

El Encaminador

Our Fearless Leaders

After sending out our first newsletter, we realized that we forgot to introduce some very important people and members of our group. They have been there for us every step of the way. Here's a little insight into the four fearless leaders who hold us all together.

Dr. Irene B. Hodgson - Irene has been a part of the Xavier community since 1986 as a professor of Spanish and directs the Latin American Studies minor. She has been working with the Academic Service Learning Semesters for ten years. Irene has been with us in Nicaragua since January 19th, the day we arrived, and returns to Xavier on March 10th. Her time with us is spent filling our heads with Nicaraguan culture and history, especially during our Culture and Society class.

Dr. Natalia Jacovkis - Natalia has been a part of the Xavier community since 2007 as a professor of Spanish. This is her first experience with the Academic Service Learning program. She arrived in Nicaragua on February 16th and will be leaving March 27th. As she is from Argentina, she is able to share her knowledge and perspective both as a professor and a Latin American. Her time in Nicaragua is being spent teaching our Culture and Society and Service Learning classes as well as leading us through our week in EL Salvador (March 7th-March 15th).

Alejandro Mandel - Alejandro has actually not begun his Nicaraguan adventure with us yet. He arrives March 23rd and will bring us back to Cincinnati on April 23rd. He has been a part of the Xavier community since 2006 as a professor of Spanish. We are looking forward to his arrival and the different-Chilean-perspective he will bring to the experience.

Kevin Edward Fitzgerald - Kevin is currently in the process of getting his masters in Latin American Studies from Ohio University. He is the trip assistant and is the person who is going to be in Nicaragua with us for the entire time that we are here. Kevin came to Nicaragua in 2004 on the ASLS Nicaragua program, and graduated from Xavier in 2006 with his degree in Philosophy, Politics, and the Public.

Issue 2

Class and Culture Connections: Celebrating the Music of Nicaragua

By Erika Vickers

Our Nicaragua group attended two concerts by native Nicaraguans during the week of February sixteenth, featuring the famous brothers Carlos Mejia Godoy and Luis Mejia Godoy. These performances provided a real life connection to topics we have been discussing in our Culture and Society class, specifically the music native to Nicaragua. Carlos and Luis are known throughout Nicaragua for their traditional Nicaraguan music, which features drums, guitars, singing, and even some shouting and dancing. These two concerts provided our group with a taste of Nicaraguan culture and a look into what creates pride in the hearts of the Nicaraguan people. In our Culture and Society class, we spent time previewing the songs of the Mejia Godoys, so that we could be introduced to the rhythms and digest the themes and vocabulary of this music. The message of their music comes from the romantic music characteristic of Latin America, music from the Nicaraguan revolution of the 70s and 80s, and music on contemporary themes and topics regarding the global society of today.

We came to a better understanding of the Nicaraguan people's appreciation for this music when we saw the artists perform it in living, breathing, color. The first concert that our group enjoyed was part of the Third Annual Granada International Poetry Festival on February 16. Our group made the hour-long drive to Granada, the former capital of Nicaragua to celebrate poetry with people from countries around the world and even with the vice president of Nicaragua, Jaime Morales Carazo. The festival was a beautiful expression of not only appreciation for this fine art, but also of unity between all members of the human race across the globe. The night began with poetry readings from representatives from fifteen different countries, including South Africa, Iraq, Ecuador, Morocco, and the United States. All poems were read in their original language and translated to Spanish for the spectators present. The themes expressed by the poets ranged from politics, to national pride, to globalization, and feminism. Carlos Mejia Godoy lit up the stage after the readings. With national pride and Latin rhythm, Carlos belted out the lyrics that commemorated his country's past and the individuality of the people of Nicaragua today. Dressed in a black suit and laden with guitar, he stretched out his arms, lifted his head high, and sang out to commemorate his people. The crowd, including both young and old, was thoroughly engaged, responding with shouts and laughter, joy and pride. It was a wonderful feeling to stand in unity with members from many countries, celebrating with the Nicaraguan people the joys that come from national identity and cultural individuality.

Our second concert we attended was that of Luis Mejia Godoy on February 19, which took place at a local restaurant and night club of Managua, named Ruta Maya. This was a unique experience, for this time we brought with our group the Jesuit Volunteers currently in Managua and also members of our *barrio* which caused us to be packed in like sardines. In true Nicaraguan fashion, the male members of our group that could not fit in the bus had to jump into the back of a neighbor's pickup truck and follow as our caboose. At Ruta Maya, our group soaked up the atmosphere, with its thatched roof and lively tables; it was a full house that had members of all age groups present. After chatting and getting to know each other's families, the concert began. We were again filled with aroma of pure joy and pride from the Nicaraguan people, as the spectators stared with starry eyes at Luis as he sang of romance, where they hollered chants to revolutionary songs, such as "Viva Sandino!" ("Long live Sandino"), a national hero, and laughed at the witty lyrics of songs based on contemporary society today. Our hearts melted as we saw the pride on the faces of our family members for their unique culture and passionate history of their country of Nicaragua.

