

Negotiating for Coffee

by Yanira Cuellar

I walked up the wooden steps that led to the verandah, with the spectacular view of the volcano Concepción, that was the site of the negotiations for this year's coffee crop. I was nervous but felt prepared. I had reviewed the Max Havelaar formula, obtained the latest New York C price (the base price), added the surcharge of 5¢ for fair trade, 15¢ for organic certification and a 10¢ premium for shade grown that BOSIA and OGIFA (on whose behalf we were negotiating) would offer for the year's coffee crop. I put on my business *sombrero* and calculated the percentage increases that we had paid over the last three years. I had been told that the negotiations were only an exercise to help the co-op members practice negotiating skills. In the future, their crop could increase so that BOSIA and OGIFA would be unable to buy it all.

When I arrived all the members of the negotiating committee were eagerly awaiting the start of the session. I sensed a certain anxiety from the group, but I chalked it up to being nervousness about BOSIA or OGIFA buying all the premium



Yanira and Kim with negotiating committee

Photo David Mitchell

grade along with the lower grade coffee they had previously shown us. That is, until I was about to sit down, and in the usual subtle Nicaraguan fashion the co-op manager said, "¿Bueno señorita estamos aqui para negociar que no?" ("Well young lady (no doubt flattering this old woman) are we here to negotiate or not?") "Oh no!" I thought, "I think the exercise has just ended."

Sure enough, for the next several hours I argued valiantly for the magic formula and my calculated percentages. They calmly

recounted the 50% increase in the wages paid to the people who actually pick the beans; the increased efforts in their nursery; the renovation of older trees; and the tremendously long hours spent in sorting through all the beans one by one (only to have us say "No, we were not interested in the lower grade beans because of the lack of uniform size"). In the end, Kim Esterberg (my team mate) twisted my arm (I have a picture to prove

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this!) and I succumbed to an additional 5¢ for a total of \$2.10 per pound for approximately 6 tons of coffee. The relief from the group was palpable. Deep sighs, hugs and smiles were exchanged as the year's negotiation came to a successful close.

Preparing for a student trip

by Ela Esterberg

So, what does it take to arrange 26 home-stays and several community projects in three towns chosen for the annual student delegation? This was the challenge facing Yanira Cuellar, Kim and Ela Esterberg when they arrived on Ometepe in February, a mere month prior to the student trip. The answer? “*Mucho* leg work, creative communication, years of friendships and lots of luck!”

We had much to accomplish

and a very short time to do it. Each town took two (or three) visits, mostly by public bus, to introduce the idea, meet the parent or school committee, deliver delegates' letters, visit each home, take pictures, ask questions and rearrange details (if necessary), and finally gather replies from host families to the students and chaperones back on Bainbridge.

Organizing things in **Altagracia** was relatively simple because of our long association with this community. Also, our latest cooperative project is the first public library on Ometepe — incidentally being built right next to our very first joint project: the Arlen Siu Preschool (completed in 1989)! Naturally, the Library Committee was our link for this year's visit. They offered their own houses (or their relatives') for homestays. Great! That was easy! A couple of meetings to plan details; then about three hours of walking the hot, dusty streets to visit each of their homes, talk about food or other *inquietitudes* (worries) they had about hosting an *estranjero* (foreigner) in their home, taking a photo of all the members of each family that were home that day, and setting a deadline and mail stop for all return mail (letters of *hola*, *bienvenidos*, etc.). One delightful outcome we had not expected was the camaraderie, excitement and cooperation that began to gel in the hosting community as we walked from house to house. A tremendous bit of luck was that the Mayor's wife, Maritza is the school Principal and on the Library Committee. This, among other things, allowed for a smoother customs “scene” at Managua airport for our 52 suitcases of

donated materials and for transporting tired students to three separate towns upon arrival on Ometepe.

Next, **La Flor**, where students have visited the last two years. This, too was relatively easy except that with no telephones we had to rely on Leonel, who lives in Alta Gracia, taught in La Flor and owns a bicycle. With his help and connections we managed two separate visits.

