



SISTER ISLANDS

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SOMOS ISLEÑOS

Winter 1998

Hurricane Mitch Update

By Lee Robinson

Many of you have called and asked about conditions on our sister island of Ometepe in the wake of Hurricane Mitch. We want to thank all of you for your heartfelt concern and your wish to do something. All of us on the board of the Sister Islands Association have also been worried, but equally concerned that the actions we take and recommend will provide the maximum benefit for those in need. David Mitchell, a member of our board, has been on Ometepe for the last week and he has been giving us regular e-mail accounts about the conditions there. We are happy to report that our brothers and sisters on Ometepe are, for the most part, quite safe. They have suffered some crop loss and the roads are the worst we have ever seen them, but there have been no mud slides on either volcano and no loss of life or property at this time. We know that the *campesinos* of Balgüe, a village below the coffee cooperative where we get our Café Oro de Ometepe, has mobilized a relief effort on their own. They gathered 2,300 lbs of clothing and food and left the island, heading north to the town of Posoltega near the Las Casitas volcano. So, it is not our brothers and sisters on Ometepe that are in greatest need of help, but our cousins in northern Nicaragua. We have received some funds for Ometepe, which we will use where the need is greatest. We ask that you make a generous financial contribution to the relief and rehabilitation work of one or more of the following agencies, today if possible. These are well-known and respected NGO's (non governmental organizations) already working hard in the region. If you prefer, you can make your check payable to BOSIA and we will send all combined contributions quickly to one of these agencies working with victims of this terrible disaster:

The American Red Cross

International Response Fund
P.O. Box 37243
Washington, DC, 20013

Catholic Relief Services

P.O. Box 17090
Baltimore, MD
21203-7090

World Vision

POBox9716
FederalWay, WA
98063-9716.

We just had a delegation that left for Ometepe on November 15th. We know that many people wanted to send clothing and other supplies. Unfortunately there simply was not enough room, although they did manage to take a large quantity of seeds donated through Bay Hay and Feed by Territorial Seed Company. The delegation will be giving a report to the Community on Monday Dec. 7, 1998 at Eagle Harbor Congregational Church at 7:30 pm Everyone is welcome. Again, *Gracias* for your concern. We realize that this particular tragedy seems more real and has more meaning because of our many close relationships with the people on our sister island of Ometepe.

Scholarship News

by Nancy Quitslund

MariaEstela Alvarez is a young woman from a very poor family in the tiny community of Tagüisapa, about a kilometer from Altagracia on Ometepe. Upon her graduation in 1991 from Instituto Ladislao Chwalbinsky, the high school in Altagracia, she began her studies of English at the public university in Managua. She graduated in 1996, and now teaches English on Ometepe in her old high school. MariaEstela was able to study because she was chosen (by the Altagracia Committee) to receive one of the scholarships funded by Bainbridge Islanders. She was selected because of her grades, ability, community spirit, and determination as a high school student. Without the funding she would be spending more time in her family's banana field, and probably be one of the 60%

Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association

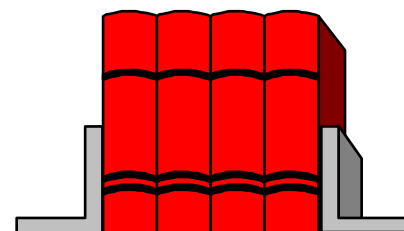
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Founded in 1986 by Kim and Ela Esterberg and friends.
Non-profit organization.

officially unemployed Nicaraguans. Harry Cardenas also graduated in 1991. He was valedictorian of the class. Both his parents, who are teachers, have inspired many young people on Ometepe, their son included. Because of the scholarship, Harry was able to attend a university in Managua and complete a degree in Medicine. Like many of the Island's young people who take the big step of attending a university in the Capital, it was very difficult for Harry. Being away from their families and close communities, skipping meals to save money and frequently not having all the supplies they need, is part of the culture shock for these students. Harry was a very serious student and in 1996, when he finished his program he got a residency in OB-GYN in a hospital in Rivas, a nearby mainland town. This year fulfilled his required national service as a new doctor. The supervising doctor wanted very much to give Harry a permanent job at this hospital, but it was awarded to a young man from a well-connected family from Managua. Harry has found work. However, it is in Nueva Segovia, in eastern Nicaragua, a poor, very remote village with neither electricity nor telephone. His mother, Emelina worries about him, but is very proud that her son is helping people in a community even poorer than her own. We too are very pleased with Harry's accomplishments!

