

*"How Was Ometepe?"*

## Student Shares Memories of Spring Trip

by Colin Hill

Many people have asked me, "How was Ometepe?" It's not something that I can explain in the split-second span of a normal conversation. My experience not only changed me as a person, it also led to realizations and a perspective upon our culture which I otherwise would not have had.

I loved going to Ometepe, I would love to go back. I loved the beautiful green country, the sun, the easy-going life style and, of course, getting away from my house and school for two weeks. What I miss the most about Nicaragua are the people. When I think of what I got out of the trip, I don't think of experiences, I think of the



*Beginning a lifetime of friendship.*

*Photo by Mikal Kelly*

great individuals I met.

I miss the casual friendliness they had, that our culture lacks; the way strangers would show up just for conversation to pass the time. People there had relatively little (materially), and yet they had a kindness and generosity not offered to strangers in our culture.

Before I left for Ometepe I was afraid. Afraid I wouldn't be accepted, and worried I

wouldn't be able to interact with these people. Instead, I found that they went out of their way to make sure that I was happy and that I talked to people. I was a stranger, a stranger of a different race, a stranger whose country had hurt their people. Yet, I was welcomed into the family. In

the short time we spent on Ometepe, I formed a bond with a land and people thousands of miles away. All of us delegates and everyone in my village cried when we had to leave. I will never forget the tears running down the cheeks of one of the kids from La Concha as our bus pulled away. I have never seen people with such warmth as these. I can't imagine never seeing them again.

# Housing Bargain of the Millenium!

by Kim Esterberg (appraiser)

If you have recently purchased a home or are thinking of doing so, consider that it is possible to buy two homes for the price of one-- well, almost! Recently, when my wife Ela and I were on Ometepe, we spent time with an old friend, Alcides Flores, who coordinates Projekt Ometepe-Alemania. This is a joint effort between a group from Germany, (led by Monika and Micheal Hohn) and some equally dedicated individuals from Ometepe. Their goals include providing medical and dental care for the most remote villages surrounding the Cerro Maderas. Their medical team consists of : Doctora Fabiola Gonzales, Dentista Melida Flores, Sonia Kofler, gynecological nurse and Miriam Ramirez, social worker/educa-

tor. This fabulous team of four Nicaraguan women travel two days a week to needy commu-

grass roofs, had been wet for two weeks and were quite ill.

It was from these observations



Photo by Kim Esterberg

Example of a home built for \$1,000 by Projekt Ometepe-Alemania.

nities in their pickup truck loaded with equipment, such as a home-made, portable dental chair. Ela and I were invited to travel with them one day and they were remarkably efficient. That day Miriam chose family planning methods and proper tooth brushing techniques as her health education topics.

Since this team touches many of the poorest people on the island, their understanding of the impact of Hurricane Mitch was quite different from the official government assessment. According to the government, Ometepe had been largely spared, with no lives or homes lost. What was not so apparent to casual observers was that the poorest, those families living in shacks built with sticks and

that a new project emerged: Projekt Ometepe-Alemania's housing campaign. With the same sensitivity and efficieincy they bring to their medical project, they now offer a simple home to the poorest families they encounter. Moving from one community to another, they build what is essentially a 2-room brick structure. Kitchens and latrines are still outbuildings, but now, at least there is a place to come in out of the weather. The total materials and labor for each house cost \$1,000! All materials (except the zinc roof) and labor are from Ometepe.

The households are typically single women with several

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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

# On the Shores of Lake Nicaragua

by Cindy Beck,  
Profesora de Español,  
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Sandy pebbles feel good between the toes after the long, hot hike to El Salto. Fifteen of us sat on the shores of Lake Nicaragua watching the tropical sun quickly go down. Several energetic folk tried to out-do one another in skipping rocks over the bronze, lapping water. Monkeys howled and birds sang sporadically from nearby trees. We all breathed a collective sigh of contentment; partly because we were grateful for having made the trek to the waterfall in one piece and partly because of all the beauty surrounding us.

Little did we know many months or weeks before that our experience on Ometepe would be like this. One can never be fully prepared for any experience. Ometepe had been full of delights, hardships and adjustments. Experiences create bonds, which cannot come into being in any other way. Taking a deep breath, I felt privileged to have the opportunity to be in that place at that time with those people. People who had just shared tears, laughter, sickness and exhaustion in the short (but

long) three hours of hiking up to the local waterfall. We learned about each other as well as our Nicaraguan ‘family’ in ways we never imagined would be part of our experience.

*Mil gracias, BOSIA,  
for making it possible for us  
to have such a meaningful  
experience. We appreciate all  
the valuable caring for us as well  
as the people of Ometepe, both  
of whom are benefiting greatly.  
May you continue for many  
years to come.*

*Con Cariño, Cindy Beck.*

We reluctantly rose to leave our beautiful spot and head for Merida before it got too dark. Dinners of rice and beans awaited us.