San Jose del Sur was our third and newest community. The Association tries to move our student visits around to different towns in order to ever-widen our connections on Ometepe. Fortunately, we were able to broach the possibility with a small parent delegation that came by to visit our host family on the very afternoon we arrived on Ometepe. We made an appointment to visit their school the following morning. The Principal and Assistant Principal were very enthusiastic and immediately understood the purpose of such student exchanges. Twenty four year old Rudy Martinez from Altagracia accompanied us to recount his family's experiences hosting numerous *estranjeros* over the years. Two days later, again accompanied by Rudy, we visited each host family and took family photos. These personal visits made it possible to avert certain problems like lack of potable water, distances to the chaperones' homes, etc.

What a whirlwind of preparations! In the end, it all added up to the strongest base ever for the powerful experiences ahead of the students, chaperones and their very generous host families.

Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association

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

Nurturing Canadian-Nicaragua-US Ties

by Carol Ware

April saw a visit by a small delegation representing our Association to Saltspring Island, British Columbia. The goal? To renew and strengthen bonds with the Ometepe-Gulf Islands Friendship Association (OGIFA). Our two organizations have a long-standing relationship. They were started within one year of each other —BOSIA in 1986; OGIFA, 1987. (While we call it “sistering” they call it “twinning”!) In the beginning the Canadian connection was invaluable to us in communicating with Nicaragua, especially during the official US embargo and the CIA-subsidized Contra War. Over the years, we have worked together on several projects including bringing potable water to several villages and jointly importing Café Oro de Ometepe. Nica-

raguan visitors usually include both Bainbridge and Saltspring Island in their itinerary.

Both organizations are non-profit, with no political or religious affiliations. However, we do have our differences. OGIFA's work is often done in participation with governmental (sometimes non-governmental) agencies existing in Nicaragua. Also, in Canada, citizen groups can get matching federal funds for international development projects they propose overseas. Thus, OGIFA has successfully completed several major capital projects on Ometepe. BOSIA generally works on smaller scale projects directly with communities on Ometepe undertaking projects conceived mostly by Ometepiños.

Last year, as in any relationship, certain misunderstandings arose. Initially there was a question of BOSIA's role in a large OGIFA-inspired project to enhance organic farming on Ometepe and, most recently, the allocation of the

jointly-imported coffee crop. In both cases, clarification, good intentions and communication led to peaceful resolution, without any international incidents!

As a follow-up, Dale Spoor, Kim Esterberg and I went to smoke the peace pipe with our northern friends. We were greeted in Victoria by Brian Finnemore, the driving force behind the OGIFA Coffee Committee. We were welcomed warmly in the home of Paul and Beth Raney with a potluck dinner that reflected OGIFA's penchant for organic farming and delicious food. We compared our philosophical directions and agreed to share information on proposals that come from Ometepe and to coordinate resulting projects.

All in all, the perfect April weather was matched by the fine, varied and intelligent friendship of our Canadian hosts. We left feeling very fortunate to have OGIFA to complement and extend our kinship with Ometepe.



In Memoriam: Elinor Yost (1908 - 1998)

By Dale Spoor



I first met Elinor back in 1990, when our first shipment of Café Oro de Ometepe arrived. As the “Coffee Coordinator” at that time, I was madly scrambling to find volunteers to help bag coffee so that we could fill our growing orders. On occasion the system broke down and I found myself with a lot of coffee to bag alone.

So I was happy to add Elinor to my small list of volunteers. Not only did she never miss one of her committed dates, she eventually started showing up regularly on a weekly basis. She continued to do this right up to the end of her last illness. However, I came to appreciate her in ways that went far beyond the help she gave.

