

We tend the relationships....

Spring 2001

*...the projects we do are secondary
to the friendships we build.*

Coffee Picking Delegation Returns with Nuggets of Insight & Many Memories

David Mitchell, delegation leader:

"My first requirement for a successful delegation, that everyone return alive, was met with the coffee pickers. But I wasn't ready for the grace that accompanied our trip. Grace is an unmerited blessing, something you get that you may not deserve. And we got grace in abundance, first in the makeup of the delegation. Everyone got along, offered support to each other in a variety of ways, looked for opportunities to help. The weather was kind; just enough rain to remind us that we were in the tropics. The Ometepinos put up with us with their usual charm and good cheer. Even the monkeys turned up while we were picking coffee. Kim and Ela Esterberg, who happened to be there at the same time, augmented our itinerary to include some wonderful and enlightening experiences. I had so much fun I'm going to do it again next year."



Coffee Delegation assembles in Managua

photo by David Mitchell

Vern Gersh:

"At the Literacy Project graduation, I saw a little boy, ribs, rags and cheap sandals. When the *piñata* broke he rushed in with all the others, grabbing the candy. Then I saw him walk over and give every single piece to two even smaller girls, who were in the crowd watching. I think they were his sisters. We and our children have so much but I wonder how many of us would have shared? How many of us would have given it all up? I am glad I shared a little of what I have with our sister island. I know I didn't give up as much as that kid in the cheap sandals."

Don and Lynnea Mayer:

"We were surprised by the tremendous impact of BOSIA over the last fifteen years. We've supported BOSIA for our entire 14 years on Bainbridge. But we had little appreciation of the extent of change, and most important, the confidence and pride we heard from the people of Ometepe. We will never forget the star-spangled evening on the coffee terrace listening to Bernabé and others talking about the history of the coffee hacienda, from peons "working at the whim of the *patrón*" to co-op owners working for themselves, with new-found hopes and dreams for the future. Certainly one highlight of the trip was our sense of kinship with the people of Ometepe. BOSIA is dramatic testimony to Kim Esterberg's fundamental statement of faith: people of good-will can change the world,

**Bainbridge Bainbridge
Ometepe
Sister Islands Association**

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

toward communities of hope, reconciliation, and mutual helpfulness." (See story on page 4).



**Brian Finnemore (delegate
from Saltspring Island, BC):**

"This is the token Canadian responding... Having lived in many environments (ranging from the sub tropics to the high arctic), not too much really surprises me. On Ometepe a couple of things astonished and bewildered me, e.g., how do the local people keep so clean, given the primitive nature of their clothes washing facilities? Since they seem to dry their clothes on barbed wire, why aren't they full of holes? I was surprised at the degree of exhaustion that I felt after climbing the volcano. The most moving experience for me was the unexpected arrival of the community band and a number of community members bringing food items at Adri van Bianchi's birthday party in Altagracia. There were many highlights to the trip: Francisco's smile, Bernabé's sincerity and interest in the welfare of his community, the generosity of everyone, including Alcides Flores, and of course the collegiality of the group. The organization was superb."



Wayne & Marcy Daley:

"What surprised us the most was all the people, including children, turning out in incredibly immaculate white clothes, considering so many live in sparse dirt floor dwellings, people and animals share same spaces and paths, etc., and the dust of the dry season and mud of the rainy season there. How do they manage to pull that off consistently??"

While we were led to expect to be warmly welcomed and accepted, the extent to which we experienced that was very heartfelt and humbling. Our most moving experience was the extra days picking coffee, with Francisco's easy, friendly camaraderie, in spite of the language barrier. While we knew to expect that those who would choose the Ometepe experience would be special people, yet it was really neat to be a part of such a great group. That also made the trip a wonderful experience. We are also aware of all the special care and work that both David and Lee put into making the experience so rewarding and work so well, and we deeply appreciate that.

As a fish biologist, the highlight of the trip for Wayne was being given the opportunity to go out with Javier in his fishing boat, and assisting him to pull in his nets with the day's catch for Balgüe."

