



# New Haven/León Sister City Project

*Spring 2008 Newsletter*

## Dear Friends...

As our work focuses primarily on education and consciousness-raising in many forms, we bear in mind the good words of Brazilian popular educator Paulo Freire:

***Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world...***

In León we put our energy and resources into supporting education programs in the rural community of Goyena. In a place where many folks do not finish the sixth grade, these programs engage children, adolescents, and adults in processes of community organization and leadership development through organized informal education.

We continue to host educational delegations of students and adults in order to introduce North Americans to the struggles of our Nicaraguan partners. We ask delegates to think critically and creatively about how they might act to support Nicaraguans in struggle once they return home.

This issue of our newsletter contains words, pictures, and updates designed to give you a better idea of both aspects of our work — intended to help along the transformation of our world.

**-NH/LSCP**

## Struggling for a Secondary School



*Bianca Quiroz and Anabel Donaire are two of 222 in the region of Goyena who are trying to move on with their studies.*

**\*\*See page 2 for their stories. \*\***

### In This Issue:

#### News from León

- Struggling for a Secondary School.....p2
- Los Carlitos Preschool Turns 20!.....p2
- Giaconda Torres Joins the NH/LSCP.....p3

#### Regarding Solidarity

- Why I go to Nicaragua: An Open Letter to my Students.....p4  
*By Silas Meredith*
- Spring 2008 Delegations.....p4
- Suggested To-Do List.....p5

#### Reflections of a New Havener in León

- Of Food Security, Sugar, & International Loans .....p5  
*By Sydney Frey*

The image in our banner comes from this piece of art, found in the Adiact Museum of Sutiava.

Sutiava is the region of Nicaragua named for its indigenous habitants, and the museum is named for Chief Adiact. Adiact's hanging by Spanish conquistadores in 1614 hastened the subjugation of Sutiaba people to Spanish colonial rule. The rural community of Goyena, where the NH/LSCP works, is in Sutiava

The Tamarind tree from which Adiact was hanged still stands and bears fruit.

# Struggling for a Secondary School

This past February about forty young people from the community of Goyena showed up for the first day of class. They had all finished the sixth grade either the year before or many years before. They were ready to continue.

Most young people from Goyena do not continue their studies after sixth grade because there is no secondary school in Goyena, and the cost of the 25-minute bus ride to León is prohibitive.

Last year, the Ministry of Education and the NH/LSCP came to an agreement – our staff and local volunteers would do a diagnostic study

in Goyena to let the Ministry know how many students could go, where would be the best place to have class, etc; and the Ministry would provide secondary school teachers for the '08 school year and beyond. The NH/LSCP would spread the word among potential students in Goyena, and the Ministry would spread the word in the smaller neighboring communities whose young people could travel to Goyena by bicycle or horse or foot.

But only students from Goyena appeared on the first day of class. The Ministry declared that forty students were not enough to justify

the youth in Goyena who are looking for ways to continue studying. Bianca was traveling into the city of León to study, but could not continue for the prohibitive cost. Both of Bianca's parents are members of the community leadership of Nueva Vida, one of the sub-communities of Goyena.

Anabel is one of the forty who showed up for class this year before it was cancelled. At 19, Anabel is the president of the community board of Aristides Sanchez, a neighboring sub-community.

Community leaders have been planning to step up pressure on the ministry to try again next year.

The NH/LSCP has the opportunity to support a pilot project that will bring teachers from *Instituto Mariano Fiallos Gil*, a prep school affiliated with the National University, to Goyena from June through December to offer Saturday classes to community youth.

As part of this effort, the Ministry of Education has committed to take over running the school in Goyena in January 2009.

The NHLSCP is trying to raise \$3000 to support this effort. The funds will be used to pay for the teachers, transportation, and organizing in the communities to continue pressuring the Ministry to fulfill its obligation to the students of Goyena.

Please contact us if you'd like to contribute to these efforts.



*Concepción Quiroz, better known as Concho, a member of the community leadership of Goyena whose daughter is among those looking to attend secondary school.*

## Community leaders have been planning to step up pressure on the ministry to try again next year...

running a full secondary school, so it ultimately decided not to run anything at all. Class was cancelled.

Bianca Quiroz and Anabel Donaire, pictured on page 1, are two of

---

## ¡Los Carlitos Turns 20!

On February 28th, Los Carlitos preschool celebrated its 20th birthday.

