock in the warm wind and
the constant of the humidity.

But senses are inadequate to touch the heart,
the people are Balgue, with friendship and love, the caring
bonds to always remember,
cause for memories, longing and the need to return.

**Bainbridge Ometepe
Sister Islands Association**

Editorial Team

Yanira Cuellar, Ela Esterberg,
Marcy Jackson, Christine
Llobregat, and Nancy Olsen

Proof Readers

Lisa Giles, Lee Robinson

Tech support

Peter Kauffman
David Mitchell

**PO Box 4484
Rolling Bay, WA USA 98061
Phone: 206 842 8148
FAX: 206 842 6907
E-mail: info@bosia.org
<http://www.bosia.org>**

**Founded in 1986 by
Kim and Ela Esterberg and
friends
Non-profit organization**

A Year Full of New Challenges

by Jackie Finckler

In 2003-4 Jim Starrs and I lived on Ometepe. We were the first couple to make our home in the Sister Islands office. Jim was the Association's office volunteer, and I was . . . well now, just what was I? My first role seemed to be "*esposa de Jaime*." It was a bit like being an ambassador's wife. One of my other roles was as a volunteer for *Si A La Vida*, a group home for young street boys. Jim and I experienced what could have been one of the greatest challenges to our relationship.

But there were many more challenges for me as an individual than for us as a couple. I often asked myself what a middle-aged woman, who is just a bit compulsive about cleaning, doesn't like bugs, and makes her living talking, was doing in a poor tropical country where she didn't speak the language? I frequently thought, with admiration, of all of the young single women office volunteers who came before us and gave so much time and effort to the Sister Islands Association. How did they do it?

On Ometepe the outside comes inside. When it rains outside, it rains inside. When it is dusty outside, it is dusty inside. Geckos live on the walls in small herds and leave their small droppings everywhere. If it weren't for the fact that they eat hundreds of insects, I would have been tempted to eradicate them.

And did I mention that the meaning of privacy on Ometepe is virtually non-existent? Besides the fact that we lived in the office, which is constantly filled with visitors and staff, there was a well-oiled rumor mill. Yes, these were some things that were challenges for me. But, while I can't say I came through with "flying" colors, at least they weren't dragging in the mud.

Jackie with the chavalos of Si a la Vida as they were going up Maderas on an excursion.

The best thing about being in Nicaragua with a partner was that we always had each other to talk to and support through the rough spots. Also, as a middle-aged couple, Jim and I experienced almost instant legitimacy. In the evenings, as young people and families went on *paseos*, Jim and I would sit out on the sidewalk with the older generation of neighbors, and I believe our actions were just a little less scrutinized than if we had been young and single.

Don't get me wrong. Like all the volunteers before us, the locals still commented on our eccentricities, such as how much we seemed to read, or my inexplicable quilting (who needs a quilt in the tropics?). And then there was the fact that one of our neighbors didn't really understand why we didn't like it when he honked his truck horn outside our bedroom at 6:00 a.m. After all, in Nicaragua that is well into the workday! And I have no idea what they thought about the fact that my Spanish was nearly non-existent.

I did work hard at learning Spanish, by studying at a school in Granada and living with a family there for several two-week periods over the course of the year. My Spanish teacher once asked me why I was doing that, living away from Jim, when it was so hard for me. I told her that sometimes one has to do things that are good and right, even if they are hard.

And I believe that our year on Ometepe was the right thing for Jim and me. We received many gifts from our experience of living in a culture where people work so hard, have so little, and yet are so generous with what they have. But, like everyone else who has visited our sister island, none of the gifts was greater than the friendships we developed.





Chilo Granizo, bilingual teacher with Susie Murphy, principal on their recent visit south.

A Beacon of Hope

by Susie Murphy (principal of Beacon Hill Elementary) and her husband, Rich

We arrived in Nicaragua on the evening of the anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution, July 19. We were excited and nervous, on our way to a new place, to meet new people, unsure what to expect, wanting to represent Beacon Hill well to its sister school community, hoping to be able to serve.

The bus drove us through the summer darkness to Granada. The ferry sailed us from Rivas to Moyogalpa on a bright Tuesday morning. The produce truck freighted us and our bags along the main road of Ometepe to Altagracia. And at last we were there, in Balgue, at Finca Magdalena, on the slopes of Volcan Maderas.

