



## It's That Time of Year -- One Call for All !

by Emily Mansfield

**"Una Llamada Para Todos."** It's unlikely that they'll be speaking Spanish when the Bainbridge Foundation contacts you in October for its "One Call for All" campaign, but we would like you to answer **"Claro Que Si"** (of course, yes!) all the same! The Sister Island Association is one of 54 Island non-profit social service organizations that benefits from the Foundation's annual fund raising drive. This means that you can designate BOSIA as the beneficiary of your donation to the Foundation and 100% of your gift will go to the Association.

"But," you ask "if I'm already a BOSIA member, why would I direct my donation through the Bainbridge Foundation?" There are two good reasons:

First, you may be employed by an organization that makes contributions to match those of its employees. If so, you double your dollar gift.

Secondly, each time someone contributes to a specific agency, that agency gets a larger percentage of the "undesignated" funds. The more people who give to BOSIA through the Bainbridge Foundation, the more excess moneys BOSIA gets.

BOSIA puts Bainbridge Foundation funds to good use. With their help, we fund partial scholarships for the spring High School delegation. And we provide scholarships for delegates from Ometepe who visit Bainbridge. These exchanges enrich our community as much as they provide assistance on Ometepe. When you receive your Bainbridge Foundation 1997 Campaign Pledge Card in the mail in October, find

us on the list and think of the cultural enrichment you will foster with your donation. We would also ask that if you do contribute through the Foundation, please let us know so that we can be sure to thank you and so that we can keep our records updated. **Gracias!**

### FALL 1997

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# Si a la Vida-- Yes to Life

by John Roise

Since its earliest days, the project Si a la Vida, has had strong ties with the people of both Bainbridge and Ometepe Islands. In addition to moral, spiritual and financial support, sister islanders from the U.S. have trundled south innumerable suitcases of supplies to help mend the lives of these destitute children. Two sister islanders from Ometepe, Nicaraguan university students with BOSIA-funded scholarships, have worked with the kids as project staff members. The Martinez family and others in Altagracia have hosted the kids during several visits to the tropical isle.

One of the highlights this year at Si a la Vida was the visit of the Bainbridge High School student delegation. The ex-street kids and the “gringo” kids spent a day at the beach at San Juan del Sur, followed by another day together at Casa Nuevo Amanecer (New

Sunrise House—the project’s residential rehabilitation center), sharing experiences, bridging cultural gaps and sealing bonds of friendship. We are currently discussing the possibility of bringing a few of the project kids to Bainbridge for a return visit, if financing can be found.



## Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association

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Founded in 1986 by Kim and Ela Esterberg and friends. The Sister Islands Association is a non-profit organization.

*From street urchin to sacerdote (priest)?*

*photo by Kim Esterberg*

Meanwhile, the project continues to grow. Construction of Casa Nuevo Amanecer was completed less than two years ago, but its capacity has already been exceeded as more and more kids opt to leave the street.

Financing has been received from a solidarity group in Barcelona, Spain, for a second house for the more advanced and stabilized kids. Several of them are attending regular school and/or are receiving job training. For many reasons, these kids are not able to return to their families or to be placed with a foster family or an orphanage. These children have matured and stabilized their drug dependence to the point where they no longer need the intensive 24-hour attention provided in Casa Nuevo Amanecer. The second house will help these kids live semi-independently with one adult supervisor in a regular house in an adjoining neighborhood. The new house will also help open spaces in the original house for the constant demand of new arrivals from the street. Meanwhile, plans are underway to double or triple the size of the original center, which will continue to serve as the immediate link with the streets. The British embassy in Managua has already committed part of the construction funding.

Total cost of operating the project during 1996 was \$16,000. In 1997, it is expected that operating expenses will total \$20-\$25,000. Although grants have been received for some capital costs, day-to-day expenses are financed primarily through small, but very consistent donations by individuals and church groups in the US, Belgium, Spain, New Zealand, Australia, Germany, Italy and Great Britain. On June 1, 1997, I handed over directorship of the project to

Jeanette Suazo, a Nicaraguan psychologist. She has worked with the kids for more than a year. Also, she is very sensitive to their needs and to the lengthy rehabilitation process in which they learn to take control of their own lives. I plan to continue working directly with the kids, especially with particularly difficult cases, and to be involved in the long-term development of the project. In short, I am thrilled to report that the Si a la Vida project continues to enjoy considerable success in rescuing and rehabilitating Managua street kids and returning them to their families and society. I believe there are three principal factors for the project's success thus far: 1) the motivation of the kids to change their lives, 2) the positive human relationships developed between them and the adult staff, and 3) education and training which gives the kids better economic possibilities in a country ravaged by 70% unemployment and debilitating poverty.