Bart Berg:



"My thoughts are best expressed in word pictures...a colorful, local ferry chugging its way to the island, as it unfolded...a small busy, simple port with boys diving off the docks...moving suitcases one more time into the truck ...not being driven, but going in "proper" style to Altigracia in the back of a truck, jostling our way down dusty roads...ox carts trudging by with questionable wheels flopping back and forth...ragged roads..arriving at the BOSIA office and a sense of connection with home...Siri and Adri looking tired from all they were doing and wondering if these new people would be there long enough to begin to understand this island... unfinished, ragged roads...washed out roads... happy people... 'Hola' repeated over and over to warm response...processions of the Virgin Mary...arriving at Balgüe to small, weedy streets, pigs, small fires, happy children with simple toys...trudging up hill to the Hacienda through narrow barbwired fence notches...the enchantment of the coffee cooperative Hacienda ...beautiful, long beamed roofs - the building is a treasure... views to Volcan Concepción always entrancing...the locals; casual chats with the foreigners traveling through; *gallo pinto*...cowboys moving cows in rocky pens from here to there-- a great show...enjoying our group...Canadian

humor...really learning about coffee beans...Francisco's warmth... a kitchen that never stopped fascinating me...cold showers... swimming in the lake...coffee picking under monkeys howling... all the coffee beans our delegation picked in one day being worth the equivalent of two beers...the dental chair trip to the medical clinic with the flea infested dog...teeth problems solved by pulling them... *gallo pinto*...*platanos* loaded onto East German trucks...dry rice being worked by feet and hands in front of homes...long trips down difficult roads to circle the island... dusty schools...Bainbridge-Ometepe signs everywhere...one thousand dollar new homes and grass huts...school uniforms...David and

electronic gadgets...*gallo pinto*...Ela and Kim's wonderful, small, comfortable home where we heard heartfelt words from island leaders...my family in Altigracia and their warm welcome...frustrating communication with my lack of Spanish - acting skills are handy...brightly colored party dresses coming from simple houses...Adri's birthday party complete with a serenade...the trip back on the ferry with *platanos* trucks... arriving at the dock feeling very different about Ometepe than the ride over - needing to know Spanish next time, concerned about the garbage everywhere coming with certain material affluence, wanting to help--- not comfortable with everything but wanting to come back."



Coop member Francisco Alvarez taught us how to pick coffee and much more.

Photo by David Mitchell

In the beginning... A History of our Sister Relationship

by Kim Esterberg

As one of the founders, I am often asked to say something about how the sister island relationship with Ometepe began. Now, nearly fifteen years later and the deep involvement of many people, my voice is truly just one more of those who have made this beautiful relationship a reality. So, understanding that what you see is the product of many hands, I will go back to the very beginning and share where this idea came from and what dream I brought to what you see today.

I have been something of a peace activist for many years, from my own personal resistance to war as a conscientious objector, to my involvement in peace groups that opposed nuclear weapons to those that protested the US role in destabilizing Central America. But always, I knew that my heart was in a different place from others who were energized by opposition in an effort to reach social justice. I am, by nature, a very positive and optimistic person and much prefer being pro-active to re-active. So, in the mid-1980's when President Reagan and his assistants like Oliver North, were illegally supplying the Contras in Nicaragua with arms to bring down the Sandinista Revolution, numerous folks on Bainbridge were doing our part to alert our neighbors to the injustice this represented. I began thinking that if we could only bring another island community in Nicaragua close to Bainbridge, we just might see the political and social realities of real people much better. We might even come to see them as members of our human family-- not Sandinista enemies of democracy, threatening our hemisphere. My dream simply was for us to meet folks from another island community and relate to them in many ways, just as we do with one another here on Bainbridge. If we did so over a long period of time (despite differences in cultural background, politics, and different economic circumstances), I hoped we could provide a model for the whole world of working together for common human goals. It might even give us on Bainbridge a real window through which to look at the much more typical human condition in today's world, as opposed to our comfortable and often insulated life. Perhaps at the same time, another island community would gain a much better understanding of us, not as the traditionally dominant Americans in the region, or as Hollywood archetypes, but as real (ordinary) people who are who we are! Over time, I hoped both our island communities would learn that there are advantages and disadvantages to both of our life settings. Thus we would grow in mutual understanding and respect.

So, that was the dream, and I believed that we would need to work on it year in and year out, always expanding the number of people in both our island communities who were connected and the ways we were involved. This would be unlike so many solidarity groups, which tend to be responses to particular (political or emergency) situations and then dissolve. Longevity, then would be a key aspect. One thing I did not anticipate was that this dream would capture the imaginations of so many very remarkable people in both island communities, who would extend the relationship successfully in so many directions.

