

# Don Paco



**His Life  
Moments Shared**

**Ovide Bastien**

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Published by Ovide Bastien

**ISBN:** [978-2-925157-29-8](https://www.isbn-international.org/product/9782925157298)

Thanks to George Turski for kindly proofreading this book

**Cover:** Don Paco in front of the old cathedral in Managua  
(Photo: Ena Haisel Mondragón)

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Cinco Pinos, the municipality where Don Paco lives, appears in the rectangle on the map

## Foreword

This book paints a portrait of one of my greatest Nicaraguan friends, Francisco Mondragón Escalante, commonly known as Don Paco. A portrait whose brush strokes originate from the parts of his life that I have had the privilege to discover since I first met him in December 2000.

It also relates some of the unforgettable experiences I have shared with him. Experiences lived when organizing the home-stays and development projects of the Dawson College [North South Studies](#) profile in Cinco Pinos<sup>1</sup> from 2000 to 2010. And experiences lived when, following my retirement from Dawson in 2011, I continued finding donors<sup>2</sup> to fund small development projects in the region of Cinco Pinos and working with him in managing these on a volunteer basis and in close collaboration with North South Studies. To name just a couple examples of these: an internet centre to serve schools and a community; or solar powered artesian wells providing water to dozens of families, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Chinandega, Nicaragua.

<sup>2</sup> Some of the donations came from individuals. However, most of them came from a grouping of religious communities in Quebec known as the International Roncalli Foundation, and the [Sisters of St. Joseph](#) in London, Ontario. I have close relationships with the community of nuns known as [Congregation of Notre Dame of Montreal](#), which participates in the Roncalli Foundation and has always made generous annual donations to Dawson's North South Studies ever since it was founded in 1993. And my sister Cécile, who passed away a few years ago, belonged to the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Following the Nicaraguan revolution, which overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in July 1979, Don Paco played a key role in his region. He was given the responsibility of coordinating the National Literacy Crusade in the municipality of Cinco Pinos, which took place from March 23 to August 23, 1980.

After the literacy crusade he headed the post-literacy effort in his region, namely as director of the Adult Education Program in all of the municipalities north of Chinandega. The aim of this program was to completely eliminate illiteracy in these municipalities and assure that the newly alphabetized would go on with their education by completing their grade school.

Both of these responsibilities Don Paco assumed with competency, love and passion. His efforts were crowned with tremendous success.

When Cinco Pinos declared itself free of illiteracy in 1987, it was the very first municipality in the mountainous regions of Nicaragua to do so. And Don Paco was granted a national award for this remarkable achievement.

Don Paco also played a key role in coordinating the North South Studies homestays and development projects in the region of Cinco Pinos from 2000 until 2019. This task was not unlike the work he had carried out during the 1980 literacy crusade. And one that he carried out with the exact same competence, love, and passion he had shown during the literacy crusade.

Countless North South Studies students experienced life altering experiences thanks to the excellent work of Don Paco in organizing homestays and development projects. Rapidly bonding with their host families, the students would refer to their members as 'my father', 'my mother', 'my brother', and 'my sister'. In many respects, this mirrored the kind of

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relationships the literacy brigadistas had fostered in the 1980 National Literacy Crusade.

And countless Nicaraguan families saw their lives considerably improved thanks to the North South Studies projects managed by Don Paco. Improved in terms of education through such initiatives as the high school scholarships, but also in terms of basic infrastructure that added internet centres, water grids, roads, etc.

\*\*\*\*\*

On several occasions over the years I told Don Paco that it would be worth writing a book on his extraordinary life. And I encouraged him to take notes on various aspects of his life, hoping to be able to use these one day to write such a book.

However, he never did take such notes.

During my last visit to Nicaragua in 2018, I was finally able to sit down with him and carried out a few interviews from January 29 to February 5. Some of these took place in the quietness of the Internet classroom of the Las Pozas high school which was then closed to the public. Others took place in his less quiet home with the occasional disturbance of the crowing of a rooster, the blasting sound of a neighbor's music, or a child coming to purchase a popsicle, a small sideline Don Paco has had for many years and that he refers to as "mi pequeño comercio" (my small business).

These interviews were very flexible. I asked Don Paco to talk about a few basic aspects of his life: his youth, his work as an elementary school teacher, his job coordinating the National Literacy Crusade in the municipality of Cinco Pinos in 1980, his involvement with the Dawson College North South Studies field trips to his region, his wife Inesita, his views on religion, etc.

At the beginning of the interviews, I made it clear to Don Paco that I was going to ask him to talk not just about his

achievements in life, but also his trials. For example, the trauma experienced by his wife Inesita during the revolution, one that has transformed her from a normal person to a mentally challenged one. Or the drinking problem he developed during the revolution.

People need to learn about real persons in their full complexity, I stressed.

Because of our long and profound friendship Don Paco accepted my proposal and opened up as one does in a relation of mutual trust.

This first part of this book reproduces the content of these interviews.

\*\*\*\*\*

The second part of this book focuses on the experiences I shared with Don Paco when coordinating the North South Studies field trips, when cooperating with him in small development projects, and when traveling with him to Managua, Ometepe Island, and Diriamba in 2014. I describe these experiences by simply reproducing several extracts of the diary I kept each time I visited Nicaragua.

I convey some of the problems we had to address during field trips, some of the meetings we had in managing projects, some of the joys and very profound and beautiful experiences we had in his family and with students, and even some of the tricks we played on Don Paco

When I was leaving Las Pozas at the end of the first week of February 2018, Don Paco walked into his office and returned with a 118-page document titled “Eliminating Illiteracy in the Municipality of Cinco Pinos”.

“Those of us who worked in the National Literacy Crusade in Cinco Pinos produced this report in 1988. We considered publishing it, but, at the end of the day, it never was

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published. I am lending it to you. However, I want to have it back.”

I was very moved by his gesture.

This document most likely represents the best historical report ever produced on the National Literacy Crusade as experienced in the municipality of Cinco Pinos. And because it means so much to Don Paco, this passionate life-long educator who won a national award because Cinco Pinos was the very first municipality in the mountainous regions of Nicaragua to declare itself free of illiteracy in 1987, I am reproducing it at the end of this book. (See as Annex 1 Eliminating Illiteracy in the Municipality of Cinco Pinos.

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The translation from Spanish to English is my own.

\*\*\*\*\*

In Parts 1 and 2 I have changed the name of a few individuals. When this is the case, the name, when first referred to, is followed by an asterisk.

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Don Paco cutting his birthday cake (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

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# **Part I - His Life**



## **Don Paco's youth**

According to official records in the town of Cinco Pinos, Don Paco was born on January 29, 1939 in La Galera, Honduras, in the municipality of El Corpus, Department of Choluteca. However, according to official records in the Cathedral of Choluteca, he was born on that same day of January but in 1938 and was baptized the following April 4.

His father Álvaro Escalante and his mother María Mondragón Ozorto were from Honduras as are many of those who presently live in the region of Cinco Pinos. They decided to move to La Montaña in the municipality of Cinco Pinos when Don Paco was a small boy.

Álvaro Escalante was a cattleman. Don Paco is not too proud of his father.

“He got my mother pregnant and then left her. He had up to 22 children with various women. Some he had with my mother’s sister, and others with the latter’s daughter,” he points out.

“Some of my half-brothers are living in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. They are very wealthy. When I visit them, they find that I am very poor. They give me clothes and they want to give me money. Once they even offered to build me a beautiful house in Tegucigalpa.

“Move here with us, they told me.

“Because of their attitude, I have decided not to visit them anymore. I am very happy here in Las Pozas, I do not want money. I want to serve people. My roots, my home, are here in Las Pozas and that’s where I want to stay.”

When Don Paco was first living in La Montaña as a child with his mother, they had no place of their own. No house. Eventually she bought a small parcel of land and they built a

house. A very rustic house whose walls were made of closely aligned tree branches and whose roof was made of a kind of straw.

“When it was cold, we would place additional branches on the exterior walls to prevent the wind from getting in. We had no tables and no chairs. There was no such thing as mealtime. We just ate when we were hungry, a bit like my son Wilmer still does today. We had no utensils other than jicaro spoons.<sup>3</sup>

“As children we did not wear clothes. I was going around naked until I was about 8 years old. And I only started wearing sandals when I was about 12 years old.

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<sup>3</sup> The information on Don Paco’s living conditions when he was a child comes from two sources. The interviews he granted me in February 2018, and a very long conversation that Fred Jones and I had with Don Paco and Manuel Martínez on January 19, 2017, recorded in my diary that same day. Don Paco and Manuel both knew one another as children and lived in the same area and conditions. Manuel’s testimony during that same conversation, which I reproduced in my diary, is very moving: “I was born with my two feet turned downwards and inwards. So much so that I was walking as a child, not on the bottom of my feet as one normally does, but rather on the front top part of them. When I would walk on a pebble, I would feel a terrible pain. I walked like that until I was 32 years old. Women were not interested in me because of my handicap. My sister and brother-in-law convinced me that I should try to get operated. So, I went to see a specialist who had a good reputation with such operations. As the operation was expensive, I pretended that I was a beggar in the hope that I would be operated on the basis of charity. When I met the doctor, he examined me, told me he could fix my feet but then added that the operation would cost more than 1,000 dollars. As he knew I did not have that kind of money - that was an immense amount of money in those days! - he quickly brushed me aside. *Did you become a doctor to make money or to help those who need help?* I asked him, staring right into his eyes. He started laughing and told me I was a very talkative person. *Do not laugh at me, I am being very serious*, I insisted. For six days I slept on the floor waiting and waiting. Some nuns would give me food. The hospital eventually ended up accepting to operate me and I was given a bed. I stayed in the hospital for 8 months. When I left, I had made so many deep friends that I wept profusely.”