Los Carlitos was founded in 1988 by the NH/LSCP and the Hamburg-Leon project, and it remains one of only a few functioning community preschools in Nicaragua. It receives no funds from the state, and is supported entirely by parents, community members, and a local board of directors.

The school celebrated with

traditional music and dance performed by hired professional dancers, and by current students.

Among those present were Alan Wright, co-founder of the NH/LSCP, and Lee Cruz, director at the time of the school's founding; as well as current NH/LSCP staff Rene Vanegas and Sydney Frey. The four took advantage of the party for an inter-generational photo-op.



*From left: Lee Cruz, Sydney Frey, Rene Vanegas, and Alan Wright at the celebration of the preschool's anniversary.*

# Gioconda Torres Joins the *Hermanamiento*



*Education Coordinator Gioconda Torres after a long day in Goyena.*

Gioconda Torres is both a social worker and an agronomist. She joined the NH/LSCP staff as the Education Coordinator in January 2008, and spends her days in the rural community of Goyena with the NH/LSCP after-school program, and the youth and community leadership programs.

Prior to coming to the NH/LSCP, Gioconda worked with an NGO called the Committee of Rural Women, assisting their own facilitation of education, agriculture, and violence prevention programs.

The following comes from an interview by Sydney Frey:

*SF: How does Goyena reflect the situation of the country as a whole?*

GT: The conditions in Goyena are a result of the economic situation of the country. There's a lack of social policies to assist these types of communities that are marginalized. The people there feel themselves to be with many limitations – access to transportation, access to education – falling in a hole. It's not specific to this community; it's typical; they're falling and feel hopeless. They say, "There's no work. If the cane wasn't here, what would we eat? But there's the cane, and it's taking our lives. But what economic alternative is there?" Hungry kids can't learn. If a woman doesn't have an income, she's going to live with a great deal of stress. Stress increases the amount of violence in the community. Everything is a chain reaction.

*SF: What's the most important aspect of your work in Goyena?*

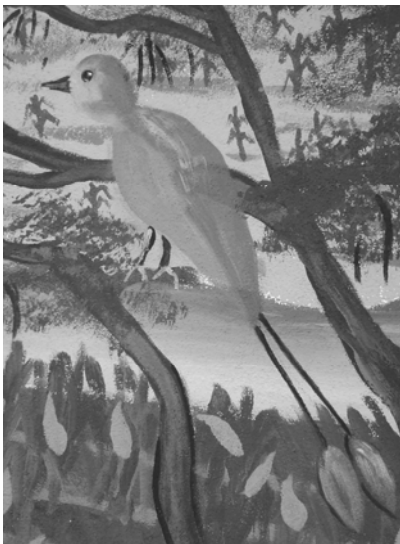
GT: There's a social part, an organizational part, and an educational part. We can help to strengthen the organization of the community through strengthening human capacity. The educational part means learning – capacity building as well as formal education.

We support formal education, but we can't leave behind the human part, strengthening human capital. If people have self-esteem and are better prepared, they're going to be less passive and more creative.

**If people have self-esteem and are better prepared, they're going to be more creative.**

*SF: What's your hope for the education program?*

We'd like to contribute to development, not do it. So we support the community leaders in the process of organizing, and we hope that our group of after-school teachers become facilitators of a learning process, instead of academic teachers. To strengthen the weakest children is not to repeat the academic lessons of the morning formal school; it's to facilitate something different. It's to facilitate a community environment.



*This image on the left of a Guardabarranco, the national bird of Nicaragua, is part of a mural painted on the new preschool in the community of Goyena.*

*The NH/LSCP supports teacher training for the preschool teachers, and supports the organization of parents to provide meals for preschool students.*

*This mural was designed by local artist Lorenzo Lopez, and painted with the help of a delegation from South Church, in Middletown, CT.*

*At Right, a student of the primary-student after-school program in front of the mural in process.*



# Why I go to Nicaragua: An Open Letter to my Students

By Silas Meredith

I am going to Nicaragua in order to fulfill a promise that I made years ago.

Don Luciano trusted me the first time he met me, and to this day I don't know why. I arrived without introduction in the hard-scrabble but proud neighborhood where he lived with his children and grandchildren. He took me under his wing and told me his life story, how he and other immigrants from the *campo* built this neighborhood from nothing. He showed me neighbors' houses with bullet holes still in the walls from the revolution 25 years before.

