

Ometepe Dances Its Way Into Hep Cats' Hearts

The Hep Cats, a teen swing dance group from Bainbridge, recently experienced the time of their lives as they shared their love of dancing with troupes on our Sister Island. Here are excerpts from several members of the Hep Cats.

Hans Klinger

I loved the opportunity to perform on stage, especially performing in some of their native dances, and having them perform in some of ours.

Guy Caridi, Videographer

It was very interesting to be both personally involved during the trip as chaperone and coach as well as being the videographer, observing the trip and all its intricacies.

Before long, the stage was set for creating lifelong relationships.

Lizzie Diehl

One evening while doing my laundry with my mom, I became nauseous. I threw up, my mom brought a chair to me, lowered me into it, and held me

there, rubbing my temples, squeezing my head, and



Nica and Gringa Cats dancing folklorico! photo by Dale Spoor

pressing me against her chest. In a warning but caring tone, she told me it was because I had been doing so much in a heat I wasn't used to and that I should be more careful. I nodded and cried, not from sadness, but from overwhelming emotions.

Scott Waddington

The one thing that did not sink in (until our third or fourth night) was that we would get to meet the other dancers of Ometepe! Since then, I've had nothing but great memories of Nicaragua.

Abra Klinger

I remember the last day in Nicaragua when the Ometepe dancers were getting on the bus to go home. All of us were standing outside the bus, red-eyed, giving each other big long hugs, and not wanting anybody to leave. When the bus started pulling out, hands reached out of the windows, and we stood there only hoping to see them again. Then the bus turned, and it was all gone.

Nicaragua -- in a Million Words or Less

By Alexis Bonoff

What did I do for three months on Ometepe? What didn't I do?

I climbed a mountain; walked through a coffee *cafetal*; fell off a white pick-up truck; ate mangoes—green and *maduros*; caught tadpoles in the river with my three year old brother; learned all the words to “*Hoja en blanco*”; helped my sisters sort three bags of beans; I rowed a small colorful boat to the *isletas* near Tagüizapa; I went to a movie in a Managua mall with twenty former street boys (the look on the security guard's face was priceless!); I caught a *mojara* (fish) on my first try; I danced in both *pisos* in Altagracia; I climbed up to the waterfall in San Ramon; I got lost at Charco Verde; I rode

the Santa Ana bus back and forth from Balgüe more times than I can remember; I was asked if I was the mother (!) of an eleven-year old *Sí a la Vida* boy at a dusty baseball game; I watched “*Corazon Valiente*” (Braveheart) on a slow Sunday; I burned my finger failing to properly cook a tortilla; I played Casino Robado in the kitchen at midnight; I almost drowned off La

Punta Jesus y Maria; I talked with tourists from all over the world at the Hacienda Magdalena; I drank *guarro* and rode my bike on a sandy road in the dark; I was proposed to various times; I ate *jocotes*, and *zapotes* and *mandarinas* and oranges until I was sick; I floated in the clear waters of la prensa; I got sunburned; I was made fun of, I laughed, I became ill, and I fell in love with Tagüizapa, with *chavalos* and *chavalas* of all ages, with la Santa Ana, with sandy roads, with *platano* trees, with black sand beaches, with



My Nicaraguan mom, Marcelina, and brother, Byron
photo by Alexis Bonoff

Altagracia, with Ometepe.

Thank you so much BOSIA for helping me have the best winter quarter ever!

Muchas gracias a BOSIA, a Siri (la diosa), a Nandi, a Jeremy, a Maria Estela y su familia fantastica, a mi mama Marcelina y su familia hermosa, y Bernabe y todos de la Hacienda Magdalena, y una gracias especial a Jonathan y todo los chavalos al proyecto Sí a la Vida! Le amo todo y le falto mucho!

Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association

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Founded in 1986 by

Kim and Ela Esterberg and friends
Non-profit organization

Seeking Partners for Projects

by Sarah Hall

In our first years, the primary focus of our project efforts was funding and supervising the construction of potable water systems. Although we still invest in the water system maintenance, our relationships on the island are expanding, as are the mix of projects.

Examples of “brick and mortar” projects include the funding of a new high school in Mérida, paint for several existing buildings and a wall for the schoolyard in Sintiope. This year’s list also includes funding a literacy project, a community garden, folkloric dance costumes, classes for midwives, and coordinating the donation of musical instruments.