## OCTOBER 9TH -- AN INVITATION

You're invited to join Jonathan Roise for a potluck dinner and slide presentation on Thursday night, October 9th at Seabold Methodist Church at 6p.m.. Many of you have met Jonathan on his visits home from Nicaragua where he has spent seven years serving the community. For the last three and a half years he has worked with Si a la Vida to help street kids in Managua shed their addiction to glue, learn academic and life skills, and where possible, rejoin their families.

Voluntary donations will be welcomed. The Si a la Vida project desperately needs boy's or men's shoes, sizes 5 to 9, in good condition, shirts, bluejeans, or blue slacks in sizes which will fit boys between the ages of 11 and 16 years old (blue pants are school uniforms in Nicaragua). Jon will be taking back extra luggage with supplies for the kids. See you on October 9th!

### NIGHT IN BALGUE

*A poem by Tracy Nishimura*

I look out the brick window frame,  
and Hale Bop shines so bright  
it seems you can reach out  
and touch it.  
There are more stars  
than grains of sand,  
and Heaven feels a little closer  
here.  
Night has a softer kind of peacefulness,  
and I dream in Spanish.  
The sky is Dancing

### NOCHE EN BALGUE

*translated by Asha Esterberg*

Me asomo por el marco de ladrillo,  
y el cometa Hale Bop brilla tanto,  
es como si se pudiera alcanzarlo  
y tocarlo.  
Hay más estrellas  
que granos de arena,  
y aquí se siente que el Cielo está  
un poco más cerca.  
La tranquilidad de la noche es  
más suave,  
y sueño en español.  
El cielo en está bailando.

## BALGUE MEMORIES

By Amy Hendrickson

I wanted to share a few of my journal entries that I wrote while on our sister island last April.

**3/31** ... After dinner we went to La Jacienda y we walked *a los plantas de café* y we also went to see the *petroglyphos*. We did a rubbing of them and they turned out very well. It was dark when we walked back so we just stepped blindly. It was so nice walking back under the stars. We saw the comet, and Luis showed it to me when I returned *a casa*. I talked more with my family and everything is much appreciated—the food, the housing, the clean clothes, and the escorting...I'm so happy here. I don't want to return home to a schedule. I have great company in a beautiful place.

**4/4.** We went to the river to bathe. I know when I get home to Bainbridge and I have a shower, I'm really going to miss the river. I'm also going to miss all the kids—Javier, Victor and Martin are so much fun! I'm also going to miss just hanging out with the people in the Balgüe group. I love our group, and I feel very lucky to be in Balgüe.

**4/5**...I changed my clothes, took some pictures, got my stuff, and headed over to Jane's host family to wait for the bus. There was so much I wanted to say, but for some reason I felt it wasn't the right time. I felt kind of like an outcast, sitting there waiting for the bus. Everyone was talking, but I didn't feel like it. I just sat there holding my mango not wanting to go. I started to cry,

and I couldn't keep it in, so I got up to get my bandana. My *mamá* came over to me and hugged me, and then Yaoska and Bionka sat next to me. All I could say was, "*No quiero ir, quiero quedarme aqui.*" (I don't wish to go, I want to stay here). I tried not to cry because I didn't want to attract attention. Finally, the bus came, and all the parents and the kids I knew hugged me and said good-bye. I hugged my family good-bye and got on the bus. I just sat there crying, waving to my family, listening to the pig squeal as they tied it to the top of the bus.

*Editor's Note: Clearly, Amy (like many of the students) was starting to think in Spanish*

## LOOKING BACK

by Margit Sperling

On this sunny Northwest day, I am reminded of the scorchingly hot and dusty (sun-burned) week I spent on Ometepe.

When I look back on that week, I have an overwhelming sense of happiness. I learned more about myself and people than at any other time in my life. Not only did I gain an invaluable appreciation for the lives of those on Ometepe, but I began to see how fortunate I am.

I loved my iodine treated water, plastic cot, heaping plates of rice and beans, conversations in the stilted Spanish that only a deck of cards and "go fish" can produce.

I loved the dream I finally had in Spanish (even if I was being chased off a cliff by screaming *platanos!*). Most of all I loved feeling so alive.

When Yanira (our group's chaperone) asked me to write something for the newsletter, I could only think of my general listings and all those questions I answered in the weeks following my return:

- a) yes, I liked the food,
- b) no, I didn't get sick,
- c) yes I'd still like to be there,
- d) no, the spiders didn't bother me (but I can tell you who they did bother), and
- e) yes, if you have a couple of hours, maybe several days, I'd love to tell you about my trip.

