



# New Haven/León Sister City Project

*Summer 2011 Newsletter*

## Getting Out

How do we get out? What does NH/LSCP need to do to create self sufficiency - to diminish the need for outside resources - in the rural Nicaraguan community of Goyena where we work ? What does the community need to do? Both the Education Committee and the new Food Security Committee (see “Creating Food Security” on p 2), working with León staff and Goyena community leadership, are looking to do just that. If successful, these efforts will make a significant difference in the lives of families in Goyena.

But the challenges are great. With the wages as low as they are - about \$1000/year - will the community be able to pull together enough resources to support the present school meal program now funded by NH/LSCP? Likewise, will they be able to support the preschool and after school programs? Will the broader economic realities compel us to try to help the community access more land so that they can provide much of their own food? Or will the community be able to get the León government to step in and take a greater responsibility for these and other efforts?

To really create a sustainable and self sufficient future, it seems likely that much will be needed in the short term - both in terms of institutional change and increased infrastructure/resources before the community can reach this

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*(Mural top left from León, Nicaragua by Daniel Pullido and friends)*

*The New Haven/León Sister City Project is a progressive, binational, grassroots organization that fosters a partnership between the communities of Greater New Haven, Connecticut and León, Nicaragua. Our mission is to promote social justice.*

goal. It’s also likely the community will need to respond to additional economic challenges (See “From the Curse of Nitrates...” on p 4) and environmental changes - global warming is a huge worry for rural communities.

To be clear, NH/LSCP has no plans to leave Goyena at this time, but our goal is to support self sufficiency, to confront the limitations on people’s lives created by poverty and to create greater freedom in this small community. As economist Amartya Sen writes, development is the process of expanding human freedoms and supporting the development of people’s skills and initiative - which are the real wealth of a community.

Lastly, the new Theater Project (see article on p. 3) is already helping us



Ellen Rubin and Janet Brodie prepare a “clean trash sculpture” for a Forum theater presentation as part of the Theater of the Oppressed Training in June.

explore themes related to human liberation - both political and personal. We’re excited by this effort’s potential to generate new energy to look into creative compassionate solutions affecting both León and New Haven.

## Creating Food Security

Nicaragua remains the second poorest country in the Americas. With a population of 5.36 million people, an estimated one out of six Nicaraguans lives on less than \$1.25 a day, and an estimated 80% of the population does not have food security. Several factors harm nutritional status within Nicaragua including people's lack of land or legal title over their land, low incomes, difficulty accessing credit, and poor transportation infrastructure. The World Food Summit of 1996 defined food security as existing "when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life". The New Haven/León SCP is currently organizing a food security project focused on improving access to food in Goyena, Nicaragua by 2015.

Many organizations have similarly striven to improve food security in other parts of Nicaragua. A non-governmental organization which works with communities and families, Centro Para la Promocion, la Investigacion y el Desarrollo Rural y Social (CIPRES) has helped families who own land by providing nutrition support, as well as information on how to renew soil and diversify produce. Programa Especial

para la Seguridad Alimentaria (PESA) has attempted to improve nutrition and income by building soil capacity, diversifying production, protecting natural resources, providing nutritional education, and financing micro credit. An estimated 1,800 families have participated in the program. Grassroots projects such as the San Rafael communal kitchen have further provided significant nutritional support for Nicaraguans. Run by women in the San Pablo Apostle Christian Base Community, the kitchen distributes food donated by Soy Nica, a national organization promoting soya consumption to address hunger and malnutrition. Soya, cooked in common Nicaraguan dishes, is a practical food source for individual households who can not afford the expense of a meat based diet.

Although still quite young, the effort will involve residents in developing pilot projects (family gardens, composting, food buying clubs, composting toilets, etc) and making decisions about how to best address their food needs. The community of Goyena was pushed off its long time location in 1998 by Hurricane Mitch and are now located in a semi-urban community with each family on a very small plot of land.

On the plus side, there are a lot of fruit trees, chicken coops and small gardens. The community also has a lot of knowledge about gardening and animals and no lack of hard workers. There is also an active Environmental Youth Brigade (organized by NH/LSCP) that will be supporting the food security effort by doing project research, help with pilot projects and community education.