She was pretty quiet at first. However, it wasn't long before those of us who worked with her found ourselves chortling and then guffawing over one of her humorous comments. I was happy to call her a friend, even if we did occasionally clash on some far-flung philosophical issue. I know that all of the volunteers who bagged coffee each week looked forward to seeing her, and enjoyed her indomitable spunk. She had a wonderful sense of living life to the hilt each day, which she did right up to the end. I cannot recall a single time when she voiced any complaint about her own life or the illness she struggled with for several years.

All of us who were fortunate to have come into contact with Elinor are saddened at her passing, but the memory of her vibrant spirit will live on in our hearts and minds. As one friend recently said to me, if you're having a little trouble referring to yourself as “young”, just remember Elinor at age ninety!

¡Elinor Yost Presente! *

**A Nicaraguan saying for a fallen hero meaning his/her spirit is here with us.*

Bainbridge Students' Impressions of Ometepe

With time, the immense rock in the small garden in front of my house became my favorite place in La Flor. I would watch my sisters pull each other and the neighbor boys up on to the rough surface. Five or six at a time, they would carefully (and with a certain seriousness) climb the great stone. Eventually I joined them, honored with my own space to sit. We would lounge in the heat of the day and watch the town walk by. As the sun went down over the plaza we would play the harmonica until all the air had left our lungs. We had the best view of the world from that rock. Later, when the little ones went to bed, my older siblings and I would sit out looking up into infinite stars in an infinite night. Even in that darkness our view was better than anywhere else in the world.

Anna Armentrout, La Flor



Twilight musicians in Balgüe

Photo Kim Esterberg

I believe the trip to Ometepe is my first truly valuable foreign travel. It was not meant to be a vacation, rather a lesson that travels beyond Spanish. It is difficult to tell if this lesson changed me or progressed my ideas; it is far more subtle. The Island as a whole is a beautiful place with great people. I often wish I had more time there. Thanks to all the chaperones, San Jose del Sur in particular (Jim, Katie & José).

Jesse Harris, San José del Sur

On Sunday we climbed Concepción, the larger of Ometepe's two volcanoes. We left La Flor at dawn to avoid finding ourselves halfway up the

mountain in the midday heat, and joined up with our guide, Anibal and other friends and family members. We all carried bottles of water and someone brought a backpack full of *jocotes**. The dusty path, lined with trees had to be shared with the occasional herd of cows being brought down from higher fields. As the sun came up, the path began to lead us up steeper ridges. Chipito led the way, stopping to show me monkeys in the trees, thorns to watch out for and spectacular views of the island and the lake. We finally got above the treeline, but the powerful winds kept us

from going any higher. A few of the men climbed up to a field of flowers and brought back beautiful bouquets. After resting and enjoying the panoramic view, we descended by a different path. Some of the boys ran all the way down. The rest of us stopped along the way to sample coconuts and ripe bananas found by our guide. We reached the bottom in time for lunch. Tired and dusty, we were ready for a relaxing afternoon at the beach.

Nora Ferm, La Flor

** A small fruit with one large pit.*

For me, Ometepe was a truly memorable experience. I'm glad I went because now my Spanish speaking skills are better than ever. I learned and experienced an incredible culture but mostly I met some of the nicest, most giving people. I had a wonderful family and I was able to form some great friendships with kids there (with my fellow travelers from here).

Ometepe made a lasting impression on me, and I know I will return someday.

Heidi Lynne, Altagracia

You've all had the Ometepe coffee, right? It is wonderful! I went down there thinking these people had it made living in the place where they grow some of the best coffee in the world. It was a big surprise to me to discover that most people (my family included) drank Presto Instant Coffee. Also, their coffee is totally different. They put one part sugar for one part instant coffee and at least a half cup of hot milk. Everyone would drink these dessert-like drinks -- even the kids. One day my Nicaraguan mother asked me if my mother at home liked coffee. I said "Yes", but explained to her that she liked it very differently in the States. Nevertheless she insisted on buying some instant coffee for me to give to my mom. When she opened the gift, my mom said with a laugh, "I can't believe my daughter went to a place where they grow the best coffee in the world and brought me back a jar of instant coffee!"

