

We tend the relationships....

Spring 2002

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

COFFEE DELEGATIONS IN THE NEW MILLENIUM

by Ed Kushner

In early December 2000, BOSIA's first "coffee delegation" spent ten days on Isla de Ometepe. While the meager coffee crop resulted in limited picking success, the delegation's visit was still a resounding success. In fact, the 16 delegates' reactions to their experiences, the hospitality of their Ometepe hosts and hostesses and the schedule of activities were so enthusiastic that a second delegation of twelve members was mustered for December 2001. As an alumnus of both delegations, I have fond memories of both trips.

Foremost among the similarities, I reckon the following: the cadre of well-informed, Spanish-speaking and Ometepe-experienced leaders, to whom I ascribe a major share of the success enjoyed by both delegations. Next, both groups' good-natured, easygoing participants, who adjusted to unanticipated developments with grace and aplomb. The delegates unani-



The Dec 2001 coffee delegates relaxing under palm trees photo by Kim Esterberg

mously acclaimed their homestays with generous, hospitable families in Altagracia. Both delegations also shared similar opportunities to learn about the history of the Cooperative Carlos Díaz Cajina (which owns the Hacienda Magdalena and grows the world-famous Café Oro de Ometepe!), to attend school graduation ceremonies, circumnavigate both volcanoes on Ometepe in the back of an open pickup truck driven by Alcides Flores, the mayor of one of the two municipalities on the island and to improve their "birding" skills during early-morning hikes led by two delegate naturalists. Among the differences, rooming arrangements at the Hacienda Magdalena wins the prize, hands down! Generally, rooming in the Coop's big house is "modest", both in terms of privacy as well as amenities. Because of an overflow of other guests, the 2001 coffee delegation experienced some astounding "creative" rooming arrangements. In short, all the single delegates (five women and three men) ended up sharing one large upstairs room! Without a

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Communities Join to Counter Violent Injustice in Mérida

by Nancy Quitslund

Lee Robinson and I arrived on Ometepe three days after the violent removal of 11 *campesino* families from their homes in the Peru district of Mérida. The action was the culmination of a land dispute involving community members and Frank Mena, an entrepreneur from Esteli in northern Nicaragua. Efrain, director of the elementary school in Mérida, offered me a motorcycle ride from Balgüe to see the destroyed homes and my host family from 2000. On Feb. 23, 2002, a large contingent of police from Rivas (off-island) and Altagracia came to Mérida with a judge, and hired "workers" to forcibly remove residents from their land. Police and "workers" severed support beams of the

houses with chain saws and axes. Then they used vehicles to pull the houses down, leaving few salvageable items in the rubble.

The larger community tried without success to prevent destruction of the homes. My host brother, Carlos Zambrana, was one of four community members with wounds severe enough to require hospitalization. Several others, including a German tourist who intervened, suffered minor wounds. Residents, including a woman recovering from a C-section 40 days earlier, and neighbors were beaten while trying to stop the police.

People asked me to tell their story up here. Although there are different opinions about how the land dispute came to be, there is consensus on the plight of the families. In the early 1990's, the Nicaraguan government under President Violeta Chomorro gave land, even though some of it was already inhabited, to demobilized members of the Resistance, or Contras. Some of those ceded land by "la Violeta" sold "their" land to someone who sold it later to Mena. About four years ago Mena cut down 40 *manzanas* (69 acres) of plantains on "his" land. The *campesinos* considered these to be their plantains, the source of their income. Mena has worked through the courts, and some people say he offered the resi-

dents money to move. One displaced family told me that they were offered 3,000 *córdobas*, a little more than \$200 to leave their home and land. I was also told that Mena would like to build a tourist resort on the disputed land. The six families I talked with have long roots in their land. They and their children were born there. One by one they told me their names, showed me where they had lived, showed me their bruises and told me about their children. The patriarch of my host family, Felix Ramon Morales, was a beekeeper when the land belonged to former dictator Somoza. Not long before last month's destruction, Salvador Guillen of Altagracia wrote a letter to Mayor Alcides Flores, testifying that Don Felix had lived in the same house for decades. But the mayor was not permitted to participate in the residency decision. In fact, he was held at gunpoint when he tried to intervene on behalf of the residents the day the police came. According to a National Act aimed at protecting the "*patrimony*" and environment, any land within 800 meters of the shore of the lake belongs to the municipality, with provision that people who lived there prior to the National Act can stay there. Apparently, the municipality actually controls the land. The displaced families have now

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Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association

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Founded in 1986 by

Kim and Ela Esterberg and friends
Non-profit organization

The 2002 Island Treasure Awards

The Bainbridge Island Arts and Humanities Council (BIAHC) created the annual Island Treasure Awards, based on the model of the MacArthur Foundation Genius Fellowship Award, to recognize outstanding contributions to the arts and humanities by individuals within our community. In a completely confidential nomination and jury process that draws from the entire community, each year two individuals are chosen who have made the greatest contribution within their respective fields. Each Island Treasure Award winner receives an unrestricted cash prize as well a sculptural candleholder award.