My first impulse was to look back on the journal I kept. In it I found many stories and affirmations: "It will be O.K." "Spanish will be easier tomorrow". I also found my frustration with the language barrier and how much more I wanted to do for my Las Pilas family.

The first night we spent in Managua was definitely the most overwhelming. As I fell asleep in a foreign country for the first time I wrote a poem (see page 5).

All in all, my week in Nicaragua seems like a week in space, but what better way to learn that personality transcends language, that playing with soap bubbles make speaking obsolete, that people really do survive and persevere and that indoor plumbing is truly a beautiful thing!



1997 student delegation at Managua International on their way back north photo by Magaly Duarte-McLaughlin

## The Blue and the Gold on Ometepe

by Windy Wilkins

### March 31 5:30 p.m.

We had our first work day today. Showed up at 8:30 a.m. and began to paint a school (Sintiope Elementary School) blue and gold—(purposely selected by the community to match the Bainbridge High School colors). Painting was really hard. We did the front and both sides of the school. I don't think I have ever been so dirty in my entire life. Dirt, sweat, paint, I was covered. When I got home I immediately took a shower. It felt so good. I think it's the best shower I've ever taken (the first in 2 1/2 days). It's amazing how much this experience has made me appreciate every thing so much more: nature (the beautiful sky and beach) food, running water, toilets, showers, etc. It is an extremely humbling experience. I feel really satisfied right now. We put in a hard day's work and

actually helped people. Buenas noches.

### April 4 11:35 a.m.

Wow, I'm feeling very loved! We went to the school today, to teach the kids about our island. We had them draw Bainbridge Island, our ferry, the U.S. flag, and a tree. After doing that, the school put on an assembly for us. We sat facing 160 kids. They sang, danced, and recited poems. At the end, the principal told the kids to come up and thank us with a hug or a kiss. All 160 children came up with 2 or 3 giving us hugs at the same time. It was one of the most amazing things I've ever seen, getting mobbed by 160 kids, all wanting to give you a hug.

### FIRST IMPRESSIONS

poem by Windy Wilkins

Each row of strange flat  
brick houses  
People brown and distant  
rocking in stark light  
Single florescent bulbs casting  
shadows  
Moving fast horns and whistles  
clutter air that smells like rain,  
exhaust, sleep and tar  
I am zipping by people who  
accept the year of change and  
"Siempre Coca-Cola".

### PRIMERAS IMPRESIONES

translated by Asha Esterberg

Cada fila de casitas raras y planas,  
hechas de ladrillo  
Gente morena y lejana  
mece en la luz austera  
Bombillas solitarias florecientes  
proyectan sombras  
Pasando rápido, las bocinas y los  
pitos llenando el aire que huele a  
la lluvia, el smog, el sueño y el  
alquitrán  
Estoy pasando rápido por la gente  
que acepta el año del cambio y  
"Siempre Coca-Cola".

# GROWING UP

by Yanira Cuellar

I stifled the yearning to run behind our truck and ask for some last minute tips from Jim Starrs or Scott Renfro on chaperoning students. Instead, I turned around to face a small welcoming committee expectantly looking for the new additions to their families. I looked at my “kids” and realized that we all felt the same—tired from the long trip, excited to be in such a different environment, and nervous to make new friendships. I took a deep breath and climbed up the short flight of stone steps to the elementary school where the welcoming party was being held. My nervousness was abated by the warm smiles, but instantly a new terror seized me as I realized that they expected me to make a speech! Following on the heels of the poetic and eloquent *maestra*, I knew I was in trouble. I took another deep breath, got up and hoped I remembered enough Spanish to make sense. As the welcoming Committee delivered each one of us to our new homes, I realized that it was futile and naive to make comparisons between Bainbridge and Ometepe. It would be like trying to compare Venus to Earth. The air was intensely hot and dusty; the “green” was made up of mango and platano trees; people rode horses or bulls (or maybe

they were cows, but they had long horns). Every home was simple and as clean as it could be with dogs, cats, chickens and pigs drifting in and out. I struggled with the part of me that is the Salvadorean child who knew these people and had traveled similar roads, and the part of me who was the Bainbridge adult chaperone trying to reassure everyone that we would adapt.

After the first morning, as I took a “shower” and felt that first cold *huacal* of water, my Salvadorean girl was constantly by my side. The Bainbridge woman listened to the troubles of the teenagers. They were frustrated with their lack of Spanish, the challenges of new foods, and their difficulty in communicating their most basic needs to their new families. The Bainbridge woman went from family to family listening to their desire to learn how to help their new charges. “What do the kids eat?” “Tell them I don’t eat meat.” “She says she’s vegetarian, what does that mean?” “Ask them if they really got rid of all the spiders.” “She said she’s scared of spiders, how can I tell her they won’t hurt her?” “Ask them if they like me.” “How come they don’t know more Spanish?” “How come no one knows any English?” “Tell them the *refrescos* made from water and fruit juice are safe to drink.” “Tell them not to be offended when I put the little iodine pill in my water”.