Food production in Goyena **Above from top:** Fruto Prado shows off his very large papaya; Banana trees in a Goyena backyard; Jamileth Osejo tends her chicken-protected seedlings in her yard.

The food security effort will look to build on this local capacity. As economist Mahbub ul Haq wrote in a U.N Development Program report, "The real wealth of a nation is its people. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives."

*Roni Druks is a Yale senior volunteering with the Food Security Committee.*

**THANK YOU** to all of our donors. Your generosity helps to keep us going both materially and spiritually. Our work could not happen without you.

While foundation support has helped us inaugurate environmental education in Goyena and theater in both Goyena and New Haven, most of our support comes from individuals. It is because we can depend on your generosity and faithfulness that we can make long term plans (see "Getting Out" p. 1 ) and envision new ones ("Creating Food Security" p.2 and "Making Theater..." p.3) Some of you have been with us for years and others are newcomers.

**You are all appreciated.**



## Making Theater for Social Change

Playwright and poet Aaron Jafferis first traveled to León two decades ago on a NH/LSCP Hillhouse High School delegation, and the trip shifted his center of gravity.

"Returning from Nicaragua opened my eyes to the poverty and racism here in the U.S.," he says, "and my life shifted towards making art that attempted to change people's hearts in such a way that it would be impossible for us to exist, content, in the midst of such inequality."

Now, with several award-winning plays about race relations and immigration under his belt, Aaron is returning to help kick off a community theater project with NH/LSCP. The theater project involves ordinary people, both New Haven and León / Goyena residents, in creating theater about their lives and social justice concerns.

As Aaron says: "I make theatre that tries to build connections between people who would otherwise remain strangers. Even in this time of globalization, when we are becoming increasingly interdependent, most of the connections we have with people far away and very different from us are filtered through news media or the electronic remove of the internet. Or woven into an anonymous piece of clothing, grown into a piece of fruit. Theatre must be made in person, in collaboration, in connection."

Since he teaches playwrighting and theater in New Haven public schools, Aaron returned to León on a teacher's delegation in 2010. There he met sugar cane workers who were struggling to hold Flor de Caña rum company - Nicaragua Sugar Estates, Ltd. - accountable for the destruction of their health and environment. It inspired him to write two poems, "Dust" and "Drunk."

From "Drunk" by Aaron Jafferis:

*'Cause Goyena's main crop is dust  
but it's not the fine earthy kind  
that lines my bottle of rum,  
but this imperceptible herbicide  
dust that rusts  
ailing workers from the inside  
'til their kidneys fail, and they  
die working the same  
World-Bank-funded cane  
plantation off of which  
this one family who owns half  
that nation gets awful rich  
making the sugar that's making the  
rum that's making me come  
over and over again to this liquor  
bottle in my hand.*

*And I am drunk off a sip of the same  
fine liquor  
which makes some lame cane worker  
sicker.*

*I am drunk off my need to buy  
cheaper and quicker  
junk I don't need  
'cause I don't see the people my  
money makes bleed.  
Drunk on the belief that my  
environment is just  
'cause the people who eat my  
herbicide dust  
are strangers to me, no danger to me,  
I'll be like "Bam!" – make 'em say  
Uncle  
Sam, 'cause that's who I am, and I  
am so drunk  
I can't see if my environment's in  
danger or not,  
can't see I got a sister in Nicaragua  
whose anger  
is hot.*

### Summer Theater

The Theater Project's first big effort was in June 2011, when Katy Rubin, a New Haven native now based in New York City, led workshops on Theatre of the Oppressed. Practiced throughout Latin American and the world, Theatre of the Oppressed is a series of games and exercises that give ordinary people the tools to



Katy Rubin (left) leads training participants and "spect-actors" in discussing a Forum piece that explored worker-employer struggles created during the June training at Bregamos Community Theater.

create theater about their own lives and realities.

Augusto Boal (1931-2009) developed Theater of the Oppressed in the 1970s in conjunction with revolutionary social and cultural movements that were unfolding in his native Brazil. Boal believed that people should not be passive spectators of theater, but they should be spect-actors. He created an arsenal of theater games that help people act out scenes from their own lives; observe the lives of their fellow community members on stage; analyze the root causes of oppression; and imagine ways to transform their situation.