Abby Tinker, San José del Sur

Traveling to Ometepe was an incredible experience. I learned so much from just being immersed in a different culture for two weeks. In retrospect, the most prevalent thing in my mind is the relaxed atmosphere and the sense of community on the island. No one ever seemed to be in a hurry because everything always worked out. My interaction with my Nicaraguan family by far was the most meaningful relationship that I developed during the two weeks. They were so patient with my developing Spanish and so open to accepting me as a daughter and sister.

My mother was Assistant Principal at the elementary school, she served as my interpreter to all the others that I interacted with. My father worked hard and was only around in the evenings. However in our time together he and I constantly discussed the similarities and differences between Nicaraguan and North American life. My older sister (who was actually 14) and I practiced English and Spanish. We both learned a lot about grammar from each other. My brother loved the Frisbee I brought with me, and wanted to play with it even at eight-thirty or nine at night. I spent time with my seven year old sister the most. We explored Altagracia together. She loved to laugh at my incorrect Spanish and share sodas with me. With some time since the trip I realize that someday I want to go back to Ometepe, and perhaps live there for an extended period of time. If I could speak to my family now I would say thank-you for being so amazing and accepting of such a stranger. I will remember them forever.

Cari Crane, Altagracia

My 73 pound suitcases filled with donations
All the kids flocking to Doc Bergman
The grandmothers of San Silvestre at the inauguration of their new water system
Lent processions on Fridays with the Jesus statue and flower-covered crosses
Looking out to the jungle while I take a shower
The chickens tied to trees because they didn't have a fence
I don't think roosters could be any louder
Political graffiti: my dad's face on walls because he is the mayor
Teaching my brothers, cousins, and father English
Coming home from climbing the volcano to learn that my family had moved into their new house, and not knowing because of my limited Spanish
The smell of tropical mahogany
The bamboo *discotec* in Urbaite
People pointing with their lips-confusing!
It's funny to hear people get mad in another language
Pan dulce from Juan's
Eating raw sugar cane
Millions of stars all so close to Earth
The 3 drops of rain that hatched 20 billion mosquitoes
Cockroaches' feelers going round and round on the walls of the latrine
Sitting on the mud inside the volcano
The orange sunsets against the huge volcano
How lucky I am to have had a terrific experience this second time around
I hope to do it many more times

Hilary Benson

***Sí a la vida, a* Nicaragua street kids project, first hand.**

by Millie Royce

When our long Continental flight finally touched down at Managua airport and our little group from Bainbridge walked through the warm night air across the landing area into the terminal building, it was still hard to believe we were actually there. Bob and I had been in contact with the *Sí a la Vida* (Yes to Life) Street Kids' Project since its beginning in 1994, through our friendship with fellow Quaker, Jon Roise. But our knowledge of the project was always at a distance through letters, articles, photographs and a few vivid firsthand accounts from Jon himself during his rare visits to the Northwest.

The days that followed were a series of meetings, visits and observations of the project itself. It felt good to begin matching names and faces with photos we had seen and stories we had heard. We spent some time at the project helping the kids prepare for *Sí a la Vida's* fourth anniversary celebration painting, cleaning, and decorating the *Casa Nueva Amanecer* (New Sunrise house), and practicing songs they'd be singing at the celebration. We also saw the *Sí a la Vida* adults in action — patient, firm, and always alert to the needs of the kids. We better understood how hard their daily tasks have been guiding, teaching, and rehabilitating these youngsters who have experienced little kindness, parental guidance or self-discipline.

We also went with Jon as he

worked with glue-sniffing youngsters living in the public markets. There we saw Jon's compassion for (and acceptance of) these cast-off kids and a determination to rescue them, one at a time.

One unforgettable experience was a group therapy session where Jon and three adult staff met with 19 boys. For an hour the group discussed some recent problems and misbehaviors while Jon patiently asked questions and listened quietly to each boy's response. We marveled at the kids' depth of thinking, the directness of Jon's skillful "consciousness

There we saw Jon's compassion for (and acceptance of) these castoff kids and a determination to rescue them, one at a time

raising" and the seriousness with which all in the group participated.

