

ASLS Nica Times

Issue 2

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Students Visit With Famed Jesuit Fernando Cardenal

He's marvelous, awe-inspiring, and a witness for Jesus in the world, not to mention he also has a famous brother in poet Ernesto Cardenal. He's Fernando. Still a member of the Society of Jesus after holding the Minister of Education position in the Sandinista government between 1984 and 1990 from which he spearheaded the Literacy Crusade, Fernando Cardenal took time out of his busy schedule as head of the Fe y Alegria popular education schools run by the Jesuits to speak to us for our theology class. However, in his opinion, none of these were the most important moments of his life. He would argue that one of them was his going to Medellín, Colombia where his entire life changed. As a Jesuit in Medellín he got to know the poor and their predicament in a way that he had not before; this was not coming from a classroom. He saw the *barrio* in which he lived as a "lake of suffering" without hope. Children ate bread and sugar water. Young women entered the city to become prostitutes. Children went through the garbage for the leftovers from the meals the Jesuits ate. After realizing through this experience he couldn't put up with such inequalities he was sent back to his home of Nicaragua to be the Vice-Rector at the UCA (University of Central America). Even though he did not want to go, but he made a promise to his friends before leaving Medellín that he would work for justice and fight for the liberation of the poor. His oath was soon put to the test when he found himself in the middle of a struggle between students and the Rector of the university; the students wanted more say in the administration among other

reforms. Fernando decided to speak on the side of the students and as a consequence lost his job. He then taught Philosophy at the National University during the Somoza era in which he lost 14 of his students to the revolutionary struggle. He met FSLN Commandante Marcos who gave him the name "Justo," meaning justice, for his frankness and perseverance. After playing a part in the cutting off of US aid to the Guardia troops, Fernando dedicated his time to the Literacy Crusade of the 1980s in which he enlisted 60,000 young volunteers, called *brigadistas*, to educate Nicaraguans in reading and writing despite threats from the Contras (counter-revolutionaries). Fernando at first ordered thousands of books and uniforms on his own but soon found help in fellow countrymen and Jesuits. Many *brigadistas* were attacked by Contra troops but the young volunteers were not



The group posing with Fernando Cardenal at his office in the Fe y Alegria center.

terred: "No quiero abandonar mis campesinos" ("I do not want to abandon my peasants.") But the most moving experience for him was when a young girl who had been eaten up by insects refused to let Fernando buy her chemicals to fumigate her room, because they would hurt the baby with whom she shared her room. She reminded him of living in community and sharing with others. Fernando found inspiration in these young volunteers and his past students who put themselves in harm's way for something they believed in.

Who Teaches Us Spanish?



Ramon Zerón (on the left) is from Jinotepe, about an hour out of Managua. He discovered his love for drawing when he was a young boy and has since childhood wanted to repair cars. His mother would not let him though and advised him to study teaching; he now enjoys working with cars in his free time. His favorite color is red in homage to Sandino and his time served in war. Stay tuned for the next newsletter as we meet the terrible twin.



Matagalpa Mountain Trip Leaves Nica Group Caffeinated and Muddy

The first overnight trip of the semester for the Xavier group was to the mountainous city of Matagalpa. The temperature was cold but our desire to visit the mountains was not. The group travelled three hours in the *microbús* to get there. The first thing that they saw when they rolled into town was a park designed for special needs and handicapped children and its creator, Sister Rebecca Trujillo, an American nun in the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and close friend of Theology professor Coach Mike Gable. (An interesting side note is that the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur is based in Cincinnati!!) Sister Becky's organization *Familias Especiales*



The Group at Martín Vicente Padilla's

works with providing children with education opportunities despite their handicaps, as well as making wheelchairs for them. We ate lunch at the restaurant that they operates and tasted their homemade yogurt. Next, we went to meet with the health workers' union FETSALUD and heard about the Nicaraguan government's actions aiding health workers. Next, we went to *Casa Materna*, a place where pregnant women who live great distances from the nearest hospital can stay until they give birth. We spent the night there and had a chat with them the next morning about the challenges of childbirth in Nicaragua. Afterward we went on a tour of a muddy coffee

farm and got educated in the University of Life, as Martín Vicente Padilla called it. We learned about all kinds of new fruits and vegetables that live in the tropics, as well as lemons the size of your head. He was one of the most inspiring people that we met on the trip because of the experiences as a teacher during the Literacy Crusade and the wisdom he shared with us. The final thing that we saw was the sunset over the tomb of Ben Linder, a young man who was killed by Contra forces, funded by the American government, after he built a hydroelectric power plant. The mood was increasingly more powerful as we read from the journal of Lillian Hall, an American woman who was there throughout all of the conflicts in the 1980s who knew Ben and was at his funeral.