As our office in Altigracia has increased BOSIA’s visibility on Ometepe, and therefore the number and type of project requests we receive,

we have had to develop a response system. We decided to accept all proposals, determine which projects fall outside of the direct mission of BOSIA, and work hard to find appropriate community partners. An example is the re-roofing of the Catholic Church in Balgüe, funded this year by Seabold Methodist Church.

BOSIA is currently seeking partners for a school fence project for the town of San Marcos and paint for the *Centro de Salud* in Altigracia. It is exciting to see the twists and turns our projects continue to take as our relationship with Ometepinos develops and deepens. This variety --water, health, education, cultural exchanges, and partnering with other organizations--increases the richness of our collective experience.

Kids Can Make a Difference!

by Alice Mendoza

Kim Esterberg and Emily Mansfield visited our third grade classroom at Wilkes Elementary on the morning of Oct. 17 with their presentation/slide show about our sister island, Ometepe.

Watch for third graders selling calendars at local stores, fairs and markets over the next few weeks. Please support these kids’ efforts to make a difference in the world.

Parents and students are very excited and are anxious to hear about possible projects we can fund and complete in partnership with our friends in Nicaragua.

I am very excited this year because finally the year has arrived where my first calendar class students will be applying for delegate positions as 10th graders for the annual high school student trip!

Have Some Time and Lots of Enthusiasm? BOSIA Needs You!

Coffee: Baggers work Thursday afternoons, others staff booths at events and coffee tastings; committee oversees purchase, transport, distribution, roasting, sale of Cafe Oro.

Projects: Evaluates project proposals, finds partners, provides follow-up.

Medical: Sets priorities for and evaluates health care issues/projects, collects supplies & meds.

Library: Coordinates library construction projects and acquisition of materials.

Newsletter: Volunteers needed for desktop publishing, production and mailings. 3-4 times a year.

Scholarships: Coordinates B.I. donors to provide annual university stipends.

Water: Consults about construction and maintenance of water systems.

Office: Responsible for issues related to our office on Ometepe.

Technology: Coordinates development of e-mail network.

Delegations: Provides orientations. Coordinates application process.

Membership: Sends out renewal notices and solicits new members

Meet some of your neighbors who are already active with the Sister Islands and get involved!

Del Mundo de la Calle al Mundo del Respeto

From the World of the Streets to a World of Respect

By Adri van Bianchi

Sitting under the papaya and plantain trees, I cried. Not quietly either. No, I let myself cry loudly and wallowed in everything that reminded me of home. At that moment, I couldn't think of anything about home that I didn't miss. Volunteering at *Sí a La Vida*, ("Yes to Life", a project to rescue homeless kids from the streets) has been the hardest work I have ever done, and some days I don't think I will be able to make it for a year. I am so far away from my family and my friends to whom I am a needed and intricate part.

Here, I sometimes feel ostracized because of my lack of language skills and because I am new and going through a difficult screening process with the *chavalos* (boys) which requires that I slowly earn their respect.

Sometimes I enter the *proyecto* and am smothered with hugs and yelling kids. Other times I am utterly ignored. I am always being tested to see what they can get away with, how they can trick me or how they can make me believe their lies. And unfortunately, they usually get away with it.

So this particular day, I

proposed to the *chavalos* that we go plant the seeds where the

new center is being built.

All week we saved the seeds to plant from the fruit of the watermelon, *nancite*, *anona* and oranges we ate at our meals. The *chavalos* had been interested in the project all week, but when the time came to actually do the work, no one was interested.

And so, by myself I

made the walk to the plantain grove and by myself, crying the whole time, planted the seeds and thought of home.

Starting at six every night, I am on duty at the Project *casa*. As I entered the project, Alexandro, one of the *chavalos* ran towards me and with his mischievous look that always puts me on red alert, told me to close my eyes and hold out my

hand. Now I have had bugs put down my shirt, centipedes



Homesick Adri gets a visit from home -- her sister, Carmen, a HepCat dancer!

dropped in my hand and paint smeared in my hair, so I first made him promise not to put anything wet or dirty in my hand. "Yes, yes, I promise," he replied, and I warily put out my hand. And around my wrist he tied a *pulsera*...the first *pulsera* that I have received here. From the same kid who last night was infuriated with me and refused

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Del Mundo de la Calle

continued from page 4

to speak to me because he didn't have permission to leave the house. And for the hundredth time since I came here, my heart melted and I felt the tears right there behind my eyes.

Monday nights are the weekly group therapy session with psychologist Karla Varela.* Everyone takes part: the *chavalos*, Jonathan Roise, and all the other educators.