As we learned about many of the kids' often painful past histories, and saw their newly developed talents and achievements, we realized that without this "home" these boys' lives in the streets would have led nowhere except to deepening poverty, perhaps disease, addictions and probably to crime. Martin, age 15, is taking classes in school to learn to be a baker. "I already know how to make four kinds of bread", he told us with a grin. Alcides, age 16, with 4 years in the project has earned a certificate in carpentry. Now he has steady employment as a carpenter's assistant. He goes to evening classes after his day's work. Other boys told us of their plans to learn mechanics or other skills.

We marveled at the variety of intricate and colorful designs of

pulseras de amistad (friendship bracelets) the *Sí a la Vida* kids were always weaving. They carry strands of yarn around their necks, knotting and weaving skilfully amid the hubbub of assigned chores or waiting in the patio for a meal. The *pulsera* project has become a "pulse point" because along with earning money for each bracelet, the boys are learning to manage their funds while their sense of dignity and self-worth grows. Seeing the importance of the *pulseras*, we realized that we must find new ways to help market them back in

the US.

As we watched Jon handling a constant flow of tasks each day, (both in his house near the Project and in the office at the center) we saw confirmed what we already knew: that Jon's unflappable calm and steadiness have made possible the tone of the project and the quality of positive reinforcement evident in the staff's handling of the youngsters. We also saw that Jon and his staff need help: perhaps another adult or two with a strong background in youth work. Perhaps there is someone out there with Peace Corps experience in Latin America who would be interested in volunteering with *Sí a la Vida* for six months or more.

Bob and I found it hard to leave *Sí a la Vida*. To see it first hand was a most enriching and profound experience.

Rick Steves Gives Benefit Talk

By Susan Sullivan

The Traveler, a Bainbridge Island store for travel books, maps & accessories, hosted Seattle travel guru **Rick Steves** for one of his humorous and informative talks on traveling in Europe and other destinations. The talk was held in February as a benefit for the Association. Tickets sales and proceeds from the sale of his popular book Europe Through the Back Door totaled almost \$2,000 in donations to BOSIA.

BOSIA is deeply grateful to the Traveler and to Rick Steves for their interest in our Association and their generosity. His travel in Nicaragua have given him a special insight and interest in the work we do with our sister island. The funds donated will be used to further cultural, and educational projects.



Rita, age seven, in La Flor. She is holding her only toy, loved and cherished since she got it two years ago, carried by our '96 delegation. Photo Susan Koch

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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

Our next visit South: A Call for Delegates

by David Mitchell

The Association is preparing for its first Family delegation for the last two weeks of November. Delegates (actually adults and families) will stay with Ometepiño families or at the Hacienda Magdalena, home of the Cooperative, from which we buy our organic, shade-grown, fair-traded coffee!

Our main project is to replace the electrical wiring at the Hacienda's two buildings which total about 10,000 square feet. The work should take no more than two or three hours per day for several days. There will also be opportunities to learn about the history and operation of the farm, to harvest coffee and to see some of Ometepe's world-famous petroglyphs (make rubbings, if you like). More experienced hikers may climb Cerro Maderas and see the volcano's crater lake. November is the beginning of the dry season on Ometepe with daytime temperatures in the mid-80's and nighttime in the 70's. Also, it is prime bird-watching time, as most of North America's migratory birds are visiting or flying through on their way even further south.

The estimated cost of the trip is \$1,300 per person. There will be a comprehensive orientation prior to the trip and opportunities to get together with fellow delegates afterwards. To join the e-mail mailing list send an empty message to bosia-nov98-subscribe@bosia.org. or call David Mitchell at (206) 842-6907.

Mark this date on your calendar!

Afternoon of Saturday, September 19
Picnic at Fay Bainbridge State Park
for friends and members of the Sister Island.
Watch for more details.



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