He told me of when there were dictators who said it was one's patriotic duty to kill a priest, and priests who lent their hands to overthrow oppressive dictators. He vouched for me when a neighbor suspected me (quite erroneously) of working for the CIA. He taught me to play "Ay Nicaragua Nicaraguita" on a guitar that he ordered custom-made for me.

When it came time for me to

return to Connecticut and write my thesis, I asked him what I could possibly give in return. "Tell our stories," he said. But, wouldn't he rather I try to send money for school supplies or educational scholarships or musical instruments? "Tell our stories," he repeated.

So here we are in the plane, the ten of you from high schools throughout the New Haven area, two teachers leading the delegation, and dozens of suitcases full of school supplies and baseball equipment. You have spent the preceding months gathering these materials and preparing yourselves to build houses in León with materials that you helped to purchase.

Sharing essential materials and building houses for those without houses is the basic human act of neighborliness. But, in doing this alone, I am not fulfilling my promise to tell Don Luciano's stories.

We have an obligation to stop and seriously consider the reasons why people are without houses in the first place.

The reasons are sometimes

political, sometimes economic, sometimes cultural, sometimes religious, sometimes climatic, and always historical, but the result is that a huge number of Nicaraguans live in conditions that nobody should have to.

With our construction project, we hope to provide a band-aid. But the true measure of the success of this delegation is the change that it provokes in you and the paths that it causes you to consider.

I am going to Nicaragua to tell Don Luciano's stories. I am going to Nicaragua to make you uncomfortable, at least long enough to reconsider the world, your place in it, and your hopes for it.

I am going to Nicaragua because I cannot think of a more valuable and fulfilling way to spend my time than to ask a question of those who in 20 years will literally be running the world: what do you want for your planet?

*Silas Meredith teaches math at Hopkins School in New Haven, and will co-lead his second delegation of students in June.*

---

## Spring 2008 Delegations



*Kathy Novak, from South Church in Middletown, CT, adds a few careful strokes to the new pre-school mural in Goyena.*



*Chhitij Bashyal, a junior at Yale University, relaxes in a hammock during some downtime in Goyena.*



*Yale students Naomi Bland, Lex Blissett, and Tiffany Mason pose with Angelito as his mother, Mariela, looks on.*



*Lorenzo Lopez, painter and community leader from Sutiava, introduces delegates to the indigenous history of León.*

**"I have learned so much since I landed, an incredible amount, and this country has made such a profound impact on my heart that I'm itching to know more and to make some further impact in the lives of those who have touched me."  
- 2008 Yale Delegate**

## Suggested To-Do List



These images of a young man caring for a flower and a young woman cutting chains are pieces of a mural in downtown León honoring the “6%” movement. For years, university students nationwide have...

### **Demand that the World Bank Enforce Its Own Labor and Environmental Standards**

Visit [www.newhavenleon.org](http://www.newhavenleon.org) for a sample letter to politicians and World Bank officials, asking them to use their power to enforce international regulations which Nicaragua Sugar Estates, Ltd. is ignoring, thereby causing serious harm to the workers and environment of Nicaragua.

### **Don't Take Our Word For It**

We suggest starting with these books:  
*The Open Veins of Latin America*, by Eduardo Galeano.  
*Nicaragua, 4th Edition*, by Thomas Walker.

### **Organize a Delegation**

Want to come see for yourself what's going on here in León? We can help you organize a group from your place of worship, school, university, or neighborhood.

### **Come on Your Own**

Become an NH/LSCP intern to spend time living and working in León. See [www.newhavenleon.org](http://www.newhavenleon.org) for details.



...organized themselves to pressure the government into respecting the constitutional stipulation of the amount of the national budget dedicated to higher education.

**History, despite its wrenching pain, cannot be unlived, but if faced with courage, need not be lived again.**

*Maya Angelou*

## On Food Security, Sugar, & International Loans

By Sydney Frey

**Food prices have risen** dramatically all over the world. For those who are already poor, the effects are devastating. Many poor countries have seen food riots break out. There are a number of culprits: bad weather, the price of oil, and the dedication of arable land to bio-fuel production are the most infamous.

In Nicaragua, the price of corn has risen more than 25% in the last six months, and the price of beans has hit new highs. The price of *everything* is rising rapidly.

People in Nicaragua, as in other Central American and Caribbean countries, are increasingly vulnerable to dangerous fluctuations in the international market because of trade policies – introduced and enforced by wealthier producer nations like the US – that encourage large cash-crop production and discourage food production for domestic consumption.