*Left to right: Kim & Ela Esterberg, Island Treasure Award chairperson Cynthia Sears and Dr. Frank Kitamoto
photo by Joel Sackett*

At an inspiring and memorable event at the Puget Sound Environmental Learning Center (PSEL) on January 28, 2002, awards were presented to **Dr. Frank Kitamoto** and to **Kim and Ela Esterberg** for their work in the humanities. Following are excerpts from the award winners' acceptance speeches:

Frank Kitamoto: My hope is that some day we will go beyond being tolerant of one another. How we treat each other will go beyond complying with laws, rules and regulations. We will see differences as positive, strengthening, desirable and to be sought after. We will embrace and support one another because we care regardless of color of skin, ethnicity, sexual preference, nationality or religious preference. We will see and treat people not as a collective, but a collection, of precious individuals.

Kim Esterberg: The sister island relationship between Bainbridge and Ometepe has touched many lives, even changed some lives, both on Ometepe and Bainbridge. It has represented a very special model of world peace, in which one community reaches out to another with a different culture, language and daily life and embraces that other community as important and dignified members of our common human family...This special association has provided a vehicle for many, especially young people, to see that there are ways each of us can bring social justice to the world in which we live.

Ela Esterberg: Kim and I stand here representing a remarkable number of talented and dedicated volunteers on both islands. At a time when there is so much fear and mistrust and hatred in this world, more than ever, we are all hungry for examples of goodwill, compassion and mutual respect —ones that supercede political, religious, economic, language and cultural differences. Thank you to the BIAHC for this very special award. Thank you also to Paul and Debbi Brainerd and the PSEL for making this a wonderful evening for us all.

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MAGIC HAPPENS ---again!

by Aleta McClelland

It began with a toy. My eight-year-old son marched into the kitchen and launched confidently into yet another campaign for yet another toy. My grip tightened around the Ometepe newsletter I had just read... why was too much never enough? Quietly I told my son the newsletter story of a young Ometepino boy who had attended a Bainbridge/Ometepe celebration held on Ometepe. Clearly, the little boy was of modest means in his tattered shorts so when the piñata was broken and he loaded his arms overly full of candy, no one begrudged him the excess. The boy walked to the edge of the crowd of people, handed all of his candy to his two skinny sisters in threadbare dresses and walked away.

Daniel, my son, looked at me with huge eyes, ran into his room and sobbed for half an hour.

Emerging visibly shaken, he whispered to me, "Mommy, Mommy that little boy didn't care at all about himself...not at all about himself. We have to do something for Ometepe. You and Dad have to send them money --- lots of it."

"Uhhmm let's see, what can YOU do for them?"

I thought out loud. With the same determination he had given to arguments for the now forgotten toy, Daniel brainstormed about how to raise money for "the little boy on Ometepe." Some days later it was decided we would have a yard sale. Eight months later on what turned out to be one of the only rainy days of the summer, half the neighborhood kids launched the first Venice Beach/Ometepe yard sale complete with lemonade and many donations. We were fully drenched twice, someone knocked over the lemonade, we didn't make as much money as I expected, I was cranky... the kids were ecstatic. My three-year-old son Kian donated more than half his worldly goods quietly walking back inside with some of his favorites when he realized people were not just pretending to buy them. Daniel was incredibly generous with Kian's toys, too. Our preteen

friends Kate and Emily became sharp business women inspiring customers with some well-placed humanitarian proclamations. The slogan, "It's for the children of Ometepe!" rang out in the soggy air. Kian renamed our dining room "The Ometepe Room." The name has stuck.

I asked Kim Esterberg how best to donate the proceeds of the yard sale. He suggested school supplies and invited Daniel to present them to a delegate from Ometepe at BOSIA's 15th anniversary celebration. Daniel was highly enthusiastic. I was hugely grateful that my son had experienced deep compassion that he could translate into action and watch it come to fruition. That was plenty. That was enough. I had no idea there was so much more to come.