Our group definitely enjoys an original experience of intellectual and experiential integration here in Nicaragua. We, as students, have never personally experienced an academic pursuit of this nature before, where everything we learn can be directly applied, reinforced, and personally appreciated in our daily lives. Hearing the music native to one country can be an interesting experience, but when one sees a sea of people clapping in unison in a city square and the beaming faces of family members that one personally knows singing with all the energy that they possess to the music of their own country, one can truly be wrapped up in their experience and come to know what it means to live in a different culture. This is the experience that we are blessed to have here in *Nicaragua, Nicaragüita (dear little Nicaragua)*.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

-There are still openings in the ASLS Over-the-Rhine, Ghana, and Nicaragua 2009-2010. Contact Dr. Irene B. Hodgson for more details at hodgson@xavier.edu.

-Mark your calendars! For May 1st at 4:00 p.m. in Kelley Auditorium for the Nicaragua 2009 presentation

- If any of you would like to contact any members of the group you can contact Irene B. Hodgson at the above address or mail a letter to us at :

APDO-161
Managua, Nicaragua
Central America

Blandón Family Profile : The Family of Michael Jonagan

By Michael Jonagan

The basic facts of my Nicaraguan family are these: my parents, Humberto and Ivania, and my siblings, Ivan (13) and María Natalia (15). Beyond this bare biographical threshold, my family opens into a treasury of stories and personalities. Ivania does for food what Michelangelo did for marble. I never want for delicious meals, and will almost certainly return to Cincinnati heavier than when I left. When she is not composing culinary symphonies, Ivania finds time to sew, follow her favorite soap operas (*telenovelas*) and poke fun at me for my woefully inadequate grasp of the Spanish language. This is actually something of a pastime for Ivan and María Natalia (Nati) as well, although because they are both learning English, we get to correct each other. Currently, I know

more about American pop culture than I have ever before, as Ivan, Natí, and I tend to bond over *The Simpsons*, music videos, and discussions of American slang. They are both extremely bright, and I am a little embarrassed to say that I am lagging behind both of them in hours spent on homework. I could say this as well for my father, Humberto, who routinely spends 14 hours or more working as an agronomist, in the field, in the office, and at home. He still finds time to chat with me about *fútbol*, politics, or his own family history. This last subject is important, because his family, the family that has adopted me, lives, with few exceptions, 20-100 feet from our house. The block is dominated by my family, which in turn is dominated by Doña Maria Francisca. At 90, Doña Francisca is a walking history tome. Her father worked for the revolu-

tionary Sandino, and she herself has lived through three dictators, a revolution, two earthquakes, and most recently 16 years of neoliberalism. Her children Amada, Marta, Aura, Marvin, Oscar, and Humberto are my family, and each has welcomed me warmly. I've even spent time with two of Francisca's great grandchildren, Memo and Jenny, who have taught me the ways of *primero-segundo* (kickball) and *arriba* (tag). I am always surrounded by the sights and sounds of my family, and with all of their care and attention, I have hardly had time to be homesick. More than the countless souvenirs and painful sunburn, I will walk away from this semester with new parents, new siblings, and a new, broad, and bilingual definition for *familia*.

Mi Familia Nicaragüense : The family of Mary Knauff

By Mary Knauff

My Nicaraguan family consists of Doña Nieves, my mother; Nieves Lisette, my sister; and *huracán* Marián, my adorable 16-month-old niece. Doña Nieves is quite simply the most amazing person I have ever met. She is a revolutionary woman who exudes confidence in her beliefs about life and society. From dawn until dusk she diligently fulfills a variety of roles, including business owner, mother, grandmother and community organizer. Every morning I wake up to the sound of Doña Nieves already busy washing and preparing the house for another long day of life. In addition to her household work she runs a sewing shop out of the front of her house and is heavily involved in various community activities, including a leadership role in the CPC (*Consejos de Poder Ciudadano* /Councils of Citizen Power) in the barrio, where she helps organize

events, such as the recent health brigade in which doctors gave free exams to over one hundred people in the *barrio*. Living with her is a truly unique experience as every night after I consume the amazingly delicious and amazingly large plate of food that she prepares for me, she tells me stories of her life in the *campo* and during the revolution and counter-revolution. My sister Nieves Lisette attends the *Universidad Nacional Agraria* where she studies *Zootecnia: Sistemas Integrales en Producción Animal*. Nieves works very hard in her studies, in her housework and in her care for Marián. She also works quite hard to hold back her laughter every time I completely butcher the Spanish language. We quite frequently enjoy boisterous laughing sessions at my inept Spanish skills. Finally, *huracán* Marián is a typical 16-month-old, full of energy and always