Ben Linder: A Clown Become Martyr

There is not one week that goes by where we do not think of Ben Linder. He was a young American engineer who dedicated three years of his life to the construction of hydroelectric plants in the villages of El Cuá and San José de Bocay. Ben traveled to Nicaragua during a period of rebuilding after the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, but policy by Presidents Carter and Reagan spoiled the Sandinista dream. During the 1980s

the US funded the Contras in an effort to topple the Sandinista government and, as a result, they targeted all who helped the Sandinistas; even those who only wished to provide running water and electricity for communities in need. Ben was one of the victims of this US-backed Contra policy and ended up giving his life for his dream

of spreading a little happiness. There is a Casa Ben Linder in Managua in his honor where we hear talks every Thursday.

*"you can cut the flowers but
you cannot stop the spring"*
Quote on the Casa Ben Linder



A Hungry Gringo's Take on Nicaragua Cuisine By Brendan Kelly

Our ASLS trip to Nicaragua is an adventure and, with all new places to explore, comes one of my favorite parts, new food to eat. I am one that loves the thrill of trying a new food, but it has come back to hurt me at times (see Tip Top Chicken paragraph below)... Martín Castro, our loyal driver and Father to all is also a big fan of food, and with his wisdom and guidance we have been able to eat at some of the local hotspots. Here I earned the nickname "Reciclaje" from Martín as I was willing to try others' food when they were not. I believe I proved my worth to earn this nickname when I ate three fish eyeballs in Pochomil. While I'm slowing down with my eating nowadays, I wanted to share with you some of my favorite foods and the ratings I

gave them. The scale is from 1 to 5 stars. Enjoy and hopefully you won't get too hungry...

TipTop- Where do I begin... One day after service Tim, Madeline, and I headed over to Metro Centro to try out some food at the local mall. First mistake, we somehow thought that fast food chicken sounded like a grand idea. I ordered a few pieces of chicken and well I was hoping for some good ole fried chicken. But what I got was a few pieces of chicken that I have no idea how long they had been sitting there... Second mistake, I was hungry and went ahead and ate my chicken. And I ended up having some stomach problems the next day right before an eight hour trip on a bumpy, muddy, pothole filled road to the Atlantic Coast. So in

the end, Tip Top gets ½ of a star for, well, being in the mall and having air conditioning.

De Colores- This gets 3 & ¾ of a star (Don't ask questions). This restaurant is one of Martín's favorites, and I quickly became an avid fan as well. It is buffet style which is always a plus for the *gringos* because when we don't remember the word for some exotic food we can just point at it. They have pork, steak, and chicken as well as a variety of side dishes. Overall, a solid lunch spot for anyone thinking of visiting.

Mario's Pizza- I will give this fine family's business 4 and ½ stars. I am no expert, however, this is Megan's host family, and she has been studying under her family's tutelage in order to learn how to

make the perfect pizza. That said we have been fortunate to have Mario's for lunch 2 or 3 times and let me tell you I was surprised. I have an Italian mother, so I have grown up on Italian food, but this pizza was pretty good! They have a variety of toppings, and I personally enjoyed the pepperoni pizza and the Hawaiian!

Dona Adilia Gutiérrez (My host Mom). She receives five stars because her cooking is flat out phenomenal, and if I didn't give her five stars I might be sleeping in the street. Really, though, I have it good with my host mom's cooking. She even gives me snacks and lunches

-to-go for our weekend trips! Below are some of my personal favorites!!

- *Carne de res con gallo pinto y plátanos fritos*. In English it's basically a really good steak, beans and rice, and plantains—which are the potatoes of Central America. She also makes phenomenal *frescos* (fruit drinks) that can be *mandarina*, *limón*, *naranja*, and more.

- *Nacatamal*- It is a dish traditional to Nicaragua. It's usually reserved for Sundays mid-morning. My host mom makes a killer Nacatamal. It is made of corn dough with a filling that consists of pork, potato, tomato, onion, olives, cilantro, and more.

Below (Dona Adilia Gutiérrez and Brendan)



Students and Families Visit San Jacinto and Pochomil Beach

There is a very special feeling that comes over you when you are standing on historical ground on which events we have learned about in our history class occurred and can see everything as the people of that time did. We got to feel this when we ventured to the Hacienda San Jacinto which is a major landmark from the National War. The Battle of San Jacinto took place on this