What first struck me about our Ometepino sisters and brothers was their inner stillness. The 15-year celebration party was charged with tempered chaos. Only when Freddie and Karla entered to dance did their quiet assurance pull all of us into the same room. It was as if they had waved an energetic wand to harness all that exuberance into a combined focus. Was Karla's swirling skirt gathering up all our frenetic energy and initiating the unseen seeds of what emerges as community? Each of the delegates seemed to have within them the ability to stand quietly in their own skin without being overly swayed by externals. I was mesmerized observing this unshakable gift, this that no money could buy or take away, this that adversity could mold but not destroy. Such clear cultural differences were evident. I watched our "sisters and brothers" in conversation, almost sternly resisting interruption. That same clarity of focus was exhibited over and over again. We from industrialized nations so frequently seem to believe our worth is in our acquisitions and our activity, the busier the better. I was grateful for the chance to catch a glimpse of what face-to-face, person-to-person cultural priority looks like. The afternoon before the 15-year celebration

continued next page

party Daniel told me that he didn't want people to make a big fuss over him. At the party, after Daniel had presented the school supplies to an exquisite Ometepino sister who was hugging him into the air proclaiming him "little angel," I was thinking, "thank you for giving him the opportunity". This coming summer will be the second annual Venice Beach/Ometepe yard sale. If you'd like to help/play we'd love it. Please call Aleta McClelland 842-6685.

Kids CAN make a difference



*Wilkes 3rd graders proudly present the results of their fund-raising (calendar) project
photo by Sue Caps*

Alice Mendoza and her Third Graders at Wilkes Elementary report yet another successful year for their calendar project—this being their ninth! As they said in their 2002 calendar, which many of you so generously supported:

“This is a special year because it is the Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association’s 15th anniversary! We loved hosting several guests from Ometepe who came to our classroom. Our Ometepe friends may not have much money, but they have a lot of love in their hearts. When we fund projects, we work as a team. We provide the money (from calendar sales) and they provide the labor to complete the projects.”

Calendar sales this year netted more than \$9,500! The children voted to donate \$6,500 to BOSIA. This money will be used to build a new elementary classroom in Tilgüe and a basketball court for the ex-street kids in the Sí a la Vida project.

Because of the tragedy of September 11th, the students voted to donate the remainder to Save the Children for helping Afghani children. They learned that \$3,000 could feed 4,350 people for a whole month!

As if all this wasn't enough, Wilkes Elementary is participating in the Dr. Seuss Read Across America Read a Thon, March 1-11. This is sponsored by the Wilkes Student Council and all money raised will go toward basic Library packages (including a dictionary, and an atlas) for Ometepe.

¡ Muchisimas gracias, niños!

And Now...A word from our Office on Ometepe

Before leaving on my trip, I expected I would go through a period of adjustment to the new food, culture, language and being without my family. After a month here, the adjustment still has not started because there is nothing to adjust to! Of course things are different, but only on the surface. The faces, towns, land and climate (thank God!) are all different, but it *feels* the same. For me, it's almost as if Bainbridge was reincarnated as Ometepe - same soul, new body. They have the same heart. I am happy that these two communities have so much love and that they share it with each other. Everyone on Ometepe has made me feel at home here. Katy Childers, new volunteer in the Islas Hermanas office in Altagracia

I am beginning my fourth year of work with this organization. I feel very happy every day because I know the feelings of the people from Bainbridge better. Also, I know the needs and the problems of the people from Ometepe better, too. Katy and I have been preparing the homestays for the 28 Bainbridge students and 7 chaperones coming soon. They will stay in four communities, who are very happy and very exciting about this visit. They asked us about the kids: What do they eat? What do they like? Are they vegetarians? Do they speak Spanish or only English? I feel very proud that the people in Ometepe Island like and receive the kids from Bainbridge Island as if they are their children. I know that Katy has had more experiences in a month as if this month was a year. WELCOME STUDENTS FROM BAINBRIDGE TO OUR OMETEPE ISLAND !!!!! MY ISLAND IS YOUR ISLAND AND YOUR ISLAND IS MY ISLAND!!!! Dora Bertilda Gutierrez Traña, BOSIA office manager on Ometepe Island, Nicaragua



Coffee Delegation -cont'd from pg 1

Painting by Melania Avelan Aly

doubt, following a few anxious moments devoted to thoughts like “They’ve GOT to be kidding!”, the “dorm” was a spectacular success as, with good humor, the eight of us learned to adjust to each other’s presence, to avert our eyes while our next-cot neighbor changed clothes as if there wasn’t a single other person for miles around, snickered at each other’s idiosyncracies such as snoring patterns, housekeeping skills and laundry hanging styles. I’ll stop short of suggesting that such arrangements be “standard issue” for future coffee delegations, but none of us will ever forget the wonderful week we shared in that upstairs “dorm”!

Oh, yes, I almost forgot to tell you that I’ve already signed up for the 2002 Coffee Delegation and I’m recruiting others for an experience that will rank with those you will never forget!

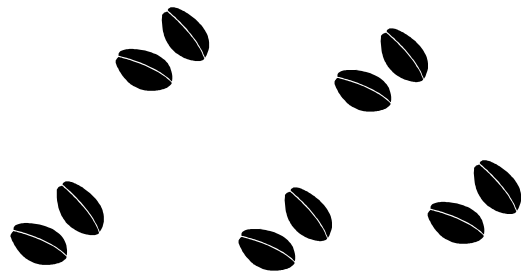


"Injustice" *-cont'd from pg 2*

built a barrio of plastic tarps and tin on the side of the main road at the entrance to their land. Don Felix Ramon stays in a thatched shelter near his destroyed home guarding his roof tiles.