“We slept on the floor - plain flattened earth - on a mat made of branches.

“We had no sugar, no soap, no rice, and no cooking oil. For cooking we would use either pork fat or butter.

“It was easy in those days to catch fish in the rivers. There were lots of them. Nowadays, one no longer finds fish in our rivers.

“There was no such thing as a hospital or a health center. However, people then were very healthy. There was less sickness than today.

“When a baby was born, the umbilical cord was cut using a red-hot machete. The heat would both prevent infection and stop the bleeding.

“We had no idea who the mayor was and the latter had no role in our life.

“Even though men had a *compañera*, it was normal in those days to have sex with other women. There were no rules. We lived a bit like wild animals, scot-free.

“Seducing a woman, however, was not a simple matter. Nowadays guys will come up to a girl and tell her, ‘I want your vulva’. In those days, such rudeness and vulgarity were unheard of. And women were very reserved.

“My mom would make a living by selling eggs and various other small things to neighbors and also people who lived in the town of Cinco Pinos. We would purchase one block of salt and it would last for one year.

“My mother would tell me, ‘Go up the mountain and find some fruit for us to eat.’

“In those days, doing so was easy as there were lots of fruit in the wild. Mango trees, avocado trees, etc. No apple trees,

however. Some of the fruit that then existed, one no longer finds today. We would even eat roots of various kinds.

“There were many trees and some of them were huge. And the mountains were absolutely beautiful, much more so than today.

When Don Paco was six-years old, a primary school opened in Las Pozas. He attended it from 1946 to 1951 but was not given any official diplomas for this time in school. In those days there were no grades in the schools of Cinco Pinos, he says.

## **From La Montaña, Nicaragua to Choluteca, Honduras**

In 1952, at 14 years old, his mother sent him to Choluteca, Honduras, so that he could complete his grade school and obtain an official diploma. There he lived with his godmother and attended the Dionisio de Herrera boy’s school.

When Don Paco was in grade five the doctor who owned the La Nueva pharmacy in Choluteca asked him if he would like to work for him.

“I accepted the job. It was probably offered to me because of the special relationship that I had developed with the doctor’s mother-in-law. She had become very fond of me.”

Gradually Don Paco drifted away from his godmother and became ever closer to the doctor’s family. To the point that eventually he moved into the doctor’s home.

Don Paco explains how that happened.

“At first I would work every day for the doctor both before and after classes. At 7 am every morning I had to go to the pharmacy, clean the doctor’s desk, and carry out other tasks. After classes I would return and continue working.”

The doctor's wife, Elizabeth (Betty) Pool, who did the pharmacy's accounting, rapidly became very attached to Don Paco. And the doctor also appreciated him ever more, given that he was doing a fair amount of work and doing it faithfully and very well.

“One day the doctor came up to me and declared that from now on, I would no longer be eating and sleeping at my god-mother's place. You're going to be living with us, he told me!”

The doctor paid Don Paco 20 lempiras per month for the work he was performing. And he would always hand over this money he earned to his mother when she would come to visit him in Choluteca.

When he finished grade six in 1956, he was living at the doctor's place. And it is the latter and his wife who paid for his grade six school supplies.

The doctor taught Don Paco how to drive a car and they would often travel to Tegucigalpa together.

After finishing his grade-school in Choluteca, he was granted a scholarship to pursue his high school studies in Tegucigalpa.

“I was too poor to accept it. One had to pay for transportation, clothes, books, etc. and I just didn't have the money for that.”

One day the pharmacy received the visit of a Honduran inspector who explained to the doctor that a law had been passed which stipulated that all workers should be allowed to leave their work by 4 pm.

“To circumvent that law, the doctor decided to adopt me as his own child.”

## **Crisis triggering Don Paco's departure from Choluteca**

Normally Don Paco would have spent the rest of his life in Honduras. He was then 21 years old and was very much appreciated by the family with which he was living. His responsibilities in the pharmacy had expanded over time.

“I had to supervise five employees in the pharmacy, plus the cook, the nanny and the person who took care of the garden. Why did I one day decide to come back to Cinco Pinos in 1959? Because I gradually realized that the doctor was exploiting me.”

Though Don Paco's monthly salary had gradually increased over time from 20 to 60 lempiras, so had the number of hours he had to work and the responsibilities he had to assume.

“I had to work during the week but also on Saturdays and Sundays. On weekends the doctor would send me to his farm to bring back various products. During the year the pharmacy would only close from Thursday to Saturday during Holy Week. That's all.”

The doctor would often inform Don Paco that he and his wife were going to be absent from the pharmacy for a period of time, and that in their absence he would have to assume all responsibilities: supervising the employees, doing the accounting, making the bank deposits, etc.

“Paco, tomorrow we're off to the beach.”

“Paco, next week we won't be home. We're going to El Salvador. You know all the things that have to be done.”

“They would regularly take vacations and I'm the one who always had to stay home to do all the work. Though I admit that they taught me how to work well - something that I'm very proud of - they also exploited me a lot!”

When the doctor and his wife returned from vacations on Saturdays, Don Paco always had to provide them with a

detailed report of everything that had gone on during their absence.

“What really pissed me off is that sometimes when my mother would come to visit me, and this all the way from Cinco Pinos, the doctor would not even give me any time off so I could spend time with her.”

The event that caused a major crisis is the following one.

“One day, the doctor and his wife come up to me and announce a big surprise. Paco, we would like you to come along with us to El Salvador for holidays. Would you like to come?”

“Of course, I was thrilled to go. So, I did all the paperwork one has to do to travel, I got my passport, etc. and prepared my suitcase.

“But look at what happened at the end of the day.

“Here we are preparing to leave. I carry all the suitcases to the car... We’re ready to go.

“The doctor asks me to take the car to the gas station to have it thoroughly checked and to gas up.

“I return from the gas station, place all the suitcases into the car, and then we all have supper together in the house. Our plan is to leave bright and early in the morning at about 4 am and I’m beaming with joy at the idea of holidaying in El Salvador for a week and getting time off from work.

“As we’re having supper I casually ask, just by curiosity: Who’s going to take over the pharmacy during our absence?”

“The doctor and his wife look at me: My God! We totally forgot to ask for someone to replace you! Unfortunately, you’re going to have to stay, Paco.

“I did my best to react calmly, but deep inside I was very hurt and boiling mad.

“I had spent the entire previous day saying goodbye to the employees of the pharmacy, telling them about my one-week holiday in El Salvador. And now this!

“I quietly got up and walked over to remove my suitcase from the car.

“When are you returning?, I asked them.”

- On Saturday.

“The next day, the employees in the pharmacy would keep repeating: “How come you’re here? Weren’t you supposed to be holidaying in El Salvador? Why didn’t you go?”

“In those days, Ovide, communication was not easy as it is today. People would travel from Choluteca to La Montaña by horse.

“I immediately sent a telegram to my mother in La Montaña, announcing that I would be visiting her the following Monday. I’m going to take holidays, I said. And these are certain. I will be there... Count on me!

“The following Saturday, the doctor and his wife returned from El Salvador.

“Tomorrow, Paco, you and I will be going to my farm”, the doctor announced to me.

As we were driving to the farm the next day, I suddenly turned to the doctor and told him I was going home to La Montaña.

-And when are you going?

“This Monday.”

-What’s the occasion?

“My mother will come to get me.”

-And how long are you going to stay there?

“One or two weeks.”

-Okay. Go ahead.

“That very Sunday night I prepared all my belongings and placed them into three suitcases.

“At about 7 am, at breakfast time, I went over to the doctor’s wife, Doña Betty, and told her that I was leaving for La Montaña.”

-How’s that? You’re really leaving?

“Yes, I am leaving.”

-And when are you coming back?

“I don’t know.

“Please check all my suitcases. Check absolutely everything to make sure that once I’m gone people don’t start claiming that I’ve stolen things.”

-But Paco, aren’t you planning on coming back?

“Doña Betty looked at me, obviously deeply saddened.”

-Paco, Paco, what in the world is going on?

“Please check all my suitcases, I repeated.

“My mom arrived in Choluteca at 8 am Monday morning.

“It was about 9 am when the bus that would take us to Nicaragua arrived. We loaded all the suitcases onto the bus.

“Just as we were about to depart, the doctor turned to me: Paco, would you mind going to the bank to make this one last deposit before leaving?

“This was obviously a small trick he had up his sleeve. He was hoping that running this errand would make me miss the bus.

“So, though I accepted to go to the bank, I ran so fast that I was back on time. I did not miss the bus.”

Don Paco left Choluteca because the doctor and his wife were exploiting him. He could hardly call his life his own. He was treated like a subordinate, a servant. The sudden cancelation of his one-week holiday in El Salvador was the electric shock that had made that crystal clear. He had had enough! He was taking time off, like it or not!

## **Don Paco unexpectedly gets a job teaching in Cinco Pinos**

After spending about eight days in La Montaña with his mother - he doesn't remember the exact number - Don Paco walked to the town of Cinco Pinos to send a telegram to the doctor informing him that he had decided to spend a full month with his mother.