“New” is the proper word for everything we encountered. We had been unable to imagine any of it: the children in their blue and white uniforms, assembled on the school grounds, to greet us with dance and songs; the staff office—the only school room with electricity—where the teachers, school secretary, and principal introduced themselves to us and spoke with a passion that transcended our language differences; sitting through a reading lesson in the first grade and discovering that much of the Spanish required to understand it was still beyond us; chess games on the floor with Balgüe children who were enchanted by the intricacy and wonder of this new game.

We were so overwhelmed by the children and their teachers, by the village and the families, the cooperative and its workers, that we could hardly see beyond the immediate facts of our experience. How cold the bathing water was. How luminous the smiles of the children. How delicious the *pescado rojo*. How clean the smell of clothes hung out to dry on barbed wire in the tropical sun.

When at the end of our stay the teachers in that remote Nicaraguan community spoke intensely to us of their vocation, of the mission of their teaching—to enable children to think, to cultivate values in them, to enrich their lives—it seemed, for all the differences between us, that they were describing our deepest hope as well.

Bienvenidos!!! (Welcome!!!!!!)

by Linda Synder

The Sister Island Association would like to introduce Adrian Sampson and Hannah Davis as the new student board members for the school year 2004-05. Adrian and Hannah traveled to Ometepe this last spring student delegates.

Adrian is an avid debater, an active Registered 4-H Cavy Breeder and has found time to develop his own software company, Pygmy Software. Check it out at:

<http://www.pygmysoftware.com>.

Hannah is an enthusiastic outdoors woman and loves to hike, sail, and camp. Hannah also makes time to play on her high school lacrosse team and has a keen interest in Latin American studies.

We welcome both Hannah and Adrian and know that their perspectives will be an added benefit to the Sister Islands Relationship.

Cream of the Crop

by Lee Robinson

A brand new Island business, Cream of the Crop Ice Cream, is using Cafe Oro de Ometepe as one of its ingredients in two of their ice creams. Cream of the Crop Ice Cream opened its doors November 10th, in the Pavilion, next to the movie theaters in downtown Winslow. The shop features handcrafted, super premium ice cream, available in pints or cones. Dana Gargus and Deanna Johanson, owners and makers of Cream of the Crop Ice Cream, try to use as many Bainbridge Island ingredients as possible, in their ice creams, so of course, they thought of using Café Oro for their coffee-based ice creams. Currently they feature Ometepe Caramel and Mochatepe con Almondres as their two coffee-based ice creams. They are *excelente!* We hope you will stop by their shop and try some of the delicious flavors they currently are featuring. Yet another way to have Café Oro de Ometepe!

AN INVITATION: GET TO KNOW NICARAGUA FIRST-HAND

by Marcy Jackson

In the past the Sisster Islands Association has organized many different trips to Nicaragua: examples are coffee picking, farmers, teachers, high school students, medical and dental delegations. While it's wonderful to hear about the friendships, partnerships, and projects that have resulted from our Sister Islands Association, you may also be interested in getting to know Nicaragua and Ometepe first-hand through participation in a work delegation. We will keep you informed about future trips as they are planned. and our Board is always open to new ideas for cultural exchanges. Two other organizations in Nicaragua that offer opportunities for participation are El Porvenir and Sí a la Vida.

El Porvenir supports self-help, community-initiated water, sanitation, and reforestation projects. El Porvenir means "the future". Clean water means a healthier future for Nicaraguan children.

Each year, El Porvenir offers one-week and two-week work trips to Nicaragua. Groups of 10-15 people work in a village assisting Nicaraguan families in the construction of wells, latrines, and "lavanderas" (sinks for washing dishes and scrubbing clothes), as well as tree-planting. The group is accompanied at all times by a bilingual El Porvenir staff member. Neither Spanish nor construction skills are required, though both are useful and welcome.

Work trip schedule:

- February 19-27, 2005 - Spaces still available!
- April 5-14, 2005 - Spaces still available!
- June 3-11, 2005 - Spaces still available!
- July 9-23, 2005 - Spaces still available!