Nicaragua Sugar Estates, Ltd (NSEL), the large cane company whose lands border Goyena, received in 2006 a USD \$62 million loan from the Washington, DC-based International Finance Corporation, the arm of the World Bank that makes private-sector loans.

By contrast, the small farmers that own parcels of land right next door cannot for their lives get any sort of credit. They are then required to compete in the market against highly subsidized goods from the US. They end up selling their parcels of land to big producers like NSEL.

**About a forty-minute drive** north of León is of Chichigalpa, a city built around the sugar mill of the NSEL, the *Ingenio San Antonio*. Some former mill workers there have filed a complaint against the World Bank for its loan, asking the WB to enforce its stated environmental and labor requirements for such loans.

The former workers are suffering kidney failure, Chronic Renal Insufficiency. They were fired because of it, without compensation or access to the company clinic. They blame the illness on regular contact with allegedly illegal, black market agrochemicals that the company applies to the cane.

The folks who own NSEL are the same folks who own *Flor de Caña*, the national rum of Nicaragua, made from the sugar. It's on happy billboards all over the country; sun-

burned tourists lug it away in carry-on boxes. In Chichigalpa, former workers are dying at the rate of about one a week.

Yet these guys have so much hope for this complaint process to the IFC/World Bank. They believe that the power of the regulation mechanisms of international financial institutions has to change their situation, *has* to make the company behave itself. Has to make it recognize worker unions, obey environmental standards, provide access to health care for sick workers, compensation to the widows of those already lost.

We northerners need to do our part in holding these institutions accountable at the *very least* to their own regulations. It's our money they're loaning to NSEL, and we are obligated to demand that the money not be used to bring further harm to the health of the people or environment of Nicaragua.

**See the to-do list above** for ideas on how to support the workers and community members struggling for justice.

*Sydney Frey has been living and working in León since February.*



*This banner is a piece of a mural celebrating the life of Benjamin Linder, an engineer from the state of Washington who came to Nicaragua to help rural communities install hydro-electric projects. He was also a unicyclist and a juggler who loved to entertain children. In 1984 Linder was killed by a Contra attack. This mural is on the wall of a café in León named for him. He is remembered as an example of US-Nicaragua solidarity.*

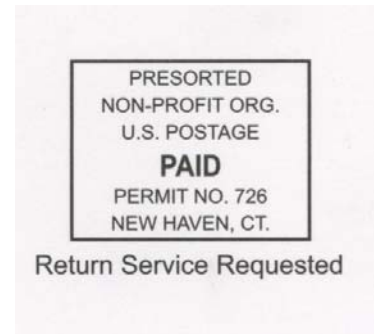
**Board of Directors: Susan Bramhall Ginger Chapman Joy Gordon Kate Landon James Leslie  
Henry Lowendorf Roy Money Ray Pagliaro Allie Perry Susan Power Trucksess Michael Soares**

**Staff: Antonieta Chevez Sydney Frey Patty Nuelsen Chris Schweitzer Gioconda Torres Rene Vanegas**

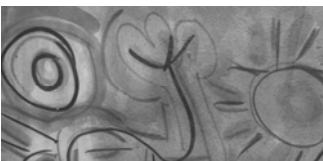
**Dear Reader**, if your name appears with \*\*\* on the address label, we need to hear from you if you wish to remain on our mailing list. The cost of postage, printing and paper have all gone up. And we don't want to clutter up your mailbox with unwanted correspondence. In addition, we haven't heard from you in a long time. If your interest in the work continues, and you would like to remain on our mailing list, please call (203-562-1607) or e-mail us ([pnuelsen@newhavenleon.org](mailto:pnuelsen@newhavenleon.org)) and let us know that. Otherwise this will be our last mailing to you. Many thanks for your attention and support.

**This newsletter was designed and edited in León by Sydney Frey. Email [sfrey@newhavenleon.org](mailto:sfrey@newhavenleon.org) with comments.**

**New Haven/León Sister City Project  
608 Whitney Avenue  
New Haven, CT 06511**



**N.B: Dear Reader, if your label has a colored dot after it, please see note above.**



**(203) 562-1607    [www.newhavenleon.org](http://www.newhavenleon.org)    [nh@newhavenleon.org](mailto:nh@newhavenleon.org)**