The families would like Mena and the government to pay for reconstruction of their homes, but don't believe that this will happen. Members of the Nicaraguan Human Rights Commission visited them on Feb. 27, and deputies of the National Assembly investigated on March 3. Greeting them was a large solidarity group of people from all over Ometepe. The judge and police commissioner from Rivas have been suspended pending an investigation. Everyone I talked to — Liberal, Sandinista, Evangelist, and Catholic— was appalled by the injustice. High school students from Altagracia and the Catholic church delivered a truck full of food staples, clothing and household items to the community on February 26. Other communities from Ometepe and the main-

land are also helping. Ometepino masons and businesses have offered labor and some materials for reconstruction. The community of Mérida has set up a place to collect and distribute donations. Dora and Katy (BOSIA office staff) bought and delivered food and emergency supplies from the Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association to help with the effort. We will certainly join a coalition to help rebuild homes as soon as residency rights are legally clarified. We will keep you informed and ask for your help when we are able to act. Meanwhile, please keep our friends in Mérida in your thoughts.



Join Us!

Thanks for your support. We use membership income wisely --- primarily to publish this newsletter.

We'll put the membership signup back next issue. Right now we need the space for this exciting news:

For the 4th year in a row, owners Susan Taylor and Barbara Tolliver of The Traveler of Bainbridge Island donated a portion of their December profits to the Sister Islands Association. This year's total was \$1,315.00 and will be used to buy Basic Library Packets for Ometepe libraries.

Plymouth Congregational Church in Seattle is pouring Café Oro de Ometepe for their Sunday social hour. Thanks to Don and Lynnea Mayer for arranging this.

Our friends at Pegasus Coffee have launched **Pegasus Sustainable Decaf**, a blend of fair-traded, shade-grown, organic decaffeinated coffees. The Association will feature Sustainable Decaf at the BOSIA Coffee Shop on the Web.

The Puget Sound Environmental Learning Center on Bainbridge Island has chosen Café Oro de Ometepe and Pegasus Sustainable Decaf for their dining room. The ELC will pour coffee for the staff and for teachers and chaperones accompanying the fourth- and fifth-graders who will make up the bulk of the ELC's visitors. ELC staffer and BOSIA volunteer Christine Llobregat was instrumental in our being considered.

DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR COFFEE MONEY GOES ?

Here is what it costs Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association to sell one pound of shade-grown, certified organic, fair-traded AND delicious Café Oro de Ometepe, and what we do with our profits:

\$1.26 - Max Havelaar Fair Trade base price (check out www.transfairusa.org for more info on Fair Trade pricing).

\$0.15- Organic Certification (www.ocia.org).

\$0.15 - Shade grown (our own premium we add because we think it's important).

\$0.05 - Social premium (grown by a Cooperative).

\$1.61 - World Fair Trade Arabica Floor price (what we pay the farmers on Ometepe, Nicaragua).

\$0.29 - our cost to ship the coffee from Nicaragua to Bainbridge Island (FY2001)

\$0.38 - approximately 20% of green coffee is lost in the roasting process

\$0.50 - our cost to have Pegasus Coffee, Bainbridge Island, expertly and carefully roast our coffee

\$0.30 - our cost for the gold foil bag

\$0.10 - our cost for the two labels on the bag

\$0.00 - our cost to label, bag and distribute to local markets (all volunteers!)

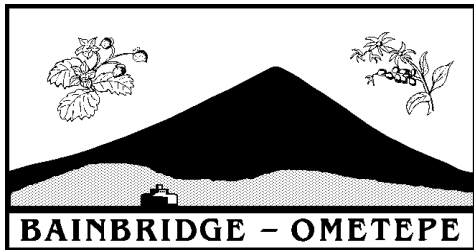
\$3.18 - our cost to "produce" one pound of Café Oro for you, the consumer.

Depending on the store, we make **between \$3.92 and \$4.62** profit on each pound of coffee. What do we do with that profit? Here's a list of projects partly (p) or completely (c) funded by coffee profits in 2001:

Merida High School (c) \$14,000; Midwife workshops (c) \$1,150; Balgüe Literacy project (p) \$831; Las Cuchillas classroom (p) \$3,254; Las Cuchillas water projects (c) \$225; Books for libraries (p) \$1,452; Sí a la Vida Project (p) \$3,235; San Jose del Sur school roof (c) \$500; San Marcos school fence (p) \$3,774; Medical supplies (c) \$789; Ometepe Scholarship Project (p) \$12,885.

So, now you know how far your purchase of one pound of Café Oro de Ometepe goes! Fair trade, indeed!

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