A two-week work trip costs \$950, plus airfare.

For more information on these work trips go to www.elporvenir.org

¡Sí a la Vida! (Yes! to Life) began in 1994 when Jonathan Roise, a Seattle Quaker, and Nicaraguan social activist Mercedes Guido first befriended homeless, glue-sniffing boys in the big Montenegro Public Market in Managua. Neighbors in the barrio offered food and support. Cash donations from U.S. and European friends enabled Jonathan and local volunteers to establish Sí a la Vida's small center, *Casa Nuevo Amanecer* (*New Sunrise House*). Since then a center has been established on Ometepe as well.

International volunteers help out in the residential centers in Managua and on the island of Ometepe, working directly with the boys or using specialized skills such as health care, construction, and agriculture. Volunteers need to commit to a minimum (preferably) of six months, speak Spanish fluently, be good role models, and be at least 21 years old. For more information about Si a la Vida go to <http://asalv.org>

The 5% Solution

Again this year, The Traveler, Bainbridge Island's wonderful little travel bookstore, has generously offered to donate 5% of its gross sales for the entire month of December to Ometepe. The funds are earmarked for books, maps, and other library materials for Ometepe schools.

The Traveler was founded 9 years ago with the aim of linking our Island community with the world community. Owners Susan Taylor and Barbara Tolliver had backgrounds in the travel industry and librarianship, respectively, and combined their talents and expertise to create a one-stop center for thoughtful travelers. From its beginning, The Traveler has been an ardent supporter of our sister island in Nicaragua.

The Traveler carries a wide array of travel guidebooks and travel literature, as well as all kinds of maps, travel accessories, and other gifts with a global focus.

Books, maps, and other items can also be special ordered.

So keep The Traveler in mind when shopping for holiday gifts. Remember that a portion of every December sale goes directly to Ometepe.

The Traveler is located at 287 Winslow Way, just steps from Town & Country Grocery Store.

More Gifts That Do Good

Our local Unitarian Universalist Fellowship supports the Sister Islands Association and many other non-profits through its Alternative Gift Project. For more information and a catalog, go to www.uufbink.org or telephone Carrie Klein at 206-842-8132.

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--- primarily to publish this newsletter.

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Living Lightly	\$10	Individual	\$20
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I'd love to volunteer : For events _____ Other _____
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Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association

P.O. Box 4484
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Membership is open to all who support our mission of...

**encouraging
mutual understanding,
education, friendship,
cultural and peaceful
exchanges between
the peoples of the
US and Nicaragua.**

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Our membership list is
not for rent or sale

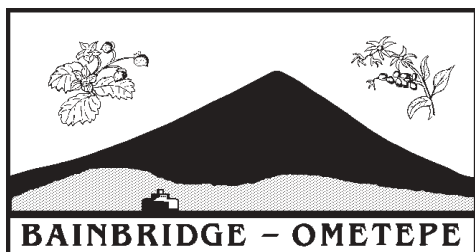
Great Holiday Gifts That DO Good!

- **CAFE ORO de OMETEPE** certified organic/shade grown/bird friendly/fair-traded
 - One pound= \$9.00
 - Half-pound= \$6
- **COFFEE MUGS** empty or with 4oz of coffee beans= \$6
- **T-SHIRTS & SWEATSHIRTS (Sister Islands)**= \$14 to \$24 plus shipping
- **2005 CALENDARS** (made by Bainbridge 3rd graders)= \$10
- **UNIVERSITY SCHOLARSHIPS for Ometepe High School graduates:**
more sponsors desperately needed... \$80/month; \$480/semi-annual; \$960/year
- **SISTER ISLANDS MEMBERSHIP**
 - \$10 living lightly; \$20 Individual; \$35 family; \$100 sustaining; \$1,000 life-membership
- **National Geographic subscription in Spanish for Ometepe school** = \$36
- **Inflatable globe for Ometepe classrooms**= \$7.50 each

Questions? Contact Lee Robinson at (206) 842-0774 (PST) or lee@bosia.org

***Happy Holidays ~ Feliz Navidad ~ Winter Solstice ~ Kwanza
Idd Mubarak~ Happy Hanukkah ~ Birthdays ~ Happy New Year***

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