In what Boal calls "Forum Theater," a group of actors begin with a dramatic situation from everyday life and try to find solutions—a worker asking her boss for a raise, a child confronting bullies at school, or woman trapped in a violent relationship. Audience members are urged to intervene by stopping the action, coming on stage to replace the actors, and enacting their own ideas. The theatrical act is thus experienced as conscious intervention, as a rehearsal for social action rooted in a collective analysis of shared problems.

Later this Summer, from August 14 - 23, you can travel with the actors on a theater delegation to Nicaragua! No theater experience is necessary. Delegates will meet

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Theater...continued from p 3.

local theater-makers in León, share performances, and take part in theater workshops.

The Theater Project work continues in the early Fall 2011, when NH/LSCP will team up with Bregamos Community Theater to stage the play *A Peasant of El Salvador* in New Haven. The play tells the story of a farmer dealing with many contemporary Latin American/U.S. issues – the root causes of migration, global economic changes, family, faith and commitment.

*Megan Fountain is the Chair of the Theater Project Committee, has previously explored community-based theater in Nicaragua and Peru, and is active locally with Unidad Latina en Accion.*

## Want to become a supporter?



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[http://www.newhavenleon.org/donate\\_online](http://www.newhavenleon.org/donate_online). Many Thanks.

### NH/LSCP's Rock to Rock Bike

Ride effort raised \$7000 to support our work and to get a new (hopefully electric) moto for Nicaragua. Thanks to all who pitched in!

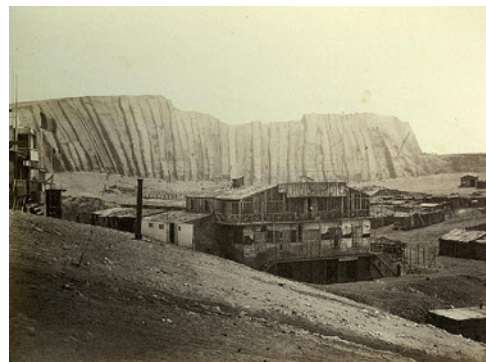


## From the Curse of Nitrates to the Curse of Oil

*(A question NH/LSCP delegations attempt to answer is why Nicaragua is so impoverished.. The following reprinted article gives insight into a dynamic that has bred much of the poverty in resource rich Latin America.)*

In 1840, an international guano rush began, as European (especially British) and US agriculturists sought the precious fertilizer to compensate for the soil nutrients that they were losing (though bad farming practices). In the early 1850s a British officer reported witnessing the simultaneous loading of guano on ships from the following countries from a single island off the coast of Peru: forty four United States ships, forty English, five French, two Dutch, one Italian, one Belgian, one Norwegian, one Swedish, one Russian, one Armenian and three Peruvian. Loading the guano into ships required digging into deep mounds of excrement that covered rocky islands. After slavery was abolished in 1854 tens of thousands of Chinese coolies were contracted for through Macao and Hong Kong. By 1875 some 80,000 were working under conditions of virtual slavery in the desert and islands of Peru.

Then in 1853 a process was discovered for efficiently mining the nitrate fields in the Tarapacá desert province of Peru, and soon afterwards rich deposits were also found in the adjacent Bolivian province of Atacama. By the 1860s these nitrate fields had become even more important as a source of fertilizer than guano, the availability of which had begun to diminish. Nitrates were in high demand not only for fertilizers, but also for the recently invented TNT and other explosives, crucial to the expanding war industries of the industrial states.



Chincha Island Peru. with guano mining operations.

By 1875 British investments primarily in the nitrate industry in Peru totaled £1,000,000. The Peruvian ruling class grew enormously wealthy as a result of the guano trade and the mining of nitrates. This wealth did not, however, flow significantly into economic development, apart from the building of railways; for the rest of the population the nitrate resource soon proved to be a curse. Peru became heavily indebted, in a classic pattern, primarily to British investors, with its guano exports mortgaged well into the future. In 1875, attempting to get out of its debt trap, Peru imposed a state monopoly in its nitrate zones in Tarapacá, expropriating the holdings of private investors (many of whom were British) and offering them government certificates of payment.