The evening soap opera *La Usurpidora* would be blaring from each TV of the small

houses along the road as we walked. The moon began to light our rocky road as we continued. The younger boys raced back and forth between the groups of walkers. How did they have the energy? What happy smiles they wore! We began to split off to go to our separate homes, planning to meet yet once more that evening for a moonlight swim before bed. We’d see. Now, the cooler breeze off the water was refreshing. Everything seemed right with the world. At least, it seemed right for a few Bainbridge students and one Spanish teacher at that moment in Merida.

## Housing Bargains, continued

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We observed the new owners helping to mix cement, move bricks and generally participating in the construction. We asked neighbors how they felt about this project. Some felt that people only appreciate things they have to work for. Others felt it was excellent, since these families probably would never have the opportunity to have a decent home. All agreed that the families selected were indeed the most needy and we never sensed any resentment.

So, if you are inspired to spend \$1,000 and buy a second

home, (this one for one of the poorest families on our sister island), here is your chance!

One possibility would be for neighborhood groups here on Bainbridge to sponsor the construction of such a home. Remember that this project touches the lives of those in greatest need directly, economically and efficiently.

If you would like a photo display or a talk about this project for your neighborhood, church, real estate office or other group, call Kim Esterberg, 842-8148.

# Projects Seeking Partners Seeking Projects

by Emily Mansfield

*"We are a very poor community, but we possess a big spirit of progress and for that reason we direct ourselves to you, as people with great heart, to help with our need. We ask your help in constructing a classroom since our school is small and we'd like our children to be comfortable."*

-- La Concepcion Comité de Padres de Familia, Ometepe

Requests such as this one have led many Bainbridge Islanders to share in the joy of accomplishing a greatly needed project while learning about life on our sister island from new friends. Some, like the annual high school delegates or the Bethany Lutheran Church Construction Brigade, have participated in projects first hand: working side by side with Ometepinos, feeling the tropical heat, trying out faltering Spanish on words like "hammer," "roof," and "watch out!" Others, like the children in Alice Mendoza's third grade classes or the Bainbridge families who support Ometepino scholarship students, have enjoyed their Nicaraguan connection through photographs and letters and felt the satisfaction of seeing their U.S. dollars

were the focus of our work. Now, the BOSIA board has turned its attention to receiving other proposals directly from communities on Ometepe. Requests for education projects top the list—for both school construction and materials. But communities are also requesting help with such projects as adult literacy workshops, sewing classes, a community garden and health clinic supplies.

Because our primary mission is to promote intercultural friendship, exchange and learning, BOSIA's approach to these project requests is more involved than simply sending money to a community. These projects present an opportunity for people-to-people connections, even if some of those connections are long distance

go a long way toward improving people's lives.

But, you don't have to travel to Ometepe to be a partner in one of the many projects for which BOSIA has received proposals from communities on our sister island.

For the last ten years, the completion of potable water systems for several villages

instead of face-to-face. When we receive a proposal from an Ometepe community, we try to find a partner group up here to raise the money, stay in touch with the Ometepinos, and follow the project to its completion. BOSIA's new office staff on Ometepe is there to help facilitate communication and follow-up. We encourage churches, schools, community service organizations, neighborhood associations, youth groups trade associations or other groups to forge a sister relationship with a town on Ometepe through one of the project proposals we receive.

Currently we have six school project requests in need of partners. The budgets for these proposals range from \$425 for electrical cable to \$2,200 for a teachers' room. New proposals come to us with every returning delegation and with an office on Ometepe, we expect even more.

The classroom in La Concepcion, whose proposal is quoted above, was completed this spring through the joint efforts of Alice Mendoza's third grade fund-raising and the 1999 high school delegation's labor.

But there are many more similar opportunities. **If your group is interested in learning about becoming a Project Partner, please contact Emily Mansfield, 842-4137.**

## Pending Project Requests from Ometepe

LOCATION	PROJECT NEED	COST ESTIMATE
Tilgüe	Pre-school classroom and repair of other classrooms	not available
Las Pilas	Pre-sschool	not available
Sacramento	Electrification and teacher storage room	\$2,166
San Marcos	Fence around school, small storage room and materials	\$800
San Silvestre	Electrical cable for school	\$425
Balgüe	Clinic Supplies Communal garden supplies Adult Literacy teacher compensation and materials Sewing Classes	not available not available

## Sister Islands Opens Ometepe Office

by Ela Esterberg

Brooke Mattock (20) became our first office manager when, in February we opened our office in Alta Gracia. This need has been evident for quite some time. We are thrilled to announce that we now have a little office space complete with the Sister Islands logo painted as a mural on the street face!

Brook had been down to Ometepe twice before –as a student delegate. He made a terrific representative and worked hard to get the office under way. Today, Brook has returned –somewhat earlier than expected due to a medical emergency, but that’s another



*The Association's logo goes on the side of the new office.*

story! (We are happy to report he is recovering speedily).

We felt very strongly that it was necessary to have a Nicaraguan co-manager in our office.