The scholarship program to help Ometepe high school graduates attend college began in February, 1991. So far, six Altagracia students sponsored by Bainbridge-Ometepe members have graduated from universities in Nicaragua. They include two doctors, one psychologist, one chemical engineer, and two English majors. Currently, the program is frozen at nine students sponsored in Altagracia and seven in Moyogalpa. Next year, the number will grow to four in Balgüe. In short, in 1999 the number of students you are sponsoring to study in universities in Nicaragua will increase to twenty! This great program which began in 1991 with one student sponsored by the Bainbridge High School Spanish Club has grown to include three churches, sixteen individuals, and of course, the pioneering Spanish Club. In April of this year we increased the stipend to \$60 per month after meeting with all three committees on Ometepe and reviewing the students' expense reports. Currently, we need new sponsors for three students. If you would like to help a student at \$720/yr or share a scholarship at \$30/month (\$360 per year) please call Susan Sullivan at (206) 842-2788 or Nancy Quitslund at 780-9422.



BOSIA Picnic an International Event

by Susan Sullivan

A wonderful group of more than 50 attended the BOSIA picnic at Fay Bainbridge State Park on Saturday September 19th. Although the sun did not deign to show his face for us, the cool air didn't dampen the warmth of the picnickers.

In addition to the usual contingent of BOSIA supporters from our Island, we were joined by off-islanders from as far away as California, Japan, Nicaragua and Zambia! Bert Muhly, of the Coalition for Nicaragua in Santa Cruz, California (who regularly buys large quantities of Cafe Oro for his group) was there with other Coalition members, as well as a friend from Earthlinks in Seattle.

Our visitors from Japan included Noriko, David Mitchell and Lisa Giles' "daughter" (one of the first students to come to the Seattle area as a participant in the Cool Summer exchange program). She was visiting with her parents, on their first trip to the U.S. And, speaking of Cool Summer, its founder Noyuri Soderland was able to join us too!

From the island of Solentiname in Lake Nicaragua, we were honored to have one of its most well known artists, Olivia Silva.

Solentiname is the home of a colony of painters founded by Father Ernesto Cardenal in the 1970's. The paintings are done in a unique "primitive" style and are beautifully colorful. We were delighted to see Olivia again.

Guests from Seattle included Roy Wilson, formerly with El Centro de la Raza, who now runs a program called Institute for Community Leadership to help youth learn nonviolent resolution skills. The group came with several impressive young people involved in this program. Two of the students are from Zambia—Francis, age 15, and his younger brother. Their family left Zambia and came to America seven months ago so the boys could get an education here. They were wonderful to talk with.



Ela visits with Noriko Kizaki and her parents --photo by Lee Robinson

Kim and Ela Esterberg brought firewood and the blazing hearth was a gathering place for conversation. The potluck contributions were wonderful and although everyone said there was "too much food," no one seemed anxious to let any of it go back home! The tables were set with white cloths, balloons and confetti streams giving the covered shelter a festive atmosphere. It was a lovely picnic and we are happy that so many of you could come together to celebrate once again this unique and amazing organization. *Gracias!* We hope this is the beginning of an annual informal tradition to meet fellow sister islanders.

Water, water everywhere.....!

by Kim Esterberg

If you're just sitting down to read your *Si* with a cup of Café Oro de Ometepe, prepare to raise your cup in a toast. After a seven year project to bring potable water to all the communities around the Cerro Maderas, the last major system has just been inaugurated — in Mérida. You just changed water into coffee using coffee beans from Ometepe, and the money you spent here for those beans changed coffee into pure water on Ometepe!

It was just after *la Navidad*, 1991 when Scott Renfro and I went to San Pedro, one of the poorest and most remote villages on Ometepe, to discuss the possibility of a gravity-feed water system. Scott had considerable experience working in northern Nicaragua, both on small scale water systems and in community organizing. The Contra war in Nicaragua had just recently come to an end (well, sort of), but there was still great danger in northern Nicaragua. Scott and other development workers were still targets for violence. We wanted him to come to Ometepe, where he would be safer and where many people could benefit from his expertise. Scott had already scoped out the situation in San Pedro and discovered a small stream that could be captured high up on the mountain and brought down in a pipe to a holding tank and then distributed to shared community faucets.

Scott and I explained to the community that Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association was willing to purchase all the materials for the water system (the pipes, the cement, valves, technical expertise and transportation), if the community was willing to do all the labor. The funding would come from the sale of Café Oro, grown just around the bend in the road and up their mountain. After about two hours of asking questions and mulling it over, the community voted to build their own water system.

This successful example of working cooperatively as a community was a great inspiration to neighboring Tichenas and Balgüe. By now the Ometepe Gulf Islands Friendship Association (Canada) was involved, using the proceeds from their sales of Café Oro further up North. They too hired Scott and his very reliable field manager, "Chele" Juan Castillo for technical work.