This week, the exercise was to talk about an object that has sentimental value to you. The session started off as a disaster. The *chavalos* all talked at once. "This pen has sentimental value because it's mine!" "My shoes are important!" "I don't have anything important"

I looked down at the *pulsera* on my wrist and raised my hand to speak. But the tears came first and everyone was shocked into silence. I told the truth to the group. My day had been horrible, I missed home and I felt like I had no friends here. I told them I hated it when we were mad at each other, but this gift of the *pulsera*, made me realize, through it all, we can still love each other.

Stunned silence as everyone stared at the emotional *Gringa*. The silence was broken by another *chavalito* who spoke up. "Adriana, you have a friend in all of us." And he gave me hug.

Silently everyone gave me a hug. The mood was set, and another *chavalito* spoke up. He

had no object of value; instead, he talked about his first days in the *Casa Almanacer* (Sunrise House) in Managua. How he had been so welcomed and how happy all the educators had been when he told them he was there to stay. The *Casa* had changed his life and for that he was thankful. He too was in tears by the end of his turn.

More *chavalos* spoke; they talked about how the *casa* and how thankful they were for the chance they had been given. And for that hour that we talked and cried, I felt like we were all a family. We were all working together, teaching and learning from each other a new way of living.

At the end of the session, we closed our eyes and Karla passed a candle to everyone and we held the candle and thought of anything wonderful. *Chavalos* and educators alike were in tears and when we stood up and hugged each other, the hugs were full of emotion and love.

So once again, when I believe I have reached the end of my rope, something so wonderful happens and once again I am ready to face another day here in the *Casa Almanacer* in Ometepe, Nicaragua.

***Editors' note:** *Karla was supported at a University in Managua through one of the first BOSIA scholarships. She has returned to Ometepe and now has a counseling practice!*

Welcome New Board Members

New Board Members voted into office at the Annual meeting were: Carl Lindbloom, Christine Llobregat, and Dallas Young Schaffer. New trustee: David Mitchell.

Reflections From Departing Members

KEITH WENTWORTH: I have been involved as a volunteer on more than a dozen boards / non-profits since 1974 and I consider my experience on the BOSIA Board to be THE BEST. Both the mission and the people it attracts are unique and extraordinary in a wonderfully "non-flashy," get-things-done-and-have-fun manner.

YANIRA CUELLAR: "BOSIA Board has been one of my most rewarding experiences. One serious thing I need to say is to be aware and beware of the tendency to feel "better than" due to our material wealth. Remember that we strive for an equal partnership, and Ometepinos have much to teach us. If the process is working (or not) for us, is it working (or not) for them?"

I don't think it is enough to bring our "gifts" to them, and assume that makes a relationship. I also don't think it is appropriate to share our ideas about their future without asking them where they want to go."

Another Great Student Trip -- Our 10th!

by Susan Koch

For the tenth time, Bainbridge High students voyaged to Ometepe on our now traditional (and very popular) student delegation. Eighteen students and six chaperones went to three different towns: Las Pilas, La Concha, and Mérida.

Thanks to our invaluable office staff, Dora Gutierrez and Siri Kushner, who arranged for transportation to our towns and host families for all of us.

Our *familias* met us with nearly the whole town and great welcoming ceremonies. In La Concha we cleared, walled and prepared an area next to the elementary school for a park which was named "*Parque de Las Islas Hermanas Bainbridge-Ometepe*." In Las Pilas, we painted the school, inside and out — sometimes with TOOTHBRUSHES! In Merida, we worked on classrooms.

In Moyogalpa, the port city on Ometepe, saying goodbye to our families was a long, tearful and very emotional experience. Then it was home to Bainbridge and the biggest culture shock of all! We came back with so many stories, so many heartfelt experiences and new

relationships, so much enriching growth and, often a profoundly life-changing



A hike up Volcan Concepcion, the active volcano on Ometepe

experience for many of our Bainbridge youth.

Excerpts From My Journal

By Devon Sampson, student delegate

27 de Marzo, 2000 (First morning)

I am sitting on a cot in the house of my *familia*. The floor is packed dirt, the walls rough-cut boards and plastic tarp. I hear a horse, a dog, a pig (I think) and voices. I don't know when I should get up.

Last night, we rode a bus through stunning countryside to San Jorge, where we caught a ferry to Moyogalpa. We arrived in Mérida just as it was getting dark. I met my *madre y padre* y a cousin named Novia. I was surrounded by a group of

staring, giggling kids. I washed my face and brushed my teeth while everyone watched. A kid just peeked his head over the tarp and is watching me right now!

