

A

Nicaraguan

In 1985, I visited Nicaragua for the first time as a participant in a Peace March. This summer, I returned to Nicaragua a second time to take part in an educational program offered by the Nuevo Instituto de Centroamérica (NICA). In addition to offering Spanish language instruction, seminars and field trips, the program also allowed for community involvement. I was billeted with a local family which helped to round out the educational experience and occasional free weekends enabled me to do some independent travel. The NICA school is situated in the town of Estelí, ninety miles north of Managua. The following article is adapted from journal entries and letters written during my five week stay.

July 27:

The Lagos family home, Jaime Ubeda barrio, Estelí. Late afternoon: I'm writing at the only table in the house, in the family living room. Through the wrought iron window frame, I can see a black and red flag stirring in the warm breeze. My Nica "family" is headed by Danilo - a middle aged upholsterer. Now a community activist, in Somoza's time he was a clandestine organizer for the Sandinista Front (FSLN) that ousted Somoza in 1979. Mama Francesca is a seamstress. Five girls from sixteen to three years old, and a twelve year old cousin, Israel, make up the family. The youngest, Elena, is the only one born since the revolution. "Elena is a Sandinista", her mother says with pride. The house is modest but comfortable. A copy of DaVinci's "Last Supper" hangs over the kitchen doorway. In another room a colour print of Sandino has the place of honour.

Aug. 19:

Evening seminar at the Nica school. The Mothers of Heroes & Martyrs are speaking. Often called simply the "Madres", they are mothers who have lost children in the revolution or the contra war.

Alejandra, sixty years old, mother and grandmother: "For those of us who have lost our own, all revolutionary Nicaraguans are our children." Her grandfather fought in Sandino's army in the 1930's, when they drove the U.S. marines out of Nicaragua. During the dictatorship of Somoza, she helped the Somocista police. "My husband didn't know until one day he looked under the bed for his shoes and found the guns." She laughs. "He was scared and wanted me to stop." She didn't. One son, Oscar, was killed in the 1979 insurrection. She says simply, "I had my children for the liberation of Nicaragua."



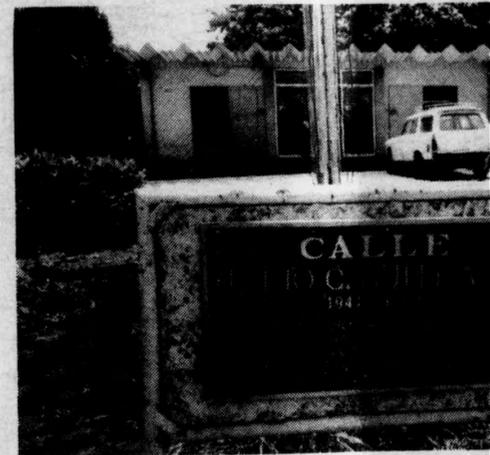
Children in Estelí



Cathedral in Leon, Nicaragua.



My host family - at home in Es



A street sign, Managua
...For the struggle against oppression and
of our people, we are paying not only the
but with tears of our dearest being.

Aug. 22:

León. Sunlight streaming in the doorway lights the marble beams polished smooth from years of worshipping hands. The ceiling arches high above us, dwarfing the faithful at their prayers. This ancient cathedral houses the remains of famous Central American poet Rubén Darío. It feels grand, but a little cold. I think I know why the poor prefer to worship in the warm informality of their simpler neighbourhood churches.

Driving out of the city at dusk, we pass another cathedral. Candlelight flickers in the open doorway as people make their way to the evening mass. As we drive home to Estelí on the darkening highway, throngs of fireflies light up the night.