getting into things. Her favorite activity is to come into my room and steal my hairbrush and my alarm clock. She also enjoys climbing the front gate, unrolling the toilet paper roll, and putting anything she can find into her mouth, hence why I dubbed her *huracán* Marián. Despite her orneriness, I very much enjoy her energy and her playfulness and I light up every morning when I see her beautiful face. These amazing women have welcomed me into their lives with open arms and I am very grateful for their solidarity and hospitality. I know I will walk away from this experience gaining new personal and intellectual insights, as well as gaining a few extra pounds from the insane amount of food that they feed me every day.

Se fue la luz

By Anna Russell

Around me everything has gone dark. “La luz! Se fue.” I hear my Nicaraguan mother yelling in the kitchen. I blink my eyes, adjusting to the newfound darkness. For yet another time, the electricity has gone out in our Managuan barrio of Nicaragua. From my bedroom, I hear flashlights clicking on and a candle being lit as Doña Coco, the matron of the house, continues cooking the family dinner... without electricity.

I walk to the front patio and stare into the darkness. Usually brightened by streetlights and children playing beneath their light, the barrio takes on a strange eerie glow without electricity or sounds of televisions streaming from houses. My younger brother Osman joins me on the patio, bringing with him the quiet smell of *plátanos* roasting on the stove. Without his music to listen to, we begin talking as we look out into the empty streets. “How’d school go,” I ask. “Ah, *más o menos*... It was hot today.”

We talk about how we both woke up sweating today—as the heat of Holy Week, the hottest seven days of the year, has arrived early—and about how strong Osman is becoming.

“I did one hundred push-ups today,” Osman says with a glimmer of pride.

“Wow, Osman, you’re going to beat your *tío* Martín in arm wrestling,” I say, punching him lightly on the arm.

“Hah!” he laughs. “Never will I do that. *Tío* Martín was a soldier in the ‘80s. No one can beat him. But I just want to beat those guys...” Osman gestures to the corner of our street. In the darkened street corner, a group of seven neighborhood men linger menacingly, as they gulp down liters of *Toña* (the Nica beer of choice).

“Don’t go out alone tonight,” Osman tells me, “It’s dangerous.

And it will get more dangerous as the night goes on.”

I nod knowingly. Each day, my Nicaraguan family warns me of the rising security issues in our *barrio*. When our Nicaraguan mothers sit around with *frescos* (Nicaraguan fruit drinks), they frequently talk about security. With the worldwide financial crisis exacerbating the 70% unemployment rate in Nicaragua, crime has seemed to increase in our *barrio*, *Catorce de junio*, also called *La Luz*.

My younger sister Natalie joins us on the patio, bringing her homework and a flashlight. In the still hot air, she whispers across the table, “Se fue la luz.”

And the saying I hear so often in my house seems to take on another meaning: one of a *barrio* darkening because of lack of money and jobs, witnessing a heightening of crime and violence and struggling to make ends meet without resorting to the easier entrepreneurship of drug trafficking. *La luz* seems to have left the barrio, both figuratively and literally. (*Luz* is translated as light)

But then the lights flicker back on. Once again, the street comes to life. Children shriek with delight as the hot air lifts their little kites high into the sky. The group of *Toña*-drinking men slinks into the shadows. A pick-up soccer game starts on my street, the goal laid out between a rock and an abandoned shoe. Osman grabs my hand, “Anna, let’s play!” We run into the half-light of the streetlights, shooting soccer balls and running and yelping with the rest of the neighborhood kids.

And the soccer game continues as the stars burn brighter in the sky when our Nicaraguan mothers call us inside for dinner. Another night, another game, and still, the lights flicker.

Our Excursion to Matagalpa

Friday evening as we were driving through the Nicaragua countryside, someone called out, “Look up at the sky!” We then took turns sticking our heads out the window and admiring the incredible mass of stars that stared back at us. So beautiful. We were able to see so many stars because we were driving into the campo, or rural area of Nicaragua. That night once we entered the small city of Matagalpa, we passed many tiny lights of houses that were scattered throughout the mountains.

After ascending an enormous hill, our bus screeched to a stop in front of the *Casa Materna*, a home for at-risk pregnant women to stay in the last few weeks before their pregnancy. After we woke up on Saturday morning, we met the director of *Casa Materna*, who told us that we could accompany the pregnant mothers on their morning walk. We were each paired up with a mother and walked up a rocky hill to a beautiful garden. In the garden, we did stretching and breathing exercises together, and then we walked back down the hill to the *Casa* to prepare for our day.