However, as he was approaching the telegraph office, a man called Don Jorge Urugo, who was sitting in front of his house and happened to see him walking by, made a gesture with his hand inviting him to come over.

-Where are you from?

“From La Montaña.”

Surprised to see someone from such a poor comarca who was so well dressed and whose manners did not seem to match those of the campesinos in La Montaña, he asked:

-Have you gone to school?

“Yes. I passed my sixth-grade elementary school.”

-And where did you go to school?

“Where I've been living for a few years. In Choluteca, Honduras.”

-And where are you going now?

“I'm going to send a telegram to Honduras explaining that I'm going to stay here in La Montaña for a full month.”

-Would you like to work as a teacher here in Nicaragua?

“Taken aback, I replied that I had a job in a pharmacy in Choluteca. And I showed him the telegram I was about to send.”

-Young man, you’re going to stay here in Nicaragua. You’re going to teach in the Cinco Pinos elementary school. You’re not going to send that telegram.

“I protested for a while, but he simply ignored me.

“Then he took the message I was about to cable and changed it. Instead of saying that I would be staying in La Montaña for a full month it announced to the doctor and his wife that I was not returning to Honduras at all, since I had just been given a job as a teacher in Nicaragua!

“Puzzled and somewhat hesitant, I asked Don Jorge whether this teaching job was a sure thing.”

-Yes, it’s guaranteed. I happen to be the education inspector of this region. There are a couple little problems that I have to settle to make this happen. But don’t worry. I’ll see to it that you have this teaching job. Here in Nicaragua we really need teachers who have your skills.

“Because of the wakeup call I had just experienced in Honduras, because I was so deeply hurt by the exploitative attitude of the doctor who treated me as his servant, I ended up accepting Don Jorge’s offer.

“We walked over to the telegraph office together and cabled Honduras announcing that I would not be returning to my job in Choluteca.”

Several days went by before Don Paco received the following reply from the doctor.

-Paco, please come back. We really need you. I’ll give you months of additional pay!

“The inspector Don Jorge was still in Cinco Pinos, so I walked over to his place to show him the telegram I had just received from the doctor.

“Once again, the inspector stood his ground and convinced me to answer, despite the doctor’s plea for me to come back and his generous offer should I do, that I had made up my mind. I had been offered and had accepted a teaching job in the elementary school of Cinco Pinos, and that was final.”

After the cable had been sent, Don Jorge explained what small matters he had needed to settle for me to get the job.

-Normally one has to have a Nicaraguan sixth-grade primary school diploma in order to teach in Nicaragua. I managed to have that condition waived. Given the ongoing tensions and conflicts between Nicaragua and Honduras, that was a bit complicated.

In a matter of days, Don Paco was the grade-two primary school in elementary school of Cinco Pinos.

“I was living with my mother in La Montaña. But I would only spend weekends with her. The principal of the Cinco Pinos school had found a family where I could stay in the town of Cinco Pinos. I lived in that family from Monday to Saturday every week.

“I would walk home to La Montaña on Saturdays and walk back to Cinco Pinos on Mondays.

“I’d pay my host family three córdobas a day for food. That is, 15 córdobas a week. My teaching salary was 250 córdobas per month, but they would only pay us every three months.

“Several months after I had started teaching, another inspector came to our school in Cinco Pinos to examine the competencies of the sixth-grade students. To do so he had

them write an exam. However, several of them ended up not passing it, making it clear that they did not have several skills they should have had. For example, they knew next to nothing in accounting.

“The inspector thus interrogated the sixth-grade teacher. How come so many of your students are failing this test, he asked her. She replied that she was doing her best, but that she herself did not master some of the grade-six level skills, so it was not surprising that so many students failed the test..

Searching for a solution, the inspector thus turned to me.

-Do you master these grade-six level skills, Paco? For example, do you have any knowledge of accounting?

“Yes, I do, I replied.

“So, he gave me a promotion and I became the grade-six teacher.”

In 1960, Don Paco asked the Ministry of Education to be moved from the Cinco Pinos school to that of Las Pozas.

“Why did I request to be moved from the Cinco Pinos school to that of La Pozas? Because teaching in Las Pozas would allow me to live at home with my mom, instead of only being with her on weekends and having to walk the long distance back and forth from Cinco Pinos to La Montaña. There was also the money I would be saving. I would no longer have to spend about a quarter of my monthly salary on food - 60 córdobas on a salary of only 250 córdobas.

“The Ministry of Education accepted my request and on May 6, 1960 I started teaching in Las Pozas. I was the school’s only teacher and at the same time its director.

## **From ‘empírico’ to formal teacher**

From 1968 to 1972 a new and larger primary school was built in Las Pozas. This one had four classrooms.

“We managed to build this school thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of Education and plenty of volunteer work on the part of both parents and students.”

In those days, most of the teachers in the region of Cinco Pinos had no official training as teachers. They taught but had no teaching diploma. Such teachers were known as ‘maestros empíricos’.

At the end of the 1960s, the government of Nicaragua decided that all those teaching with no formal diploma would have to obtain one in the near future to go on teaching.<sup>4</sup>

“In 1971, I thus started attending the Normal School in Managua every Saturday. There were fifteen of us ‘empíricos’ of the region who, every Saturday morning at 1 am, after a full week of work as teachers, would take the bus for Managua. We would arrive in Managua at about 6h30 am. At 7h00 a.m. classes would start in the Normal School, and they would end at noon. Then, classes would resume at 1h00 p.m. and finish at 5h00 p.m. Immediately after class, we would board the bus once again and arrive at El Espino at 11h00 p.m.

“We did this 52 Saturdays per year, and with no breaks whatsoever, from 1971 to 1978. And in those days, we did

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<sup>4</sup> Most of the information in the following paragraphs concerning the teachers known as ‘empíricos’ was drawn from a conversation I had on January 2, 2003 with Don Paco, and which I recorded in my diary that day.

not have paved highways like today. The bus ride was rough and we would breathe tons of dust as we traveled.

“On December 22, 1972, I saw the effects of the earthquake that destroyed all of Managua. It produced more than 50,000 casualties. The house of the family where I sometimes lived in Managua was totally destroyed.

“I have obtained three certificates as a teacher (as Don Paco spoke, he went off to another room and came back with the certificates). One, showing that I am an official ‘empirical’ grade school teacher of Nicaragua; one, obtained in 1975, showing that I am a teacher with an ‘educación básica’ (basic education); and one, obtained in 1978, showing that I am a fully trained formal grade-school teacher.”

“It is only in 1977 that the first secondary school was opened in the municipality of Cinco Pinos. It only offered the first three high school grades.

“For several years, I was the only teacher in the elementary school of Las Pozas. In order to offer all six elementary school grades, I would ask teachers from nearby schools for their collaboration. I taught students who were in certain grades in the morning, and these teachers taught students who were in the other grades in the afternoon.

“It was in 1978 that our elementary school in Las Pozas had its first graduation ceremony for students having completed grade school. As a matter of fact, Las Pozas was the very first comarca in the rural area of the municipality of Cinco Pinos to hold such a graduation ceremony, an achievement made possible thanks to our own efforts and the help we received from teachers from nearby schools.

## Don Paco becomes coordinator of National Literacy Crusade in Cinco Pinos

In 1979, I was dismissed from the position of elementary school director in Las Pozas and only carried out my teaching tasks. However, on February 6, 1980, in other words just a few months after the July 19, 1979 triumph of the Sandinista popular revolution, I was transferred to the town of Cinco Pinos and appointed coordinator of the National Literacy Crusade of the municipality of Cinco Pinos.

“When the crusade started on March 23, 1980, the census we had held revealed that the rate of illiteracy in the municipality was 40.6%. When we completed the crusade five months later, namely on August 23, it had been reduced to a mere 15.6%, an amazing achievement! And, by 1987, we had totally wiped out illiteracy in the municipality of Cinco Pinos.

Don Paco walked back into his office and came out with the diploma showing that he was the official leader of the literacy crusade, during the Sandinista Revolution, in the municipality of Cinco Pinos. He also showed me the diploma individuals would receive once they had successfully completed their training and were considered literate.



“One day Fernando Cardenal, the then minister of education, exclaimed during a 15-day training workshop all the municipal leaders of the National Literacy Crusade in Nicaragua were having in Managua: I would like to have a Paco in each of the four regions of Nicaragua.

“I was deeply moved by his compliment.

“I am a teacher by vocation. When a teacher notices that a student is not learning, he or she should try to find out why and attempt to address the problem. It may be because of family, health, etc.

“Teachers who don’t care are not doing their job properly. Nowadays, too many teachers are merely interested in their salary, nothing more. They do not prepare their classes. They see students as mere objects That means they do not view teaching as a vocation.

“That’s not right! Students are persons, they are subjects. Having an appropriate pedagogy means relating to them as persons, not as objects!

“How did we manage to accomplish the amazing feat of drastically reducing the rate of illiteracy in a matter of months and of totally eliminating it in Cinco Pinos by 1987? We managed to do it because we acted as a nation which is united and intensely mobilized in reaching an important goal.

“Our leader Carlos Fonseca had made it clear that two enemies had to be wiped out. First, the Somoza dictatorship, and second, the other dictatorship, that of illiteracy!

“Our National Literacy Crusade took place just a few months after the overthrow of Somoza. And everyone was involved in it: the army, the various mass popular organizations, for example, those of the youth, those of women - AMNLAE (Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Espinoza), the Sandinista Defense Committees, etc.