This led to the War of the Pacific (also sometimes called the Nitrate War), which broke out four years after the Peruvian expropriation of the nitrate industry. Chile, backed by British investors, declared war on Bolivia but also on Peru, with which Bolivia was allied.

With its more modern, British-built navy and French-trained army, Chile was soon able to seize Bolivia's Atacama province and Peru's Tarapacá – never to leave. Before the war Chile had almost no nitrate fields and no guano deposits. Before the war British controlled 13 per cent of Peru's Tarapacá nitrate

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## Guano... continued from p 4.

industry; immediately after the war – given Chile’s possession of the region – the British share rose to 34 per cent, and by 1890 it was 70 per cent.

As the former US Secretary of State James G. Blaine told a congressional committee investigating the war, ‘Nothing else .... It is an English war on Peru, with Chili as the instrument ..... Chili would never have gone into this war one inch but for her backing by English capital, and there was never anything played out so boldly in the world as when they came to divide the loot and the spoils.’

Having lost its two principal resources for export, the Peruvian economy collapsed. And it had no other way to pay off the foreign debts except by handing its railroads over to British investors who had themselves clandestinely backed Chile in the war.

As a result of its seizure of the nitrate territories Chile was to take on the curse of nitrates. Europe still needed guano and nitrates in vast quantities to maintain its agricultural productivity and sought to control this trade. . In 1888 the Chilean President José Manuel Balmaceda, who had carried out modernizing reforms including extensive public works and support for education, announced that the nitrate areas of Chile would have to be nationalized through the formation of Chilean enterprises. Three years later a civil war broke out, with British and other foreign investors supporting the opponents of Balmaceda with money and armaments.

The press in London characterized Balmaceda (in tones very recognizable today) as a ‘dictator of the worst stripe’. When the British

defeated Chile in 1891, Balmaceda committed suicide..

In the early 1890s Chile was delivering three-quarters of all its exports to Britain while obtaining almost half of its imports from Britain, creating a trade dependence on Britain. When the First World War broke out in Europe, two-thirds of Chile’s national income was derived from nitrate exports primarily to Britain and Germany. Just prior to the First World War, however, the German chemist and nationalist Fritz Haber devised a process for producing nitrates by fixing nitrogen from the air. The result within a few years was to destroy almost completely the value of Chilean nitrates, creating a severe crisis for the Chilean economy.

But the curse of nitrates (and nitrogen) did not end there; it was transferred to the world at large, including the rich countries themselves. Nitrogen fertilizers, used on an ever-increasing scale to maintain agricultural productivity, now pollute more and more of the world’s groundwater, lakes and rivers through fertilizer runoff, giving rise to one of the major ecological problems facing the world today. Now... the curse of oil, with its all too close parallels with that earlier history, is still very much ongoing.

As the New York Times noted in its June 7, 2003 issue, in an article entitled ‘Striking it Poor: Oil as a Curse’, ‘scholarly studies for more than a decade have consistently warned of what is known as the resource curse: that developing countries whose economies depend on exporting oil, gas or extracted materials are likely to be poor, authoritarian, corrupt and rocked by civil war.’ As Michael Perelman has cogently stated, “The origins of the curse of oil do not lie in the physical

properties of petroleum but rather in the social structure of the world ... A rich natural resource base makes a poor country, especially a relatively powerless one, an inviting target – both politically and militarily – for dominant nations. In the case of oil, the powerful nations will not risk letting such a valuable resource fall under the control of an independent government, especially one that might pursue policies that do not coincide with the economic interests of the great transnational corporations. So, governments that display excessive independence soon find themselves overthrown, even if their successors will foster an environment of corruption and political instability.”

Nowadays, the curse of oil has also come back to haunt the rich countries too – their environments and their economies – in the form of global warming, or what might be called a planetary rift in the human relation to the global commons – the atmosphere and oceans.

*Excerpted from an article by John Bellamy Foster and Brett Clark, “Ecological Imperialism.”*



Sam Gamer (right), a Yale senior, is teaching in Goyena this summer as a Peace and Justice Intern

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