Today the last major system has been completed. In Mérida, 145 families participated in the construction. It took 8,142 person-days (an average of 56 days per family) to carve out a route for the system through volcanic rock. At 12 cordobas per day (a little over one dollar), they estimate they contributed over \$9,000 worth of labor, or a third of the system's total cost. .

What an excellent example of people working as equal partners on a cooperative project that improves their quality of life and health over the long term! A toast to us all and *muchas gracias* especially to Scott Renfro and "Chele" Juan for all their years of hard work!



Inaugurating a new water system --photo by Scott Renfro

Patience is a virtue

by Jim Starrs

Six months after its originally scheduled date, the Bainbridge Island Education Association (BIEA) organized a walkathon to raise money for the Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association (BOSIA) scholarship fund. On Saturday, October 3, a group of about 40 teachers, paraprofessionals, and their retinue walked a 4-mile loop through Winslow. The marchers started at the old Commodore Middle School. They carried colorful balloons donated by Janie and Stuart Walton, owners of Paper Products, and handed out information fliers to curious onlookers. Many of the participants wore t-shirts made for the event by art teacher Robin Hruska. It was event-coordinator and Wilkes teacher Alice Mendoza's idea to use t-shirt sales to add to the money raised from pledges. The idea worked! Thanks (in part) to BIEA's donation of seed money to pay for printing costs, shirt sales netted \$140 for scholar-

ships. BIEA also donated two dollars for every participant. That donation added \$80 to the event's receipts.

The union decided to support the walk for several reasons. The educational opportunities that the scholarship program provides were clearly right up the teachers' alley. The connections between the school community here and on Ometepe (students and teachers here have been visiting, working with, supporting, and learning from each other for many years) made this a good choice as the union's latest community service project. The walk also provided a fun way to kick off the schools' wellness campaigns.

Fueled by coffee and donuts, a display of images of Ometepe, and a few words from Kim Esterberg and Nancy Quitslund, the educators headed off. One hour later they returned to tally up the amount they had raised. The grand total came to more than \$1,250.

This is a great start on fund-raising for a new scholarship or a solid addition to the existing scholarship account. A very warm thank you to all who participated.



BIEA walks for Ometepe Scholarships -- photo by K. Esterberg



The 5% Solution

Again this year, "The Traveler," located at 219 Madison Ave. South, just up the hill from Pegasus Coffee House, has offered to contribute 5% of their gross sales receipts for the entire month of December to Ometepe. Last year they donated 5% of their December sales to provide books and maps for the Ruben Dario Public Library on Ometepe.

The Traveler probably offers the widest selection of travel books in Kitsap County. You'll also find many practical travel accessories such as Tilley hats, Bucky pillows, electronic translators and currency converters. If you want your holiday gifts to go beyond the bright gold bags of Café Oro or sister island mugs, and you already have the third grade calendar wrapped and ready, go visit this wonderful little store. It opens us up to the world beyond our own island shores plus cares about our sister island in Nicaragua!

Nicaraguan Government blocks Humanitarian Aid

by Kim Esterberg & Keith Wentworth

Normally in *Si* we concentrate on stories that deal with our very personal connections with the people on our sister island. We try to avoid taking positions on political issues there, since the broad contact between people on our two islands reflects a wide range of political views. However, there is one political issue that we feel should be brought to your attention. Recently the national government of President Aleman has impounded a number of shipments of humanitarian aid coming into Nicaragua from various groups around the world. The government is insisting that all humanitarian aid be channeled through foundations within Nicaragua and that the government have control over their distribution. All other shipments would be subject to a tax which could range from 40% to over 100% of the value of the shipments. One shocking example recently was a container of rice valued at \$8,500 imported by Quest for Peace, for which the Nicaraguan customs demanded \$10,000 duty to release!

Our concern is that when we send a student delegation to live with communities on Ometepe, we like to be able to bring them a donation of school supplies and sports equipment as one way of thanking them for their hospitality. We have been involved over the last couple of years in the building of the first public library on Ometepe, and want very much to help put books and other materials on the shelves. We have an ongoing e-mail project, where we hope to link the high schools on Ometepe with Bainbridge High School so that students will be able to connect on a daily basis. These are just some of our projects that involve aid brought from Bainbridge to Ometepe. We do not wish to turn over these materials to the Nicaraguan government to dispose of as they please, nor do we want to pay an exorbitant duty on these generous contributions from islanders here. We believe that we should be able to bring material aid which is not sold and which benefits whole communities on our sister island in Nicaragua, without any duty. We have been doing this for the twelve years and want to be able to continue this relationship.