Since our sister island of Ometepe is relatively poor and we on Bainbridge are relatively affluent, one might assume that our altruism would lead us to help folks there, after learning of their material needs. We have indeed participated in many development projects with our brothers and sisters on Ometepe. These projects normally are initially proposed by folks there (not here) and we work out a system by which both contribute to make the projects a reality. One example is the seventh and last potable water system we built together, which was in Merida. BOSIA provided approximately \$25,000 for materials and technical assistance and the community put in approximately 9,200 days of hard, physical labor! Wouldn't you agree that we did it together? A second example is our scholarship program, which supports promising graduates from high schools on Ometepe who wish to go on to college. It is funded by people and organizations on Bainbridge, but the selection of scholarship recipients is

administered by committees on Ometepe. We currently have 13 graduates and 23 young people receiving scholarships. I believe this program, like all the others, works because we trust one another and recognize that the projects are meaningful only if we both have an important role in their implementation.

Every year students from Bainbridge High go to Ometepe to live (one student per family), practice Spanish and work on some community project. Our students bring down funding for community projects and put in some of their own labor, while the community organizes and works on the project and the host families provide free room and board to the visitors. When the Bainbridge students arrive they are immediately struck by how humble the housing is. But they normally leave the families having experienced a life that is not constantly bombarded with advertising for consumer goods. They are struck to learn that it is possible to have a life focused on people and relationships, not things! The experience is very moving to many young people from Bainbridge. They return with a view of a different life on the other side of the window. Often they have a much deeper respect for life beyond Bainbridge, and reflect this later in their schooling and career choices.

Editor's note: *In future articles this year, we will celebrate 15 years of sisterhood with Ometepe, with voices of Ometepinos who have helped to shape the very special relationship that we are all so proud of.*



Photos by Dallas Shaffer

Alice Mendoza's Third Graders Come Through Again

by Dallas Shaffer

The third grade students in Alice Mendoza's class at Wilkes Elementary School on Bainbridge have shown that kids can make a difference for the eighth consecutive year. At a ceremony on January 12, 2001, the class presented BOSIA with a check for \$8,000 earned by planning, designing and selling 1,100 Pacific Rim Rainforest Animals calendars. The students also presented a \$3,000 check to the Nature Conservancy to purchase and preserve 75 acres of rain forest in the Maya Marine Corridor in Belize.

The students shared their excitement, pleasure and satisfaction with an appreciative audience of parents, friends and BOSIA board members. The students decided that this year's funds will go to aid in the construction of the school library at the Koos Koster Elementary School, a full-time teacher for the Sí a La Vida (recovering street kids) center on Ometepe Island, and a scholarship for the first Sí a La Vida graduate to go to college! The class thanked Kim Esterberg for his help during the preparation and production of this year's calendar.

KUDOS, AWARDS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Recent letters to BOSIA

"It is my responsibility, pleasure and privilege to send you a check on behalf of the Master in Teaching program Cohort 7.2 of Heritage College in Olympia. Enclosed please find a check for \$40.42.

I would also like to take a moment to congratulate the various staff and volunteers of your organization. During the Fall Semester last year we were assigned, as a class, to conduct research on a product that is either grown or produced outside of the United States and consumed here. One of the groups chose to look at organic coffee cooperatives. In the course of their research the owner of Traditions Fair Trade [BOSIA sells coffee to Traditions Cafe in Olympia], a coffee shop located in Olympia, provided a copy of your newsletter and a package of Ometepe Gold coffee.

Due to the excellent quality of your collective efforts, of the newsletter and the coffee, that group's research project changed to one that focused on coffee and the Sister Islands Association. Consequently, when the group presented their findings to include information about the fund-raising and funding needs we were able to pass a hat and raise the enclosed amount. I have included the information as I felt it is important to note your work is being noted and pays dividends. I hope in future [sic] that others will also learn

of your association and the wonderful things that you are all doing.

On behalf of the M.I.T. -7.2 Cohort (14 students)....

Yours Sincerely

con cariño, Brian Moreland"

Editor's note: This donation was used for a whiteboard for the literacy Project in Balgüe.

"Dear Folks at BOSIA, Just a few words to let you know how impressed I am with your sister islands association. I discovered you through your coffee at T&C when I first went to visit my daughter and family after they moved to Bainbridge a few years ago. Because I have spent many years here in Marin County involved with issues of social justice in Central America, I was moved to buy your coffee and bring it home with me along with your newsletter.

Since 1984 I have been part of the Marin Interfaith Task Force {MITF} on Central America which began in response to the sanctuary movement for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees in the Bay Area and quickly grew to oppose the war imposed by the Reagan administration on Nicaragua. During the 1980's there were two sister city organizations here in Marin, one for Condega and the other for San Rafael del Norte. Both of these groups, sadly, are no longer functioning.

