



New Haven/León Sister City Project

Fall 2014 E-Newsletter

July 2014 Texas Delegation Musings

By Morgan Howard and Izabel Wills

Nicaragua is a country of rich culture and colorful cities. Even from the first day of our visit it was astounding how different everything felt. The traffic was wild with motorcycles moving this way and that and bicycles carrying multiple people and slipping in between cars. It was amazing and quite scary to watch. The buildings were painted with bright colors, livening up the streets and making everything feel more festive, like there was a holiday approaching. The color, noise and chaos made my sedate hometown seem mundane. While seeing interesting things like this was fun, it was simultaneously hard to look around without seeing something that made you realize there is just as much hardship as there was festivity.

As we were driving around the streets of Managua, I saw a small boy who should have been in school wandering the streets, trying to wash people's windows for a small amount of money. It was these moments that shaped the trip for me, I would have fun seeing and experiencing new things but the stark moments of intense poverty were emotionally challenging and eye opening. But this was why I was there - to learn about and help the people of Nicaragua in a small way. I always wished I could do more.

While the first day was a buzz of driving, sightseeing, and learning, the second was more focused. We spent most of the day boarding down volcanoes, swimming in the ocean and boating through beautiful mangrove trees. It was a day of learning another side of the country – the natural beauty and adventures that are available for tourists. Much like the chaos of the city, the natural areas of Nicaragua were wilder than my experiences thus far in the U.S. Though the first two days were mainly entertainment oriented; they were a great introduction to the country and set the stage for the remainder of the trip.



Mike, Elizabeth, Justin, Izabel, Crescent, Morgan at Cerro Negro outside Leon in July.

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After the second day, we spent our time learning about the hardships the people of Goyena face and doing service for them. Especially memorable to me was the time we spent learning about what the women in Goyena were doing to increase their independence. It made me realize how fortunate I am to be a female living in America.

While working on the library, we spent a good deal of time hauling everything out, sanding all of the shelves and desks and chairs, and finally painting them. This effort seems small, but it took a lot longer than you might think! We also took some time to teach English to local teenagers wanting to learn. We created a lesson plan and the next day taught kids from Goyena. It was very cool to see these kids using their free time to learn from us; I hope we did a good job teaching them.

Overall I wouldn't be satisfied in simply saying that my trip was "good" because that word is not adequate. It was such a diverse and rich experience – both bad and good; but I would go back in an instant. Nicaragua is a beautiful country with an amazing history; I was incredibly lucky to experience it first hand.

We wanted to share a few of the things that surprised us most about Nicaragua.

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"He beats me the normal amount"

By Erendira Vanegas

The title of this article was a revelation to us and as shocking to us as it probably is to you. This comment came from one of the women in the first session of the NHLSCP program to prevent violence against women in the rural community of Goyena outside León, Nicaragua.

She stated the prevention program was unnecessary because, according to her, she did not suffer any violence. She said, "He beats me the normal amount; he only hits me when I'm to blame."

The three year-old program for the prevention of violence against women is a community initiative in Goyena. Some women who noticed too much violence in their lives discussed the need to create greater awareness among community members and share prevention methods. We agreed that in Nicaragua the term 'violence against women' was something that referred only to extreme cases of violence and ignored many lesser forms of oppression. Sadly, in this society, when a woman is sexually abused, it is her fault because she is assumed to be the cause of it! For women and men in the community, and in our society in general, violence is so accepted that its impacts them are not recognized, except for those who have experienced extreme violence!

Life in rural communities in Nicaragua can be very different from life in urban areas, which is

not to say that the problems in cities are not difficult. But in the urban communities there are some options, albeit exhausting and bureaucratic, to confront these problems. That said, it's important to point out that there have been 67 femicides so far this year in our country.

Underdevelopment in Nicaragua is fed by ingrained gender inequalities and pervasive violence toward women. As one of the poorest countries in Latin America, and with the lowest education budget in the region, violence against women and inequality are hardly addressed at all by the Nicaraguan government. Rather the

government focuses international attention on questionable statistics that boast of gender equity. And as in recent years - using this skewed data - the World Economic Forum ranks Nicaragua as the 6th best country in the world for gender equity, which denies our violent reality!

In the community of Goyena, many women have no control of their bodies. In this viscerally patriarchal culture it's the man who decides the what, the when and the how in everything concerning sex. After working with the women in Goyena our program has had some successes: for example, women are now aware of family planning.

