

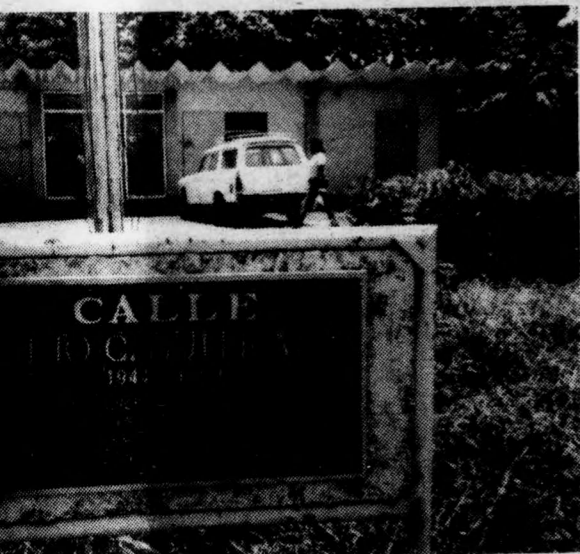
Journal



family - at home in Estelí.



Fernando, a Sandanista army soldier.



Managua
e against oppression and for the liberation
e are paying not only the price of our blood
our dearest being.



Children in Estelí

Aug. 24:

Estelí hospital tour. An American doctor, a volunteer, is speaking. He admits that the government has made mistakes, economic and political, but, he says, without the war the problems could be handled. "Without the war," he says bitterly, "I wouldn't be seeing eighteen year olds shot through the belly or with their feet blown off. The Reagan line, that people who kill children and slit people's throats are freedom fighters, is a tragic lie."

As we are leaving the hospital, we pass by an open door. Looking in, I see a young man in uniform leaning against a baby's crib, sound asleep. The baby is sleeping peacefully, snuggled against the soldier's arm.

Aug. 28:

At the central union hall, Estelí. The Despedida (farewell party) is under way. The room is crowded. It's a warm night. Latecomers have to stand. Families, children, old folks, officials - everyone is here for the farewell ceremony. After the official speeches, a local band begins to play. Guitars and drums echo through the room. Children watch the dancers from the sidewalk, laughing as they crowd against the windows.

Later, I walk home with neighbours from our barrio. It's dark and quiet. After we say goodnight, I stop and listen to the night sounds. Toads are singing their strange bop, bop - they sound like a video space game, unearthly. Now and then a dog barks. As always, music comes from one house or another. The neighbourhood seems peaceful, but walking by the community centre, I glance in and see people picking up their guns for the nightly guard duty. A reminder that Estelí is part of Region I, a war zone.

Aug. 29:

Time to say goodbye. I hug the girls as they leave for school. Israel shakes my hand, hesitates, then comes back for a hug. Papa Danilo asks how I feel. He knows it's hard to go. Elena, snuggled on my lap, smiles and shouts, "Aquí ni se rinde nadie!" (The national slogan - here no one surrenders!) Danilo roars with laughter. As I walk away, they stand in the doorway and wave. I can hear Elena calling "Adios, adios, Aunt Alba" until I turn the corner. (Alba is Spanish for Dawn.)

Aug. 30:

After a weekend in Managua, we are on our way home. At the stopover in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, a dark, heavyset man approaches our group. He tells us that he is a Cuban American. Noticing that we've just come from Managua, he feels compelled to mention that he was with the CIA for fourteen years. He smirks, "How are things in Nicaragua?"

And how are things in Nicaragua? A people are struggling, with the odds against them, to build a society that offers all its people the opportunity to live in peace and dignity. All things considered, they're doing all right. Things are tough, but so are they.

By DAWN LEAVITT

Dawn Leavitt is a fourth year student at Saint Thomas University. Dawn is presently taking Third World Studies and is active in other social reform groups locally.