MITF's involvement with Nicaragua now takes the form of working to oppose the sweat-

shops that have been set up in the free trade zone where the workers at the Chentex plant have had great difficulty in attempting to organize a labor union. Earlier this month we held an educational event to raise money for a clinic in Mulukuku in northern Nicaragua. The clinic has been run for the past 10 years by Dorothy Granada, an American woman, who now makes her home in Nicaragua. Her stories of what has happened to Nicaragua since the defeat of the Sandinistas are truly heartrending. One can only wonder what might have been. Having visited Nicaragua twice in 1985 I remember the great hope the people had for a better life and for health care and education for themselves and their children. Washington dashed their hopes.

I really want to thank your great group for continuing to stand with the people of Nicaragua. I know that both islands gain from your continuing interaction. *Muchas gracias para su trabajo!*

Jan Bauman, Mill Valley, CA"

Thanks, Traveler!

Muchas gracias to Susan Taylor and Barbara Tolliver of the "Traveler" store on Winslow Way. They donated 5% of their gross sales in December to our Sister Island. Their generous gift of \$1,700 will be used to build a classroom in Las Cuchillas, a tiny, remote village on the flanks of Cerro Maderas.

AWARDS: a drum roll, please!

The Sister Islands Association's email project team got a boost this month when they were named a finalist in a design competition sponsored by ZF Linux Devices, The Embedded Linux Journal and Tri-M Systems. Each finalist in the competition will receive a tiny computer system, less than four inches on a side, along with development tools. The email project team's design is a solar-powered wireless router and other tropics-hardened computer devices. The router will connect far-flung computers on Ometepe without

using wires, and will eventually enable email connections in even the most remote schools and other locations. This new design will replace an existing system that was installed last May in Altagracia.

 And, speaking of awards, "Islas Hermanas", the video about our Association recently produced by Melissa Young and Mark Dworkin of Moving Images, Inc., last month won a Cine Golden Eagle award for Best Documentary in a prestigious national festival in Washington, DC. This is one of nine awards given annually by Cine for the best programs produced the previous year. Also, Islas Hermanas was

shown recently at two local film festivals ---at the Environmental Films Festival in Olympia and the Conscientious Projections Festival on Bainbridge. We are very thrilled about sharing our story via this film.

Editor's Note: Check out the video from the Bainbridge Public Library or call Lee at 842-0774 to buy one!

A Baby Sister is born!

We're very proud to announce that a showing of our video and visit by folks from BOSIA inspired a group on Whidbey Island to start a sister relationship with a town in the Dominican Republic! Watch for the story in the next issue!

Join Us! 700 names on the mailing list, yet only 100 dues-paying members? Something is not right!
 We use membership income wisely— primarily to publish this newsletter.

Cut Here

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State/Province _____
 Postcode _____
 Country _____
 Phone () _____
 E-Mail _____

Annual Membership

Living Lightly	\$10	Individual	\$20
Family	\$35	Sustaining	\$100
Life Membership	\$1,000		

I'd love to volunteer : For events _____ Other _____
 Specific interest _____

Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association
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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.*

Non-profit organization

Registered with the State and Federal Governments

Our membership list is not for rent or sale

CALENDAR

Mark these events and dates on your calendar at home!

Board meetings: 2nd Monday of each month. 7p.m. Bainbridge Island Senior Center

Annual student trip March 24- April 7

Deadline for donations & mail going to Ometepe: March 16 (packing party March 17)

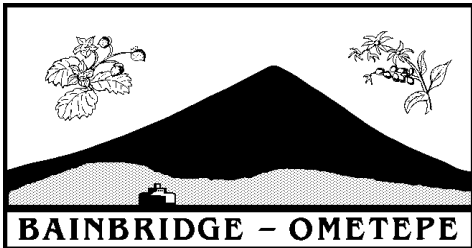
Collection boxes for school & sports supplies or other donations at Sakai, Wilkes and BI High schools, and Seabold Church (call Nancy at 780-9422)

October 6th or the 13th??: Our 15th Anniversary Celebration Party! Watch for details... planning is under way. Call Yanira at 842-9227 if you want to help!

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

- * Co-Editors for the newsletter with Pagemaker, design and desktop publishing experience.
- * Volunteer to compile addresses of past student delegates to Ometepe for a program evaluation, and (maybe) to organize a reunion this summer. Call Ela at 842-8148
- * Membership Committee needs a person to mail out monthly renewal notices. (We only send out one reminder to supporters on their membership anniversary). Call Lee at 842-0774.

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WAIT! Don't just recycle this —Pass it on to a friend!



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