“When a directive was given by the Ministry of Education, it was communicated to all organizations. When I, as leader of the literacy crusade in the municipality of Cinco Pinos, would receive such a directive, I had to immediately pass it on to all those involved in our municipal crusade.

“The army’s responsibility was to offer us protection. AMNLAE’s responsibility was to mobilize women.

“The Municipal Committee responsible for the literacy crusade would meet regularly with those in each comarca who were in charge of the literacy effort. It would relay all national directives to them.

“In each comarca there was a technician who was a teacher, there was the coordinator of the Literacy Committee, and there was a person in charge of gathering statistics on the progress of the crusade.

“On November 8, 1986, in recognition of our performance in the National Literacy Crusade, the Ministry of Education sent Adolfo Campo and me to participate in the World Adult Education Assembly in Buenos Aires, Argentina, as the representatives of Nicaragua.

“For a whole month I gave conferences in Argentina explaining the methodology we had followed during the National Literacy Crusade and responding to criticisms made by some of the Nicaraguan government. I returned to Nicaragua on December 8, 1980.

“In 1987, the delegates of the Ministry of Education in the municipality of Cinco Pinos gave me the responsibility for an adult education project. I was asked to supervise a group of students who followed a six-month carpentry course taught by INACAP - presently known as INATET - in the municipality of El Viejo, department of Chinandega.

“In 1989 I was transferred once again to Las Pozas to act as director of its elementary school.

“Furthermore, I was also asked to act as nucleus director of the region. In other words, I had to hold regular meetings with the directors of the primary schools of Las Lajitas, El Jícaro, El Espino, El Carrizal, La Montaña, and Santa Fe. And I had to coordinate pedagogical matters and act as a link between these schools and the Ministry of Education.

“In 1999, I resigned from the position of primary school director in Las Pozas and simply continued assuming my teaching responsibilities.

“In November 2000, I finally decided it was time to retire.

### **Don Paco’s wife Inesita and his family**

In March 1964, Don Paco got married to a young woman from El Jícaro, Inés García Andrade.

“In those days, El Jícaro was not part of the municipality of Cinco Pinos. It was part of Somotillo.”

Inesita - that’s what Don Paco lovingly calls his wife - and Don Paco have five children. Their oldest is Francisco or Paco. He currently lives in El Salvador and works for a company there. He has three children: Jonathan Levis, Robert Francisco, and Yury Janeth.

Their second son Walter Osmar lives in San José, Costa Rica, where he works as a security agent. He has five children: Heyling Anielka, Sylyen Ariesna, Itzel Ines, Elkis Sugenis, and Walter Josue.

Nora, their first daughter, lives in Las Pozas and has two children: Albert Ramón Calix and Imara Antonia Calix.

Wilmer lives at home with his mom and dad and manages the family farm. His wife, María José, comes from La Montaña. He has one child: Duban Francisco Mondragón.

Their second daughter and last child, Ena Haisel, is a doctor and now lives in Managua. She has a daughter from a first marriage, Serena de Los Ángeles Mena, and a second daughter from a second marriage, Cristen Sofía López.<sup>5</sup>

When Don Paco was given the responsibility of directing the National Literacy Crusade in the municipality of Cinco Pinos in 1980, his life became very hectic. Not only did he have to move away from his family on the farm and into the town of Cinco Pinos, but he also had to work very long and intense hours virtually seven days a week.

“It is in that context that Inesita experienced a deep trauma that has changed her life. Here’s how that happened.



Ena grinding corn, Inesita making tortillas (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

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<sup>5</sup> This information on Don Paco’s children and grandchildren was provided to me by email by Ena Haisel, his daughter.

## His Life

“In the first years of our marriage, up until the birth of Wilmer, Inesita was a normal, calm, healthy and very pretty woman. I would leave my home in El Guásimo and go off to teach every day in Las Pozas. Then I would walk back home and help Inesita with the children

“We formed a happy couple and family.

“It is my intense involvement in the National Literacy Crusade and my moving away from home that changed all that.

“My work was so intense in Cinco Pinos that sometimes a whole month would go by without my returning home a single time.

“It is my prolonged absence that caused her problem. She would constantly ask those walking by our house in El Guásimo:

“Did you see Paco?”



Inesita (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

“Yes, he’s got tons of work, they would tell her!

“I did occasionally drop by home. However, I would not even stay to eat.

“My responsibilities were immense, and I really took the literacy crusade to heart. As I mentioned earlier, our hard work was crowned with success, Cinco Pinos being nationally awarded for being the very first municipality in the rural mountainous regions of Nicaragua to wipe out illiteracy.

“The first municipality in the rural non-mountainous regions of Nicaragua to accomplish this same feat was El Realejo.

“My prolonged absence from home because of the literacy crusade is what traumatized Inesita. She constantly worried and, at the end of the day, the stress was just too great for her.

“I was not the only one in our family away from home because of the literacy crusade. My oldest son, Paquito, was also intensely involved in the crusade.

“The only ones living at home with Inesita were my mother, and our other three children, Norah, Osmar, and Wilmer.

“As you all know, Inesita does not sleep in a normal bed at night. She sits on a plastic chair in the corridor and spends the whole night in it sleeping in a relatively awkward position.

“As all rapidly notice also, Inesita cannot carry on a normal conversation. She is mentally challenged.

“Let me explain how all that started.

“One day, during the literacy crusade, I was told it was urgent to provide statistics on the progress of literacy in our municipality. So, I walked from comarca to comarca throughout the municipality to obtain these statistics.

“After visiting Las Lajítos, I arrived at my home in El Guásimo.

“When Inesita saw me arriving she was thrilled. We hadn’t seen one another for five days.

“I introduced her to my secretary, Carmen María, who was accompanying me in my task of gathering statistics.

“When we left to gather the statistics we needed in El Guásimo, Inesita asked me: Are you going to come back?

“Yes, I replied.

“After our work was done I returned home with Carmen. We had a pleasant supper with Inesita, my mother and the children.

“Then, after we had finished eating, Inesita turned to me, as we were getting up to depart: Paco, aren’t you going to sleep here tonight?

“No, Inesita, I have urgent matters to tend to. And we left for Cinco Pinos.

“As we walked away, she stood there, gazing at us, plunged into sadness, and most likely, considerable jealousy, given that I was traveling with my secretary.

“The following day, Felipe Calderón,\* who also lived in El Guásimo, happened to pass by my home.

“When Inesita noticed him, she inquired: Has Paco not returned to Cinco Pinos?

“Inesita, do not think about Don Paco anymore - I imagine it was a joke - Don Paco has another woman in Cinco Pinos!

“And who is that woman?

“Carmen María, his secretary, Felipe replied.

“That incident, Ovide, lies at the heart of Inesita’s trauma.

“Just a few days later, Inesita started speaking in an abnormal manner. She was obviously psychologically traumatized. She’s never been normal to this day.

“Felipe did not tell me anything about this incident.

“I only learned about it later from others.

(At this point of what was a very emotional interview, I dared ask Don Paco whether he was in fact having an affair with his secretary. He simply blushed a little, did not respond and continued.)

“To this day, if anyone asks Inesita who Carmen María is, she invariably replies, Paco's wife.

“The FSLN has gone out of its way to provide Inesita with medical help. It has never abandoned me to this day.

“Inesita has been diagnosed as suffering from deep jealousy. Giving her hormones is not the solution according to doctors. Hormones would only increase her jealousy, and thus her trauma.

“On March 1, 1981, I moved with my family from El Guásimo to Las Pozas. It was in the same year that my mother died.

“Before passing away, my mother took me aside, and made me solemnly promise that I would never leave Inesita.

“You are responsible for what happened to her. You must never leave her, she told me.

“If Felipe had not one day told Inesita what he told her, Inesita would be normal today. She would not have undergone that trauma. Jealousy simply does not heal.

“Ena was born in 1984. Though born of a mother who is mentally challenged, she is perfectly normal.

“When Ena was born, Inesita was still sleeping in bed every night.

“Her habit of sleeping in a simple plastic chair all night most likely originates from the Contra attacks in our region. We lived in fear of being attacked, and Inesita would stay up at night to guard her children and family.

“This being said, if you ask Inesita today why she refuses to sleep in a bed, she invariably replies it’s because she’s afraid of being raped.

“She has never been raped. Yet, she is always afraid of being raped.

“We bought Inesita a comfortable beech chair, something that would help her sleep better.

“Ena tried and tried to convince her to use it but to no avail.

“She washes and irons clothes, makes coffee, and cooks meals.

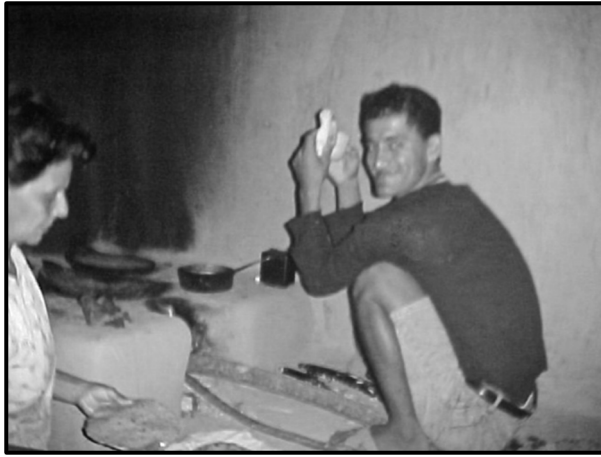
“However, we have to keep a close eye on her lest she puts too much wood on the fire or starts cooking something and totally forgets about it.