Day after day, my heart broke with every delegation that came to my house making cases for assistance with community projects. “How can we make

them up North understand how great our need is so they will help us?”

In the long week that we were there, my student charges needed me less and less. Everyday they told me of conversations they had managed to have with their families, games they had played or dances they had gone to. Everyday I watched them grow up, and slowly I learned what every parent must eventually learn—how to be supportive and let them go at the same time. Meanwhile, my Salvadorean girl was also growing up. Her Spanish improved everyday until one day I caught myself swearing and heard the laughing acceptance of Ometepinos. I was still terrified by the formality of their meetings in which I was invariably expected to say “a few words”, but my tongue wasn’t so thick and I could roll my “r’s” with the best of them!

On the very last day I realized how much I had learned and how respected my position, as a BOSIA representative, had become as I negotiated a tricky compromise for how the “thank-you” funds (given to the community for hosting the delegation) were to be used.

As we left the island, and I watched the mist play with the majestic volcano, I realized that I had left part of my heart and that I would be back. I also realized that as with my teenage charges who had grown up a lot, I too had become a *Señora* and my Salvadorean girl had come home.

# SCHOLARSHIP, ANYONE?

Six years ago, the Sister Islands Association initiated a scholarship program. Eighteen students are currently sponsored by our community. Six others have already graduated from college. While we raise funds up north, there are scholarship committees in three towns on Ometepe who select high school graduates with good grades, community spirit, and financial need to receive a \$50.00 per month scholarship. The stipend helps cover the cost of tuition, books, transportation and food. Most students live with extended family or friends during the school year to stretch their funds. .

Our hope is that students studying with our financial help will return to Ometepe. For example, Karla Varela, who graduated in Psychology in December and completed her certification requirements in June, is now working on Ometepe at "Las Chicas". This is a project to nurture, rehabilitate, and educate girls who had been living on the street in Managua and other large cities. During her junior year of college, Karla worked with Jonathan Roise at the project Si a la Vida. While there, she decided that her vocation was to work with street kids. We're very proud of Karla.

Harry Cardenas, who graduated in medicine in December, has begun his two years of required national service in a hospital in Managua. After that he hopes to return to Ometepe.

In short, all of you who are sponsoring students are making a tremendous difference in their lives as well as their communities. **Gracias, Gracias!**

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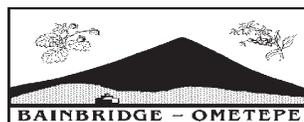
## Join Us

- ◆ 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*
- ◆ Non-profit organization
- ◆ Registered with the State and Federal Governments
- ◆ Our membership list is not for rent or sale

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## COUPON



Café Oro de Ometepe

### Coffee

## \$1.00 Off

Grocer: BOSIA will pay \$1.00 plus 8 cents handling for each coupon returned if submitted in accordance with standard coupon redemption policy. Cash value 1/100 of one cent. Void where taxed or prohibited by law, or if transferred or copied. Mail to: BOSIA, PO Box 4484, Rollingbay, WA 98016-0484

**Expires 12/31/97**

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However, the cost of attending college has increased significantly since the program began. Education is no longer subsidized by the government to the same extent as before and so, all students now pay tuition. Other costs have increased as well. The scholarship committees on Ometepe have asked us to consider increasing the stipend to \$75 per month instead of \$50. To do that we would need \$900 per year per student. Some sponsors are able to subscribe at that generous level, and we welcome you to consider funding a full scholarship. If that is not possible, will you consider co-sponsoring a student with two or three other people? This would entail a donation of \$25 or \$37.50 per month (\$300 or \$450 per year). To sponsor or co-sponsor a student, please call **Nancy Quitslund** at **780-9422** or **Susan Sullivan** at **842-2788** as soon as possible.

Remember your donation is tax-deductible, and you may be able to stretch it by taking advantage of your employer's programs that match contributions for charitable organizations.

**SISTER ISLANDS CALENDAR --Mark these dates!**

**Thursday, Oct 9: 6 p.m.** Jon Roise/Si a la Vida Potluck. Seabold Church

**Monday, Nov 10: 7 p.m.** Annual Membership meeting (dessert potluck)

**Second Monday of each month: 7p.m.** BOSIA Board meeting

*The last two events will be at Eagle Harbor Congregational Church*



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