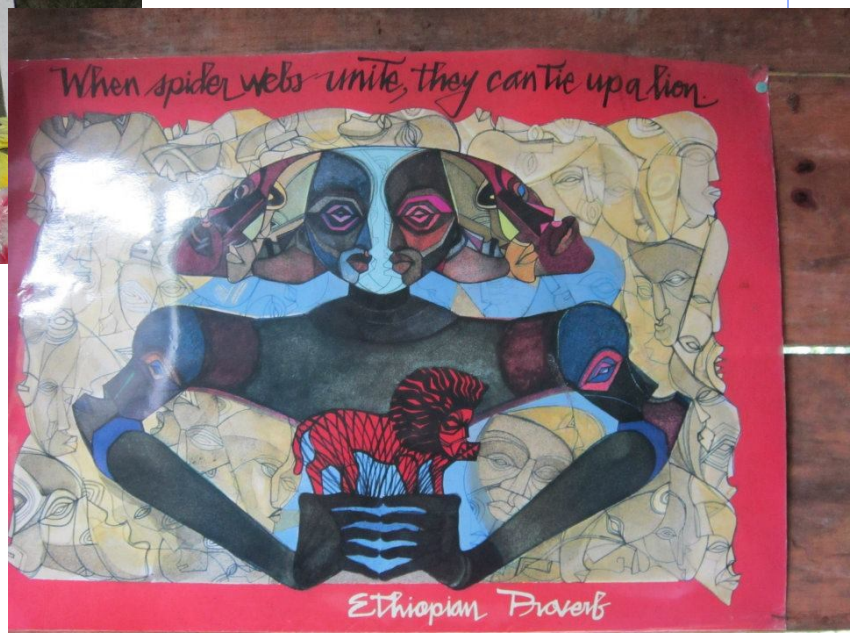
hacienda (farm) in 1856. In this battle 160 Nicaraguans, 60 of them being Indian *flecheros* (archers) from Matagalpa, took on American William Walker and his army of 300 filibusters (hired mercenaries). The Nicaraguan army used their knowledge of the mountainous terrain around the hacienda and military tactics forged by colonel José Dolores Estrada Vado to win a two-

day battle over the American filibusters. A famous personage of the battle is Andrés Castro, who, they say, in the heat of the battle, found himself weaponless and fought with a rock.; this man could be an ancestor of our fearless driver Martín Castro. We spent the rest of the day on Pochomil beach with friends and family. Looking from one side to the other, the sand looked like an endless stretch, and the Pacific Ocean like an infinite horizon. Looking from the land out towards the reflection of the sun on the water, it seemed like an endless unconquered world. But to us it felt close.



Above: A photograph of the tombstone of internationalist Ben Linder

Right: A poster of an Ethiopian proverb hanging at the farmhouse of Martín Vicente Padilla in Matagalpa that shows the strength of family and his ideals.



XAVIER UNIVERSITY

Links to Blogs:

Kelsey Blackwell: <http://kelseyinnica.wordpress.com/>

Madeline Hickey: <http://madelineexploresnicaragua.wordpress.com/>

Megan DeRosier: <http://megansnicadventures.wordpress.com/>

Brendan Kelly
Brendankellynicaragua.wordpress.com

Come to our presentation Friday, April 27, at 4:00 pm in Kelley Auditorium in Alter Hall.

*Soy un indocumentado de la eternidad.
Sin papeles he cruzado las fronteras del tiempo.*

Detenido por los agentes migratorios del nacimiento y de la muerte, he saltado en el tablero de ajedrez de los días.

*I am one of eternity's illegal aliens.
I have crossed time's borders without proper papers*

Detained by the immigration officers of life and death, I have jumped across the chessboard of days.

from "*Por la puerta verde* / "Through the Green Door"

This poem by the Mexican poet Homero Aridjis that he read at the festival inspired further conversation on the theme of immigration from our theology class.

Granada Poetry Festival Worth the Late Night

After a busy day of service and learning, we had the opportunity to visit the beautiful city of Granada, only an hour out of Managua. The atmosphere of the city was unbelievable as the streets were filled with people excitedly walking to their next destination. We were headed for a special night of poetry and music which was very fitting to enjoy on Valentine's Day. The poets were from all across the world, from Canada, to Egypt, to Taiwan and nearly all of the poets spoke in their native tongue. Throughout the night we heard Arabic, French, Russian, Gallego, Taiwanese, Portuguese, and, of course, a great deal of Spanish, both from the poets and our Nicaraguan guests on the trip. There is much to be said about poetry in Nicaragua as it is a very rich part of the culture. In Culture and

Society class, we have learned that poets like Rubén Darío are looked upon as heroes in Nicaragua. We got to see current icon Ernesto Cardenal in action. Although his poem was not the most romantic of the night, it cut straight to the heart as it compared current US foreign policy in Iraq with that in Nicaragua in the 1980s. Ernesto started the night of poetry and music. It was definitely a moment in which you could pick out the Nicaraguan in the crowd as many of them sighed in agreement with the words of Cardenal. Following Cardenal was a vast array of poems, some of them about love, some about war, some that made us sit up in our seats in surprise, and others that put us at ease and sent us on a mental cruise. But all would agree that Luis Enrique Mejía Godoy had

everyone out of their seats by the end of the night, singing such songs as: *Soy de un pueblo sencillo* and *Nicaragua, Nicaragueta*. His genuine excitement and energy had even the elderly Nicaraguans jumping and clapping like the young ones; it was a great sight. The jovial spirit did not end when the concert was over since I am sure many of us found ourselves singing the songs in our heads as we rode back into Managua happy and satisfied.

A special thanks to all members of the group and all of our readers. For further information on Xavier's Academic Service Learning Semesters, contact Dr. Irene B. Hodgson at hodgson@xavier.edu or Kevin Fitzgerald at 513-745-3541.



This newsletter is dedicated to the memory of Andrés Castro as a possible ancestor of valiant driver (and operations coordinator and host father) Martin.