“She likes sweeping the yard, cleaning the house, washing dishes, and grinding corn in the morning to make tortillas.

“We are always careful to keep a close eye on her. If Wilmer has to go off to the field, or run an errand, then I’ll stay home. And if I have to go run errands, then Wilmer stays with his mother.

“However, from time to time she likes to go for long walks alone. Especially to the comarca where she was raised as a child. People in the region know her and take care of her.

“She is never aggressive. Quite the contrary.”



Inesita cooking tortillas, Wilmer warming up close to the fire  
(Photo: Ovide Bastien)

**Diary, Las Pozas, December 20, 2008.** When I sat down to write my diary, Inesita, my host mom who is mentally challenged, offered me coffee. She tried to offer me bread also but could not because the door to Don Paco's office where the bread is stored was locked. She opened the fridge, and lovingly placed a banana on the table for me. From time to time, she interrupted my diary writing. I could not make out what she was saying, but nevertheless listened to her with tenderness.

**Diary, Las Pozas, January 20, 2016.** The afternoon before our departure I was sitting alone on a plastic chair in front of Don Paco's house when suddenly Inesita appeared next to me. As she spoke, she placed her arm very affectionately on my shoulder.

“Ovidio, ¿porque no compra una finca aquí. ¿No te gusta aquí con nosotros? Mancho<sup>6</sup> tiene una finca. Tu podría comprar una finca en El Jícaro”. (Ovide, why don't you buy a farm

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<sup>6</sup> Mancho is Raymond Robitaille's nickname. Raymond, a Canadian from Montreal, worked as a volunteer in the post-literacy effort in the municipality of Cinco Pinos in the late 1980s. He owns a small farm not very far from Don Paco's house.

here? Don't you like being with us? Mancho has a farm. You could buy one in El Jícaro.)

“Given that Inesita became mentally challenged in 1980 when Don Paco was leading the literacy crusade in the municipality of Cinco Pinos and the Contra were attacking this region at night, I was profoundly moved by her comment. It was her simple way of saying, I love you Ovide”.

**Don Paco: “Until the age of 36, I did not drink at all”**

“At the beginning of my married life, I never drank alcoholic beverages. Until the age of 36, I did not drink at all.

“I will explain what happened.

“At 36 years old, I was the youth leader of the whole region, and had been teaching for several years. I was a very thin man. People often commented that I was too thin and should gain weight. The solution, they suggested, was to take a drink of rum before meals.

“That's how I started drinking.

“I already had children then.

“When we were in the process of building the elementary school in Las Pozas in 1962, we organized parties to raise funds. There were many of these, and alcoholic drinks were always served in these events.

“Throughout my life, I've never lost the respect of others. And this, from the moment I returned to Nicaragua from Honduras at 18 years old. People have a great respect for the person that I was and still am. And I'm going to die with that respect.

“Before I didn't touch alcohol.

“Teacher, teacher, come on! Have a beer! people would say.

“And, one day, finally, I started drinking.

“Look, isn’t it great to see Paquito having a drink!

“Drinking became a source of celebration, of joy. And that’s how, I gradually got used to drinking.

“During the revolution, I had already started drinking. Not as a vice, but just to let go and have a good time.

“In the afternoons, I would go and have a few drinks.

“Never did I want my students to see me drunk during the revolution. But eventually, it did become a problem.

“For example, in 1985, Daniel Ortega sent me to Argentina for one month, from November 8<sup>th</sup> until December 8<sup>th</sup>. My role there was to be the link between the revolutionary process in Nicaragua and Argentina. I gave conferences on what was happening in my country and answered any questions they had.

“When I was in Argentina, I’d always take two beers before lunch. Then after lunch I’d take two more. It’s when I’d take the last two beers that I would start feeling homesick, that I would think about my family, about Las Pozas. I really drank very heavily in Argentina.”

“When the Sandinistas lost the elections in 1990, I stopped drinking rum. Since then, I’ve never touched the stuff. I only drink beer, and only in special circumstances, not on a regular basis. For example, when you guys are here”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The information for this paragraph and the two preceding ones was drawn from my diary of January 1, 2002. After a communal supper held in one of the North South Studies students host homes, Don Paco suggested we go to the pulpería to have a beer. When I offered to pay him a beer, he replied: “You can pay the second beer; I’ll pay the first”. I

“When I would have too much to drink during the revolution, my compañeros of the FSLN and my guards would come to my help. They’d watch over me and take me home.

“But when we lost the elections, I asked myself:

“Who’s going to help me if I get drunk? Who’s going to drive me home by car, who’s going to help me? Not the liberals for sure!”

### **Don Paco’s involvement in North South Studies**

After his retirement, Don Paco accepted to work as a volunteer for the Nicaraguan NGO in El Espino known as APRODESE, which was organizing the first homestays in the region of the Dawson College North South Studies students.

His first involvement with North South Studies consisted in hosting in his home teachers accompanying students. In December 2000 he hosted Fred Jones, and the following year he hosted me.

He also accepted to manage a very modest high school scholarship project financed by North South Studies.

Starting in 2003, Don Paco replaced APRODESE in assuming the full responsibility of organizing the homestays of the North South Studies students. He also started managing the various small development projects North South financed during the student homestays. This eventually included certain development projects that were ongoing throughout the year.

The high school scholarships soon became more generous, some 50 high school students receiving each year a

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asked Don Paco why he just drank beer, not rum. “I’ll tell you why, he replied. In the years preceding the revolution, I drank very little alcohol. However, during the revolution I started drinking more and it became a problem.”

scholarship of approximately \$40 US. These students came from the poorest families in La Uva, El Jícaro, El Espino, Las Lajitas, La Montaña, El Carrizal, El Granadillo, and Las Pozas.

When a very bright and wonderful North South Studies student, Patrick Tansay, died of brain cancer on November 13, 2003 - he was supposed to travel with his fellow students to Nicaragua in December - it was decided that the high school scholarships would thereafter be called the “Patrick Tansay scholarships”.<sup>8</sup>

Don Paco managed these meticulously and with love and passion, receiving and carefully analyzing scholarship requests, meeting on a regular basis with both parents and students, keeping track of the grades of each student, walking kilometers on a path through the mountains to visit a student who was neglecting his studies, etc.

Each year, he presented a detailed report to North South Studies, which included all expenses incurred, and the names and academic results of each student, their comarca, etc. (See appendix 1 for the full report Don Paco submitted December 24, 2011)

High school directors have repeatedly highlighted the very significant impact these scholarships have had on the academic achievement of numerous students.

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<sup>8</sup> Extract of Patrick Tansay’ biography: “Patrick truly loved the North South Studies program and students at Dawson. He talked about it at home all the time. He actively worked hard to raise funds for his trip to Nicaragua and was looking forward to going with the Dawson group on the trip in December of 2003. Patrick was highly motivated by the words: Peace, Love, Justice, Brotherhood, Equality and Freedom. He learned them in many languages and had them inscribed in Arabic on his bedroom walls. Some of his favorite quotes came from: Malcom X and Mohammed Ali, both fighters for Justice and Equality....Patrick was a noble fighter. He believed in people and he made them believe in themselves.”



Don Paco having a siesta (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

Below are some of the projects of North South Studies in whose management Don Paco was involved, often in collaboration with other Nicaraguan leaders:

- The construction of at least a dozen houses; two of them in very remote and difficult-to-reach areas in La Montaña and La Uva.
- The construction of a daycare center in El Carrizal.
- The distribution of baseball gloves, balls, bats, soccer balls, etc. to the youth in various comarcas of the region.
- The distribution of clothes to those in greatest need in the various comarcas where North South students had their homestays.
- A series of health workshops for women in the region of Cinco Pinos. North South Studies obtained \$3,000 US in 2002 from the International Roncalli Foundation for this project which was managed by Dr. Thelma Zelaya. It included the distribution of medical kits to the comarcas of the municipality of Cinco Pinos.
- In 2002, North South Studies negotiated with [Cyclo Nord-Sud](#), a Montreal based NGO that distributes

used bicycles to developing nations, to have containers of used bicycles sent to the Cinco Pinos region. Jean-Pierre Giroux, of Cyclo Nord-Sud, travelled to Cinco Pinos in 2003 and permission was given to send a first container of bicycles. However, this operation failed because the Nicaraguan government insisted on charging a \$15 to \$20 import tax on each bicycle.

- The distribution of thousands of used eyeglasses (in December 2013 alone, North South Studies brought 886 eye glasses<sup>9</sup>) to people of the region. Don Paco hired an optometrist to help him distribute these to those who needed them.<sup>10</sup>
- Installation of public street lights in several comarcas.
- Construction of at least a dozen cisterns to collect water from the roof of a school or a public health center in the region of Cinco Pinos.
- Implementation of dozens of family micro-irrigation projects in the region of Cinco Pinos.

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<sup>9</sup> In my diary - January 16, 2014, Las Pozas - I noted, “Yesterday we distributed 10 laptops to the new mayor of San Pedro del Norte. We had already given one to the police of that municipality. Afterwards we had lunch in Concepcion's restaurant with Don Paco, Rodolfo, the mayor and his driver. Then, Don Paco and I went to the storage room in Carrizal to count the eye glasses: 886 of them! It was very hot in the storage room in the corner store of El Carrizal.”