If you agree and want to express your support here are a few contacts:

Sen. Patty Murray, B-34 Dirksen Bldg. Wash. DC 20510 , phone (202) 224-3441 or Seattle (206) 553-0350

Lino Gutierrez, U. S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, Apartado Postal 327, Managua, Nicaragua or FAX 011-(505) 266-9056

Francisco Aguirre Sacasa, Nicaraguan Ambassador to the U.S. 1627 New Hampshire Ave. NW, Wash. D.C. 20009 or FAX (202) 939-6542.

EL PORVENIR NICARAGUA

by Darien De Lu

Here's another option (if you can't go with Bainbridge-Ometepe), but would still like to work alongside Nicaraguans to construct basic clean water projects such as latrines, capping and skirting a hand-dug well, or building a community washing facility in rural Nicaragua! Or you can join a tour of cultural sites plus meetings with local leaders
Work brigades: Dec and Feb.
Cultural tour: January 16-24.
Contact El Porvenir, 2508 42nd St., Sacramento, CA 95817; (916) 736-3663
epueu@igc.org;
www.elporvenir.org.



Mark these dates!

Annual Meeting & Elections:

Monday, Dec 7, Eagle Harbor Congregational Church, 6 p.m Board Meeting, 7:30 p.m Dessert Potluck, Elections & Report from November Delegation freshly back.

Art Studio Tour Dec 4,5,6. Ometepe @ Llewellyn Studio

3rd grade Calendars

Go on sale November 25

BOSIA Board Meetings: 7:00 p.m. 2nd Monday each month Eagle Harbor Church

Eighty-percent Eclipse

poem by Ela Esterberg

High noon in the Tropics and we have
High hopes for glimpsing a brief
Celestial drama, a grand flirtation
Between heavenly bodies. Instead,
Just the sky turning dull and dusky.
The time is NOW, yet no *milagros*?
Our impatience grows. Until...

From pin holes in the rusty roof spill
Crescents of silver onto the tiles below.
An identical convex shadow etched
Like tarnish into every single coin of light.
New moon slivers dance and shimmer as
Palm fronds and flowering vines shiver
Under the teasing caress of a lake fresh breeze.

At high noon today hundreds of light-dark
Crescent moons spilled down on Earth
And danced like fireflies at our feet!

Ometepe, Feb 25, 1998

Translated by Asha Esterberg Tran

Ochenta por ciento del eclipse

poema de Ela Esterberg

Es mediodia en el tro'pico y tenemos
Grandes esperanzas de vislumbar un breve
Drama celestial, un gran coqueteo
Entre los cuerpos celestes. El cielo
Solo se ha tornado apagado y negruzco.
¿YA es el momento, sin embargo, no hay milagros?
Aumenta nuestra impaciencia. Hasta ...

Desde los agujeritos, pequeño como alfileres, en el techo oxidado
Derraman rayos crecientes de plata en el piso azulejo.
Una ide'tica sombra convexa grabada
Como el deslustre en cada moneda de luz.
Nuevas astillas de luna danzan y resplandecen como
Las frondas de palmeras y las enredaderas florecientes tiemblan
Bajo la caricia esquiva de una brisa fresca del lago.

Hoy a mediodia centenares de crecientes de lunas —
luminosas y oscuras — dislumbraron la Tierra.
Y a nuestros pies bailaron como lucie'nagas!

Ometepe, 25 de Febrero, 1998

Traductora: Asha Esterberg Tran

Cut Here

Name _____			
Address _____			
City _____		State/Province _____	
Postcode _____			
Country _____			
Phone (____) _____			
E-Mail _____			
Annual Membership			
Living Lightly	\$10 <input type="checkbox"/>	Individual	\$20 <input type="checkbox"/>
Family	\$35 <input type="checkbox"/>	Sustaining	\$100 <input type="checkbox"/>
Life Membership	\$1,000 <input type="checkbox"/>		
I'd love to volunteer : For events _____ Other _____			
Specific interest _____			
Bainbridge Ometepe Sister Islands Association			
P.O. Box 4484			
Rollingbay, WA USA 98061-0484			

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

Happy Holidays ~ Feliz Navidad ~ Winter Solstice ~ Kwanza ~

GREAT HOLIDAY GIFTS THAT DO GOOD!

World-Famous CAFÉ ORO de OMETEPE:

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

Sister Island T-SHIRTS \$14 to \$18

1999 CALENDARS Ms. Mendoza's 3rd grade students \$7 (for Ometepe) + \$3 (hurricane relief) = \$10

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

OR, GIVE A "NON-MATERIALISTIC" GIFT IN THE NAME OF SOMEONE YOU LOVE

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

SISTER ISLAND MEMBERSHIP\$10.....\$35.....\$100

DONATIONS: for pure water, public library, classrooms...

Feliz Año Nuevo ~Happy Hanukkah~ Birthdays ~ Happy New Year

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



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