In the nearby community of Troilo we have a difficult and sad case. "When her husband leaves for work each day he leaves them locked at home," says a women's rights promoter. "The 22 year old woman remains in a 12x12 foot room along with their four children waiting for the



Women's march in Leon on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Musings... continued...

1. There are volcanoes you can sled/board down like snow.
 2. The energy use in Nicaragua at any given moment is between 50-80% from renewable sources.
 3. The horses are much more malnourished looking than any other animal.
 4. Nicaragua has a "Mister Nicaragua" cross dressing pageant every year in support of its gay citizens.
 5. They dress more formally in their day to day lives than most Texans.
 6. There is a major discrepancy of wealth. Some people own mansions on private islands while some towns only have houses made out of tarps and scrap metal.
 7. Nicaragua doesn't have GMO's (Genetically Modified Foods)
 8. The Nicaraguans were exceedingly nice to all of us despite the history between the American and Nicaraguan governments.
 9. Nicaragua has a mysterious kidney disease causing deaths among the sugar cane field workers.
 10. They make THE best pancakes ever
- This list is only skimming the very surface of what was a truly an eye opening, once in a lifetime experience. The history, politics, culture and just overall vibe of a different country is something that cannot be explained through a mere article though. We invite you to take a trip of your own.

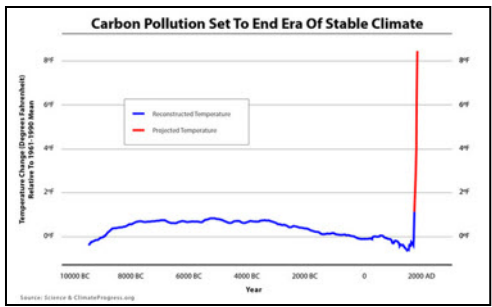
Morgan Howard and Izabel Wills traveled to Leon from Texas on a delegation in 2014. The trip leader Elizabeth Black Wills and her now husband Mike Wills, previously lived in New Haven and went on a delegation in 1993.



Delegates Morgan, Crecent and Izabel painting shelves for new library space.

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The Art of Confronting Global Warming



Graph above shows historic increase in greenhouse gas emissions ... and likewise reflects the increase in public climate art in New Haven! The question is whether art making can keep pace with our continuing GHG increases!! For a solution see p.5. Photos: Upper left, Statue of Liberty from Fossil Fuel decorated with vines and critters at East Rock Festival; Left, poster by volunteer artist Ashanti Shih; below street art on sea level rise as part of Park(ing) Day.



"Normal..." Continued...

man to come back from work." There are thousands of situations like this throughout our country.

In the schools talking about sex is taboo, although the Ministry of Education boasts of the existence of a guide for students on sex education. But teachers are not trained to discuss these issues with their students. And how could they do it if they themselves suffer violence at home? In the middle of the school year, a teacher was killed by her partner at the gate of her school. Although we have a comprehensive law that protects the rights of women, impunity, corruption and a lack of resources to handle cases of violence are very apparent when women must visit police stations.

In Leon, we have three alternative centers that provide support to women, and some other NGOs also work in the communities. This has made a difference in the lives of some women. We see the changes - not manipulated statistics - with everyday behaviors reflecting that Goyena women have a greater awareness of violence. At the start of the program, women believed it was best to not interfere with a couples' private affairs and to leave disputes to be resolved by the partners despite apparent domestic violence. Today we have a network of promoters involved, and they help accompany women and report any violence whether the victim wants to file a complaint or not. Goyena women now see violence against women as a public health problem.

Promoter Martha Osejo shared in a workshop: "I never felt that when my husband yelled at me I was being violated, I felt that was the only way to settle our differences. But it never works out, and that cycle of violence was repeated many times with my son and my daughter. I deprived my daughter of many things in her childhood because she was a girl. And my son who is younger than my daughter always received everything ! A while ago - and I still remember the first time I sincerely talked to my husband - and said quietly, 'I am a human being who feels, and I deserve the same respect you demand for yourself. Please do not shout.' Then I began to choose strategies that would prevent violence in my home and would help sensitize my partner about this problem. Acting to prevent and eradicate violence is not a job just for us women. It involves all of us because violence affects all of us."

Erendira Vanegas directs the Women's Program and coordinates the Intern and Delegation programs in León.

Get Involved!

Intern in Nicaragua or New Haven. Public Health, Rural Education, Theater, Climate Change.