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Jacobs, [A Simple Way to Improve a Billion Lives: Eyeglasses](#) (It's the biggest health crisis you've never heard of. Doctors, philanthropists and companies are trying to solve it), The New York Times, May 5, 2018. “[More than a billion](#) people around the world need eyeglasses but don't have them, [researchers say](#), an affliction long overlooked on lists of public health priorities. [Some estimates](#) put that figure closer to 2.5 billion people. They include thousands of nearsighted Nigerian truck drivers who strain to see pedestrians darting across the road and middle-aged coffee farmers in Bolivia whose inability to see objects up close makes it hard to spot ripe beans for harvest.” Also see: [“Wear glasses. Earn more”](#), The Economist, August 2, 2018.

- Construction of dikes to prevent soil erosion in El Espino and Las Pozas;
- Construction of a new roof for the primary school of Las Pozas, and also for the Community Centre of El Carrizal.
- Construction of about 30 improved ovens, every year for about 6 years, for families located in and near the host communities of the Cinco Pinos region. These ovens diminish the quantity of wood used in cooking and also, because they have a chimney, protect the women and other family members from the very damaging effects of smoke.
- Renovation of a community well in El Carrizal.
- Renovation of segments of roads, using stones and mortar, in La Uva, El Rincón, Las Tablas, and Las Pozas.
- Construction of a fairly large concrete-covered playing area in the primary schools of El Espino and of Las Pozas. Without this concrete-covered playing area, the children would have to play in mud during recreation.
- Construction of a storage room for the new Las Pozas high school (about 120 students).<sup>11</sup> Purchase of many musical instruments so that this high school could have, as all others in the region, a musical band.

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<sup>11</sup> The Sandinista government financed the construction of a new high school in Las Pozas in February 2011. Before, students attended classes in a horribly looking and makeshift building; the walls were simply black plastic. Elmer Zelaya told me he took a photo of the plastic high school and showed it to the Minister of Education when they were having supper in a five-star hotel after a meeting. “The Minister was very embarrassed. Not long afterwards, a budget was announced to construct the new Las Pozas high school,” Elmer explained. As soon as the school was finished, Don Paco asked that North South Studies pay for a filing cabinet: \$160 US.



Storage room for new Las Pozas high school (Photo: Rodolfo Martínez)

- Creation, in 2006, of the Internet Centre of Las Pozas. In a region deprived of newspapers, journals and even libraries, this high-speed Internet Centre, located in the heart of the community and right next to the regional primary and secondary schools, had a major impact.
- The public health centres in four municipalities asked us for inhalators. Five of excellent quality were purchased and delivered by Don Paco. One went to each public health centre in the four municipalities: Cinco Pinos, San Pedro, San Francisco and Santo Tomas. One went to the new health centre in Las Pozas. Total cost: \$900 US.
- Installation of six solar panels, in 2011, to provide an alternative and more reliable energy to the Internet Center of Las Pozas. This project was made possible thanks to a \$10,000 US grant from the International Roncalli Foundation.
- Creation, in 2016, of an internet classroom in the regional high school of Las Pozas. The arrival of the Claro cell phone signal in Las Pozas having led to a

substantial decrease in the use of the Internet Centre of that community, all the laptops of the center were moved into the high school. The Sisters of St. Joseph of London Ontario provided the funding for the renovation of the internet classroom and to help pay, for a period of 18 months, the cost of the high-speed internet connection so that teachers and students could have free access to the Internet.



Evelyn Martínez, manager of Internet classroom, with students  
(Photo: Ovide Bastien)

- From about 2008 to 2014, North South Studies brought down to Nicaragua each year approximately 50,000 US worth of pharmaceutical supplies. These were distributed to the public health centers of the municipalities known as the four saints: San Juan de Cinco Pinos, San Francisco del Norte, Santo Tomas del Norte, and San Pedro del Norte.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In December 2010, North South Studies also distributed medical supplies, such as stethoscopes, isolation gowns, surgical masks, digital

- From 2005 to 2018, hundreds of used laptops, most of them donations from CGI International and Pratt and Whitney, were distributed to the four saints mentioned above. The main beneficiaries: the Las Pozas Internet Center, high schools, health centers, mayors, judges, university students, policemen, etc.



On the right, my colleague Fred Jones distributing a laptop to Ruber Ríos Mondragón, computer teacher in Paso Hondo High School  
(Photo: Ovide Bastien)

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thermometers, disposable medical gloves, anti-bacterial hand sanitizer, automatic blood pressure units, First Aid Kits, etc. These supplies, which also included a wheelchair, were donated by AGM Medical for which one of our student's father Fred Friedberg worked.

- In 2012, digging of an artesian well for 61 families of Las Pozas. North South Studies also financed a significant portion of the piping bringing the water to each family.



Two water reservoirs, located on mountain, for Las Pozas water grid  
(Photo: George Turski)

- In 2013, North South Studies obtained a grant from the Roncalli International Foundation for the digging of an artesian well in La Uva. Casa Canadiense also collaborated in the fundraising. We were told that the well supplied 20 gallons per minute. A big inauguration was organized in 2014 in the presence of a radio and TV station.
- When it was discovered that the new artesian well in La Uva ended up supplying enough water only for a few families, North South Studies financed, in 2014, the installation of a pump in a hand-dug well, whose water supply is abundant and virtually

inextinguishable, and a huge plastic reservoir. This allowed the entire community of La Uva to have potable tapped water.

- In 2015, North South Studies financed the digging of an artesian well in El Granadillo. This well is now supplying tapped potable water to some 35 families.
- Welding courses for marginalized youth in 2015. North South Studies obtained a \$15,000 grant from the International Roncalli Foundation; a \$6,800 grant from the Sisters of St. Joseph in London, Ontario; and another \$4,000 via donations made to Casa-Pueblito (the new name for Casa Canadiense) for an electric welding course given in the APRODESE Training Center in El Espino.

Managed by the NGO directed by Elmer Zelaya<sup>13</sup> Blandon, this project allowed 39 marginalized youth originating from the municipalities of Cinco Pinos, Santo Tomas del Norte, San Francisco del Norte and San Pedro del Norte to attend four and a half months of welding courses, all day Mondays to Fridays. Some 27 students finished the course in February 2016.

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<sup>13</sup> Elmer was the director of CHICA (Coordinación de los Hermanamientos e Iniciativa de Cooperación Austríaca) for some 20 years. That NGO received all Austrian aid going to Nicaragua, both governmental and non-governmental. Like Don Paco, he has played a key role in several North South Studies projects. Following their two-week homestay in Cinco Pinos, the Dawson students spend a couple of days in Leon, where they live in the hotel owned by Elmer and his wife, Sueño de Meme. Elmer always gives an excellent conference on various aspects of Nicaragua each time.

## His Life

Students were even taught plasma cutting, something that does not exist anywhere else in Nicaragua, and given training on the functioning of solar panels. The best student was a WOMAN!<sup>14</sup>



Group of students in welding course with their teacher  
(Photo: Elmer Zelaya Blandón)

- In 2018, North South Studies also financed, primarily with the help of the International Roncalli Foundation, 18 solar panels for the water grid of Las Pozas, and 8 for the water grid of Paso Hondo. The latter comarca also obtained a new water pump for its artesian well and water meters for each family in the grid. Both comarcas also obtained extra piping to improve their water grid infrastructure.

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<sup>14</sup> To see the two-minute TV report broadcast by Acción 10 on this welding project:

[https://www.facebook.com/ezelayablandon/videos/vb.712633435/10154373334938436/?type=2&theater&notif\\_t=video\\_processed&notif\\_id=1468531553861937](https://www.facebook.com/ezelayablandon/videos/vb.712633435/10154373334938436/?type=2&theater&notif_t=video_processed&notif_id=1468531553861937)



Eighteen solar panels for Las Pozas water grid  
(Photo: Elmer Zelaya Blandón)

- In 2019, I am requesting, not in the name of North South Studies (because of the crisis that erupted in April 2018, Dawson College has cancelled the students field trip foreseen for December 2018) but that of Casa-Pueblito, a donation from the Roncalli International Foundation for the installation of 28 solar panels to activate the pump of that water network, for the construction of a new and larger water reservoir, for water meters for each family, and for a pipeline to include more families in the network.
- In 2019 I am requesting, also in the name of Casa-Pueblito, a donation from the Sisters of St. Joseph nuns, London, Ontario, for an artesian well and pump for the water system of ten families in Paso Hondo. Also, for two projectors: one for the Internet classroom of the Paso Hondo high school, and one for the Internet classroom of the Las Pozas high school.

## **Similarities between National Literacy Crusade and North South Studies**

When North South Studies arrived for the first time in the Cinco Pinos region in December 2000, many Nicaraguans told us that our students reminded them of the literacy crusade workers of 1980.

And as I commented at the beginning of this book, Don Paco himself often asserts, always with considerable emotion, “Your homestay reminds me so much of our literacy crusade!”

Of course, when North South Studies arrived in the Cinco Pinos region the context was altogether different from that of the literacy crusade. The crusade took place only a few months after the victory of the Sandinista revolution in July 1979, when Nicaragua was still full of revolutionary spirit and the entire nation was powerfully mobilized.

After overthrowing the dictatorship of Somoza, which had lasted more than 40 years and was constantly supported by the United States, Nicaragua was eager to overthrow its other dictatorship, that of ignorance. In a country where more than half of the population did not know how to read and write, getting rid of Somoza did not suffice to move forward. Of equal and perhaps even greater importance, as Carlos Fonseca, one of the greatest leaders of the Sandinista revolution, had always emphasized, was getting rid of the other great obstacle to real and profound change, the dictatorship of ignorance with its roots in illiteracy.