2 de Abril, 2000

I am back with my host family after a night at the coffee co-op near Balgue....we took a bus to Santo Domingo to the beautiful *playa* with hotels. On the way there my dad jumped off the bus, bought two *sandías* (watermelons), and jumped back on...We played on the beach with our families, then got on

a truck to Balgue. We walked up to the co-op. It is a huge building sitting partway up the mountain. It has Sandanista murals all over the walls and is full of various hippies and hikers from all over the world...

9 de Abril, morning

Getting off the plane in Seattle. We were scared to be back at home, but once there, everything sort of felt normal, but unimpressive and ridiculous. On the ferry, we were parked next to a guy in a huge SUV. He was the only one in the car and was on a cell phone. With the cost of the car he could have funded more than 30 houses on Ometepe or many, many classrooms.

The Thread of Connections Between Islands Is Growing!

Thanks to the many individuals and organizations that helped our Sister Islands relationships thrive. If we've forgotten to mention someone below, please forgive us. Let us know, so we can thank them!

Adobe Systems Incorporated
 Alice Mendoza's third grade class at Wilkes Elementary School
 Anne Stern, CPA
 Bainbridge High School Spanish Club
 Bainbridge Inter-parish Council
 Bainbridge Photo Lab
 Bainbridge School District
 Bainbridge Senior Center
 Bethany Lutheran Church (for sponsoring Sintiopé school fence project and part of Sacramento school classroom)
 BI Cycle for fixing our long-term volunteers' bikes
 Central Market
 Custom Printing, Doug Brobin
 David Dessinger and the staff of Pegasus Coffee

Dwight Davis (for sponsoring Balgüe Garden Project)
 Eagle Harbor Congregational Church
 The Grainger family (for sponsoring one year of Balgüe Literacy Project)
 Harbor Gallery - now Roby King Gallery
 Hazel Van Evra, Pegasus Coffee Shop
 Hyla Middle School
 Ometepe Gulf Islands Friendship Association
 Paper Products
 The Patmonts (for sponsoring part of Sacramento school classroom)
 Our coffee volunteers, who bagged and shipped ~7500 pounds of coffee in 1999
 Puget Consumers' Coop
 Chris and Allen Matsumoto for

brochure design for BOSIA
 Rena Koshyand James Templeton
 St. Cecilia's Church
 St. Vincent de Paul Society
 Seabold Methodist Church (for sponsoring El Madroñal school roof)
 Seattle Audubon Society
 The Speakeasy Network
 Supporters of Bainbridge Ometepe Scholars
 Tom Monk, MD
 Town and Country Thriftway
 The Traveler (see next page)

And all the Citizens of Bainbridge Island who gave through the Bainbridge Foundation's "One Call for All" Campaign

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 () _____
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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

Celebrate the Holidays with Great Gifts that Do Good!

World-Famous Café Oro De Ometepe at local grocery stores and www.bosia.org

Certified organic, Shade grown/bird friendly & Fair-traded 1lb... \$8.50 8oz... \$5

Sister Island T-Shirts.....\$14 to \$18;

Sister Island mugs filled with coffee beans.....\$8

Sister Island Caps.....\$14

Sister Island Sweat Shirt.....crew....\$20.....hooded....\$25

Friendship bracelets & Bookmarks..... by street kids from *Si a la Vida* Project

Sister Islands Video.....\$8 (English *and* Spanish Versions)

To order, call Treasurer Lee Robinson, 206.842.0774

SCHOLARSHIP to university for an Ometepe student..... \$60/month

SISTER ISLAND MEMBERSHIP\$10.....\$35.....\$100 (see form on page 7)

DONATIONS: for pure water, public library, classrooms, painting a health clinic, school fences, literacy classes...

Businesses That Are Wonderful Friends of the Sister Island

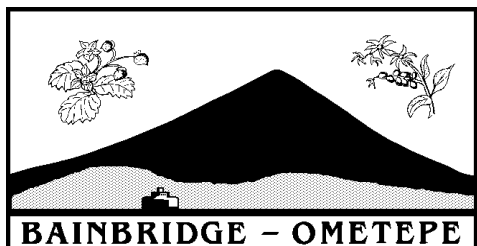
Custom Sport (8926 Miller Rd) owner and designer Chris Llewellyn is using friendship bracelets on winter hats.

The Traveler (287 Winslow Way) a wonderful holiday shopping place, is contributing 5% of their gross sales for the *entire* month of December.

Bainbridge Thriftway will be selling the 2001 Calendar from Alice Mendoza's third graders without any mark-up!

Muchas gracias!

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



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