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Join an Intergenerational Family Delegation, July 2015.

More info at nh@newhavenleon.org

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JCC Preschools leader aids students, teachers in Nicaragua

Excerpted from a January 17, 2014, Jewish Press of Tampa article.

Since 2010, Dr. Jennifer Goldberg has made seven trips to León, Nicaragua, to aid young schoolchildren and teachers.

And even though she began reaching out to students and teachers in that town before assuming her post last year as executive director of Early Childhood at Tampa JCC Preschools, it is fully in keeping with an ongoing effort by the Tampa JCC to engage in one of Judaism's most important doctrines – Tikkun Olam (repair of the world). The Tampa JCC and Federation have given her education and support to continue her efforts in Nicaragua, she said. For example, Ivett Fonseca, education coordinator in Nicaragua, came to Tampa JCC Preschool last October observe in classrooms and to meet with teachers to discuss possible strategies that could be used by teachers in her nation, Goldberg said.

Her involvement with students and teachers in Nicaragua began when she was an associate professor in Early Childhood Education at Fairfield University in Connecticut. "I began working with preschool and after school teachers in Nicaragua through the New Haven/Leon Sister City Project while with the university."

Goldberg moved to Tampa in 2012 and in April of 2013 she joined the JCC Preschool as assistant director, then became executive director of Early Childhood in August.

Most of Goldberg's time has been focused on education in Goyena, a rural community outside of León, which was displaced by Hurricane Mitch in 1998 – a deadly hurricane that killed 11,000 people and left 11,000 missing.



Jen Goldberg demonstrating teaching methods in Goyena.

On her first trip, she spent time observing in classrooms and talking with teachers, students and parents. She found major issues affecting the quality of education. For example, there was an absence of books and extremely limited supplies in the schools, particularly in Goyena. "While we did note that the older elementary students had individual notebooks and pencils, there were no other books seen in any of our Goyena observations," she noted.

Teachers and students in Nicaragua face so many hurdles every day. Teachers receive limited teacher training and their salaries are extremely low, especially in rural areas, requiring most of them to hold second or third jobs just to earn a living. They work in classes with large teacher-to-student ratios and very little teaching support. Standards are presented very differently in an effort to keep children at different schools at the same level; there are maximum standards (i.e., a child will learn numbers up to 10, but not past 10 in preschool) rather than minimum standards (i.e., a child will learn numbers at least up to 10).

To help improve the schools, Goldberg has led workshops and facilitated discussions on several topics, including early literacy skills,

early math skills, the importance of play in early childhood, building relationships between home and school, daily, routines, and more, and says she has seen improvements to the local school since the exchange program began.

The preschool classrooms now have colorful, educational posters on their walls and a wide range of materials to use during activities. Their classrooms are becoming more structured and their lessons incorporate best practices.

Goldberg describes a lesson where the teacher worked with 5-year olds on addition and subtraction, using multiple strategies and a variety of tools, such as fingers, objects (bottle tops), and writing on the floor with chalk. Children were engaged and all were actively participating. "Other than the use of the floor, this lesson could have come straight out of a textbook," she said.

Working directly with preschool teachers and afterschool teachers, Goldberg has helped shape preschool classrooms where teachers are using current best practices and children are engaged and excited to learn.

She witnessed teachers who previously had no formal training teaching creative, hands-on math lessons and students raising their hands to participate and share their responses.

Goldberg said that despite the hurdles the teachers and students face, "I have met amazing teachers who are passionate and remain positive. They bring energy to the classroom and care deeply for their students. Furthermore, they are truly grateful for both supplies and ideas about teaching."

Organize a Coin Drive in Your School
to support education in rural Nicaragua.

For more info contact Chris at nh@newhavenleon.org

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NHLSCP 30th Anniversary Celebration a Big Success



On October 18th, just under 100 friends and family members of the Project came together to celebrate the Project's 30 years of solidarity and friendship. That evening \$4,100 was raised for the Education Fund. Also, during the anniversary year over \$25,000 was raised in a special capital campaign to replace our vehicle in León. The evening included a number of wonderful story tellers sharing how they have been impacted by their Nicaraguan experiences. Thanks to all who joined in to support and celebrate our work for peace and justice!

Photos: Top, Aaron Jafferis MCing and sharing from his journal; Middle, former Executive Director Kate Landon and former Board member Joy Gordon; Bottom, present Board members Henry Lowendorf and William Vazquez and guest Nohora Garcia.

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