Dora Gutierrez was recently offered the job and has accepted. Many of us remember “Dorita” fondly since she –a High School English teacher on Ometepe- was sponsored by BOSIA and visited Bainbridge for three months two years ago. Her fellow-traveller at the time was Josefa “Chepita” Cajina, also an English language teacher.

The primary goal of the office is to facilitate better and more frequent communication between our two islands, to provide on-the-ground project coordination and to prepare for all delegate visits and cultural exchanges. Watch for updates in future newsletters.

# Hike to A Waterfall

by Meghan Dewey,  
Merida Delegate 1999

The sun was setting in that perfect orange-yellow vibrancy that only happens in post card pictures. We were all sitting on the beach, passing a box of Jelly-Bellies around the group, toes hiding in the sand, Spanish and English floating off our tongues as we laughed and relaxed after a long, sometimes frustrating day.

Just hours before we were hiking up Maderas, to see a beautiful waterfall. We had heard many different stories about how long it would take, from an hour and a half, all the way to three hours. We set out in pretty good spirits. Everyone was ready to take on the challenge with little complaint. But as the day wore on and we didn't seem to be getting anywhere near water, let alone the waterfall, some of us became a bit disgruntled. This was turning into a harder hike than first anticipated.

But we pushed on, and finally reached some water trickling down the trail. A turtle was swimming in a pool of water that we stopped at to cool off, and we took some photos and got a bit happier that we were at least near a source of water! We kept pushing, at times near total frustration. Some of us lagged behind, but we all made it there after a long, hard day.

It was absolutely worth the sweat and heat. The waterfall was gorgeous, a gigantic blast of water tumbling off the face of the volcano, the cool air and the spray of water gently blowing off the falls.

It was a perfect setting to relax, have lunch, talk with our Nicaraguan friends and cool off: the only time on the trip we

could get goosebumps!

As we walked along the road on the way home, we found a pretty little beach and decided to take awhile to just let the day sink in. The sun began melting behind the horizon, and we were left to skip rocks across the lake, grateful to be surrounded by people we had just met and yet loved.

## Ask for Shade-grown Coffee!



**Watch for this Campaign logo where you shop. If you don't see it ask your coffee seller if they offer shade-grown coffee. And of course, you can always buy "made in the shade" Café Oro de Ometepe at our Web site, <http://www.bosia.org>**

## Coffee 101: Shade-grown

by David Mitchell

One of this year's first warm spring evenings kept the crowd down as Lee Robinson and David Mitchell presented Coffee 101 at the Seattle Audubon Society monthly meeting. But the nearly 50 people who attended learned from Lee & David's slide show the process of coffee production from the plant nursery to the cup. Coffee cultivation is a complicated process, and requires great patience and attentiveness. The Audubon birders were especially interested in coffee grown in the

shade because this preserves vital habitat for migratory birds. The loss of habitat as forests are cleared to grow coffee in the sun has been blamed for the recent dramatic decline in bird populations.

Seattle Audubon has sponsored the creation of the Northwest Shade Coffee Campaign, along with a coalition of over 30 importers, brokers and roasters who offer shade-grown coffee. BOSIA is a founding member of the Campaign.

*Editor's Note: First in a series of 3 articles. Look for Coffee 102: Organic and Coffee 103: Fair-traded.*

# Drug Inspections Steam Coffee Committee

By David Mitchell

Since 1991, the Association has sold delicious Café Oro de Ometepe. The coffee comes from Ometepe of course, so getting it here is a bit of a challenge. We started importing the coffee in delegates' suitcases, which had been full of school and medical supplies on the trip down. We brought in 3,200 lbs. of coffee that way.

But we soon began using an exporter, a container, a ship, an import broker and a truck to get the coffee to David Dessinger's Pegasus Coffee warehouse on Bainbridge. It's a complicated process, carried out in two languages via slow and unreliable communications channels. This year we bought 12,150 lbs. of coffee, and imported an

additional 27,200 lbs. with our friends, the Ometepe Gulf Islands Friendship Association and CoDevelopment Canada. This cooperative shipping venture works well since the ocean freight charges are the same whether the container is full or nearly empty.

One annoying aspect of the import process has been the regularity with which the US Customs Contraband Enforcement inspects our coffee. This inspection, supposedly random, is designed to deter people from smuggling illegal drugs in shipments of legal commodities. And, assuming that most cocaine comes from the same countries, coffee shipments are a favorite target for the searches. The importer is

charged a fee for this inspection, which covers the government's cost of hiring contractors to do the actual work. Last year the container came into Vancouver, BC and we were spared the inspection expense, but all five of the other times our coffee was inspected every single time! This year we paid \$585 to be able to claim our coffee is "US Certified Drug-Free".

This year we also paid another premium. Containers for organic products are lined with cardboard and kraft paper to prevent contamination. The inspectors dragged two-thirds of our 150 lb. sacks of coffee out of the container, destroying this organic barrier in the

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**Annual Membership**

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I'd love to volunteer : For events \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

Specific interest \_\_\_\_\_

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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.