Approximately 60,000 Nicaraguan youths, most of them from better-off families and accompanied by numerous teachers, thus abandoned high schools and universities on [March 23 1980](#) and extended a hand of solidarity for five consecutive months to that half of the population – about 1.5 million – that was illiterate. They lived in host families, placing their

private interests on the back burner and prioritizing the common good. They taught campesinos in the countryside how to read and write, living with them, participating in the ordinary daily chores of the families – fetching wood, transporting water from wells and rivers, making tortillas, washing clothes, working in the fields with machetes, etc. – and participating in community projects to improve roads, houses, and health services.

When North South Studies arrived in the region of Cinco Pinos in December 2000, Nicaragua was no longer deeply mobilized and full of revolutionary zeal. Instead, it was under the spell of a profoundly conservative and neoliberal spirit. Openly neoliberal governments had sharply reduced its public sector – for example the government of Violeta Chamorro had dismantled Nicaragua’s railroad system – and allowed most of its cooperatives to disappear. And they had also privatized to a considerable degree both healthcare and education.

In the talking circles North South Studies organized with the Nicaraguan youth, we discovered that most young Nicaraguans, even those lucky few who made it to university, entertained but one dream: emigrating out of the country in order to get ahead in life, in order to find a job, in order to send money home to their families.

One would see children – as young as 6 or 7 years old – filling the numerous potholes on the highway from Chinandega to Somotillo with gravel. To carry the gravel, they would either use their bare hands or plastic bags. Trucks, busses and cars would stop from time to time to give them a tip.

As user fees had been introduced in education and healthcare, not all school age children could afford to go to school, and in particular high school.

Doctors would prescribe drugs, but a substantial portion of the population simply did not have the money to purchase them. Mothers would often ask us to help pay for the pharmaceutical products a doctor had just prescribed for their child. And one would regularly hear radio fundraising campaigns to help pay the medication for a person suffering from cancer, from diabetes, etc.

Why such an abrupt change from a socialist leaning revolution in the 1980s to openly neoliberal governments in subsequent years?

Though the Sandinista government had implemented numerous positive structural changes in the 1980s, it had made important mistakes in its economic management. Also, and more importantly, the long Contra War carried out by those Nicaraguans who opposed the revolution and who were being heavily financed, trained, and armed by the United States, had resulted in very heavy casualties.

As a matter of fact, the attacks from the Contra stationed in Costa Rica and Honduras produced as many casualties as the revolution itself – some 40,000.

Not only was the war effort draining a substantial portion of the budget of the Nicaraguan government, but the economic losses – schools and health clinics destroyed, and crops burned by the Contra – resulting from the war were also extremely high.

It was not surprising then (in spite of polls indicating an FSLN victory), that in these dire and very taxing circumstances the majority in a nation of less than 4 million people would vote on [February 25, 1990](#) against the Sandinista government and in favor of Violeta Chamorro (55%). She was promising to end the war and make peace with the most powerful country in the world.

**Revolution and literacy crusade as described in *La revolución perdida*.** It is impossible to understand the role played by Don Paco as coordinator of the literacy crusade in Cinco Pinos unless one also understands the radical and transformative nature of the revolution itself. However essential and historical the National Literacy Crusade may have been, both on the national level and in Cinco Pinos, it represented but one dimension of a profoundly multifaceted revolution.

Drawing from the excellent book *La revolución perdida*<sup>15</sup> written by Nicaragua's internationally renowned poet, Father Ernesto Cardenal, I will thus first paint a brief picture of the revolution on a national level, including the literacy crusade. Then, I will describe the similarities that Don Paco sees - explained in the interview he granted me in February 2018 - between his work as coordinator of the literacy crusade in the municipality of Cinco Pinos and his responsibilities in organizing the North South Studies homestays and development projects.

Father Cardenal notes that when his friend "the great Spanish poet José María Valverde" first came to Nicaragua after the revolution of July 19, 1979, he told him "that what most impressed him was to see something he had never seen before: a nation radiating with hope." (p. 373)

No longer could one see beggars or abandoned children on the streets; instead, one would now see throngs of street vendors, pursues Father Cardenal.

Operation Quincho Barrilete, he explains, "consisted in gathering all the street children of Managua – newspaper vendors, cigarette vendors, Chiclets vendors, shoe polishers, or just kids hanging around in the streets – and giving them

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<sup>15</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *La Revolución Perdida*, Anama ediciones centroamericanas, 2003.

classes – primary school classes, and music, painting, theater, and manual work classes – and taking them to visit museums, factories, production collectives, and sugar cane factories...” The children who were targeted by this operation, which was launched by the Ministry of Social Welfare and directed by a priest, were known as the ‘Quinchos’. Their uniform – a white shirt, blue pants, and tennis shoes – served as “an identification that allowed them, among other things, to take buses without paying a fare”. Those Quinchos who worked in the street “also wore phosphorescent orange vests that made them shine like fireflies in the traffic so they would not get run over.” (p. 376-7)

Unemployment following the revolution virtually disappeared, explains Father Cardenal. And so much so that employers started finding it hard to find workers. The salaries of the lowest paid workers increased by 25% while those of the highest paid government workers dropped by 15%. As a result, the “highest income earners made little more than twice what the lowest income earners were making,” proudly recalls Father Cardenal.

“The working day in the field was cut in half, the minimum wage was doubled, and the owners of large farms were ordered to add meat, milk and eggs to the diet of their day laborers, a diet traditionally made up of only rice and beans (I do not know to what extent this order was respected). Public transport was subsidized so prices would be very affordable, and old age pensions were slightly increased.” (p. 373-4)

Quoting Sergio Ramírez’s 2007 book *Adios muchachos*, Father Cardenal points out that the revolution transformed how Nicaraguans felt about both themselves and the world; it changed their values. A new ethics of solidarity was created, which affected how they spoke and even how they dressed. (p. 374)

“When the revolution triumphed thousands of dispossessed illegally took land in Managua and began to build a house with whatever material they found. The revolution gave them water and electricity, without charging fees or taxes, and also gave them property titles. In many poor neighborhoods, electricity and water were free. The Ministry of Housing helped to build houses, horticulture was developed, flowers were planted, and children started attending newly constructed schools.” (p. 374)

Not only did the revolution address the needs of the landless but it also focused on the working conditions of ordinary workers.

“It is only with the triumph of the revolution that attention started to be paid to the working conditions of workers. For example, factories throughout Nicaragua were investigated in order to find out where the level of noise could be harmful. Old machines sometimes make so much noise that they eventually cause deafness in workers. An American union was contacted, and it accepted to donate thousands of earplugs for workers.

“Furthermore, the government implemented long-term safety measures. The use of insecticides in the field, previously not at all controlled, was also restricted, and above all measures were taken to protect workers.

“In cotton plantations, where soil erosion is severe because of high winds, trees were planted. The latter served as windbreakers, and tree planting provided jobs to the unemployed.”

The revolution also started providing institutional support to the mentally and physically challenged, asserts Father Cardenal.

“Before the revolution, Nicaragua had no institutions for mentally and physically challenged children. An American psychologist started attending to children who were deaf and dumb, or blind, or otherwise mentally or physically challenged. (..). This psychologist taught teachers simple techniques to help mentally and physically challenged children, something that fostered considerable progress. These children were given attention and love, and none of them stayed locked up.” (p. 376)

“Another one of the first initiatives of the revolution, asserts Father Cardenal, was the passing of a law prohibiting commercials using women as sex symbols. And most of the media respected this law, though some may not have agreed with it.” (p. 377-8)

Father Cardenal also refers to some of the errors or “follies” of the revolution:

“Pharmaceutical products were so cheap that there were people who would buy them in Nicaragua and then go sell them in Miami.

“Gas was so cheap that vans transporting goods throughout Central America would gas up, as much as possible, in Nicaragua. And Costa Ricans would arrive in the city of Rivas to bring gas back to Costa Rica.” (...)

“Government ministers learned of a serious problem that the country started facing in those days: campesinos no longer wanted to work more than three hours per day, and some no more than two, because they were saying that they were now liberated.” (p. 373-4)

Father Cardenal recalls that those preparing the literacy crusade consulted UNESCO in order to learn out how to carry out a census to find out how many illiterates there were in Nicaragua. UNESCO told them a census would cost \$ 3

million and take two years. As they did not have that kind of money and felt that the literacy crusade was urgent and could simply not wait two years, they sent an army of students to carry out the census; and, quite amazingly, it “was completed in a month, and only cost 10,000 dollars.” The students travelled enormous distances throughout the country, often on muddy roads and paths in very remote regions, “asking everyone their name, age, occupation, level of schooling, and at the same time also those who could teach, what days, at what times and where.” (p. 390)

Normally one would use computers to process the immense quantity of census data collected. However, as there were only 15 computers in all of Nicaragua at that time and these were absolutely necessary for the functioning of the country’s financial activity, students once again came to the rescue and processed all the data on the floor of an auditorium!

UNESCO found this achievement astounding. And all the more so when, after completing its own evaluation of the quality of the census, it discovered that its margin of error was very small. (p. 390)

It is on the basis of this census that the literacy crusade was initiated, driven by a dynamism and zeal well captured by the national literacy crusade hymn titled “Turning Darkness into Light” and composed by Nicaragua’s famous musician, Carlos Mejía Godoy (The words of this hymn are reproduced, both in Spanish and English, at the beginning of Annex I - Eliminating Illiteracy in the Municipality of Cinco Pinos. To listen to this hymn, go [here](#)).