First, we visited a school and park for children with disabilities called *Familias Especiales*. We all decided that it was one of the most colorful and fun parks that we have ever visited. After talking to the director Sr. Rebecca, walking through the classrooms and therapy rooms, and trying to cram all ten of us into a spinning sphere, we left to eat lunch and go to our next meeting.

Our next experience was very powerful and inspirational because we were immersed in the story of a man who struggled against the injustice that many Nicaraguan *campesinos* face. We had heard parts of the story of Vicente Martín Padilla, a coffee farmer in the *campo* of Matagalpa, before we arrived, but it was very powerful to hear him share his story at his farm with his family. Vicente fought in the Sandinista revolution in the 1970s against the brutal dictator Somoza. When the Sandinistas defeated the dictatorship in 1979, Vicente worked to help organize farmers into cooperatives to harvest food for the population. However, when the contra war, financed by the United States, began in the 1980s and many of the farms were bombed, Vicente’s farmers began to fight in the war. In 1990, when the US-backed candidate for president was elected, the war ended and Vicente bought some land for a farm in 1991. He lived on this land with his family in peace until 1998, when a rich Nicaragua named McEwen, who had owned part of Vicente’s land before 1979, began violently threatening to leave the farm. Instead of using violence in return, Vicente used his camera and tape recorder to inform Nicaraguans and internationalists about the injustice he was confronting. Thanks to this public broadcasting, Vicente was able to gain national and international support for his cause and McEwen has mostly ceased his persecution of Vicente and his family.

After visiting Vicente, we talked to Corina Centeno, a woman who works for FETSALUD, the healthcare workers’ union, about the government’s attempts to create records of the health status of all Nicaraguans. The next morning, we watched a movie about Benjamin Linder, a young engineer who worked in Nicaragua during the Contra War building hydro-electric dams for the people of the countryside. During the war, however, he was ambushed by the US-backed Contras and killed. We then visited his grave and read the journal of Ben’s friend Lillian Hall who was working in Nicaragua when he his murder occurred.

Following this visit, we went to the gallery of the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs and met with a mother of a young Nicaraguan who was killed in the Contra War. She cried as she told her son’s story. She said that the pain was still very near to her heart, but she was grateful that she could share her story with us. After this meeting, we got back on the bus and headed home to our Nicaraguan families in Managua. It was a weekend to reflect on both the reality of suffering and injustice here and the reality of strength and determination, which moves the people to attempt to overcome them.

Pajarito Azul



Photo compliments up the Pajarito Azul website

Josie and Jena here, and we would like to give you a little insight into our service site: *Pajarito Azul*. *Pajarito Azul* serves as a home for children and adults with disabilities. These disabilities range from Cerebral Palsy and Down Syndrome to blindness and autism. At *Pajarito* they provide physical rehabilitation as well as teaching skills such as art and sewing. There are over one hundred children and adults who live at *Pajarito* and about twenty of them are able to attend school during the day. The residents of *Pajarito* are assigned to rooms based on age, mobility, and the type of care that they need. During the day we each work in different rooms with our own group. Jena works with the *Delfines* (Dolphins) group. This group consists of adolescents and adults ranging in age from twelve to fifteen. Josie works with the *Ositos* (Little Bears) group. This group consists of children ranging in age from two to seventeen. Each room has one *educadora* (here *caregiver*, although frequently this word means “teacher”) who is responsible for meeting the basic needs of 10-15 children and adults with special needs. Our job during the day is to assist the *educadoras* in any way possible. Seeing as they obviously have their hands full meeting basic needs, there is not often time left for play. We often take the members of our rooms outside to play or take a stroll around the playground; however, if it is too windy our *educadoras* warn us about the dust and ask that we stay inside. Meal times are rather hectic because almost everyone needs assistance. The *educadoras* are grateful for any help we can offer at snack and lunch times. Although at times working at *Pajarito* can be an exhausting experience, receiving hugs and morning greetings in the park makes getting up every morning worth it. We have been amazed at how quickly friendships can form and we are thankful that *Pajarito Azul* has welcomed us into their community. If you are interested in learning more about *Pajarito Azul* or want to check out some pictures, you can visit their website. It’s in Spanish, so grab your dictionaries!



The Xavier ASLS Nicaragua group at Pajarito Azul with Héctor —who asked for this photo with the group. Héctor suffers from brittle bone disease. For those from previous groups who know him: he is now 15 and has been attending school since 2004. Back row L to R: Molly Rehak, Erika Vickers, Kevin Fitzgerald, Mary Knauff, Irene Hodgson. Front row L to R: Josie Watson, Mary Renda, Anna Russell, Paul (Pablo) Madden, Héctor, Michael Jonagan, J. Michael Delaney, Jena Galster.