As noted above, some 60,000 young Nicaraguans – some as young as 12 or 13 – left on March 23, 1980 for the literacy crusade.

“When it was departure time, all the normal activities of the country came to a halt; all buses, all vans, all state-owned

vehicles and many private cars lent by their owners, as well as all boats, were used for the departing brigadistas. And in those places unfit for vehicles, donkeys and horses were waiting for the brigadistas; and where even the latter were lacking, they had to walk long distances on foot.” (p. 396)

Father Cardenal recalls that just as the clandestine Radio Sandino had been a fundamental tool for the success of the revolution, the radio program called *Puño en Alto* (it was named after the slogan of the crusade “Fist held high – Open Book”), which was transmitted twice a day on all radio stations in the country, played a key role in the success of the literacy crusade.

“This radio program transmitted reports and communiqués on the progress being made by the Popular Literacy Army. It also reported on the conditions of the brigadistas: where they were, in whose house, in what municipality. A young brigadista located in the mountains of the north would send a birthday greeting to her boyfriend who was a brigadista located on the shore of Lake Nicaragua. Parents would announce on what day they would arrive to visit their son or daughter brigadista so that horses would be waiting to transport them on the last stretch of road. A brigadista would report that he had managed to get rid of malaria. And some of the radio transmissions consisted in pedagogical and organizational orientations for the brigadistas. It was the most popular radio program in the country, and it was very similar to Radio Sandino, the radio station of the guerilla.” (p. 397)

Father Cardenal describes how hard it was for the brigadistas, who generally came from better off urban families, to adapt to the harsh living conditions of campesinos.

“Those first sleepless nights thinking about home, about one’s parents, and waking up in the morning with one’s body covered with flea and mosquito bites; and then discovering that there are many scorpions, ants, lice, and fleas. Having to

go to bed very early, in some regions not managing to sleep because of mosquitoes, and being obliged to use mosquito nets. (...) Getting used to darkness, to non-potable water, to eating nothing but rice and beans cooked in water, to the lack of latrines, to long walks, to frequent showers in the rainy season, to illnesses without a doctor, to living in houses so tiny that one had to sleep on the floor as there was not enough room to set up a hammock.” (p. 398-9)

Father Cardenal mentions that brigadistas also kept diaries.

“Many brigadistas noted everything that happened to them in their field diaries; the difficulties encountered, the progress they were making. The idea of doing this came from the guerrillas who also kept a diary. A girl noted in her diary that there was no water where she lived and that they had to walk a very long distance to fetch water from a well.” (p. 400)

He also notes that each group of brigadistas brought along a medical kit.

“Each squadron was given a medical kit, whose contents were carefully selected to last five months. However, the medical kits rapidly emptied and needed to be replenished several times. Why was that so? Because the pharmaceutical products were not only being used for the brigadistas, but also for all members of their host families.” (p. 402)

Not long after the beginning of the crusade, some of the parents of the brigadistas started complaining that their sons and daughters were only eating tortillas and bananas in their host families. The leader of the literacy crusade, Father Fernando Cardenal – he was Father Ernesto Cardenal’s brother, was also a Jesuit priest and Minister of Education – met with these families and told them that such eating habits did not start in these communities with the arrival of their sons and daughters but had existed for 500 years. “That perhaps this was going to allow them (the parents) to realize

why Nicaragua had experienced a revolution.”

And Father Fernando Cardenal proposed the following solution: a campesino would simply have to go to any of the literacy crusade offices that existed in all regions of Nicaragua, show the identity card of the brigadista living in his family, and his family would receive a monthly provision of food.

This practice, adds Father Cardenal, ended up altering the consumption habits of campesino families.

“One effect of the crusade was that sugar became scarce, because it started being consumed in many places where it was not consumed before. The same happened with toilet paper, which started being used in regions where before it was unknown”. (p. 401-2)

“The first brigadista to be assassinated was the peasant Georgino Andrade, who was responsible for the literacy crusade in his region. He was humble and selfless and a true revolutionary leader. The area where he was working was close to the Honduran border. It’s from there that the Contra entered Nicaragua, captured, tortured and killed him with the obvious purpose of instilling fear into the other literacy workers. But not a single one gave up their work following this crime,” notes Father Cardenal. (p. 410-1)

Besides the challenge posed by the constant threat of Contra attacks, Father Cardenal mentions other major challenges facing some of the literacy workers. Particularly moving is the case of the literacy workers who were raped in the mountains of Waslala, just a few days after one had been murdered by the Contra in another region.

“A few days later (after the assassination), late in the afternoon, Fernando (his brother who was in charge of the literacy crusade) was notified on the radio that some

brigadistas had been raped in the mountains of Waslala, and three squadrons of girls, 90 in all, had come down to the town and said they would not return to their places of work if he did not come to meet them. He met with them at midnight in a small school illuminated by a Coleman lamp. They told him that they would not continue their work in literacy if they were not guaranteed that no other rapes would ever occur. Fernando relates that, deeply moved and saddened, he spoke to them with love and sincerity and told them that it was impossible for him to give them that kind of guarantee, and that it was simply impossible for him to guarantee that such crimes would not occur again. At sunrise two of the squadrons told him that they would not abandon their host communities and would return to the mountains. The other squadron said it also would not abandon the crusade but requested to be transferred to a safer place; and they continued their literacy work until the end.” (p. 413)<sup>16</sup>

“The literacy guide used in the crusade had been produced drawing from similar revolutionary experiences in other countries and following Paulo Freire’s popular education method. However, it was adapted to Nicaragua. The themes of its lessons were all taken from the reality of Nicaragua: the revolution, Sandino, Carlos Fonseca, the role of the FSLN and the masses in the final insurrection and victory, agrarian reform, health, education, things that could amuse children,

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<sup>16</sup> Before the North South Studies students would depart each year for their field trip to Nicaragua, we would always organize a meeting with the parents of the students to address any concerns they may have. I vividly remember standing up and telling a father who wanted teachers to ‘guarantee’ the safety of his daughter: “Obviously, it will be more dangerous for your daughter to travel to Nicaragua than to stay here in Montreal during the Christmas Break. There is no way we can guarantee that your daughter will return to Montreal alive. Such guarantees simply do not exist, even here in Montreal. All we can promise is that we will take every precaution, during our stay in Nicaragua, to assure the safety of your daughter.”

religion, democracy, international solidarity.” (p. 415)

This guide, remarks Father Cardenal, “not only served to teach people how to read but also how to understand the world in which they lived and to change it.” (p. 416)

Father Cardenal describes the role played by the Ministry of Culture, which he directed, in accompanying and fortifying the national literacy crusade led by his brother.

“Hundreds of so-called Culture brigadistas traveled throughout Nicaragua compiling folklore songs and poems, popular legends and stories, as well as special campesino recipes and traditional medicines, and data on the flora and fauna, and information concerning archaeological treasures. They also compiled the oral history of the insurrection as experienced by the masses and its leaders throughout Nicaragua. With the 200 recorders and 12,000 cassettes they were given, the culture brigadistas recorded some 6,000 hours and carried out more than 3,000 interviews.”

“Other mobile culture brigadistas, also organized by the Ministry of Culture, were formed of artists originating from all over the country. They accompanied the literacy teachers wherever they were in various parts of the country – performing plays, singing, playing musical instruments, and reciting poetry. Furthermore, they also compiled whatever cultural manifestations they found in the countryside. The literacy crusade resulted in an immense upsurge of art: theater, music, dance, poetry, and painting.”

“There was what was called the Retaguardia de la alfabetización (Rearguard of the Literacy Crusade), which was also organized by the Ministry of Culture. The Ministry of Education carried out the crusade, and it fell upon us to attend to those children – 80,000 – who were deprived of teachers for five months in schools because of the crusade. We kept all these children busy and entertained in all the

neighborhoods, towns and cities, through a variety of activities: children's games, handicrafts, and artistic activities of all kinds.” (p. 413-4)

Father Cardenal concludes by proudly stating the remarkable result of the literacy crusade, a decrease in illiteracy from 54% to 13%! An achievement so outstanding in a five-month period that in September 1980 Nicaragua received from [UNESCO](#) the [Nadezhda K. Krupskaya award](#).

And he adds that not only did the literacy crusade transform darkness into light, but that literacy workers also performed numerous other tasks for the benefit of their host communities, “such as the construction of parks, schools, wells, latrines, roads, bridges, etc.” (p. 410)

Father Cardenal reproduces various very moving testimonies of brigadistas who explain how the experience of the literacy crusade turned out to be a profound, life-altering and beautiful experience for them. One they will always cherish.

“It was the most beautiful experience of my entire life, which changed me forever. I gained a new worldview and developed a greater social commitment”. (p. 399)

“I wouldn’t change my experience of the literacy crusade for anything in the world, because before I lived in a bubble. Now, I’ve discovered the real Nicaragua”. (p. 405)

Miguel Aragón, who was a university student when he participated in the literacy crusade, explains what he experienced when it was time to leave his host family.

“I was unable to hold back my tears when members of my host family gave me a final hug. I tried to hold them back but just couldn’t. And they were also weeping. Everywhere I looked I would see my co-literacy workers with their families, and the applauding was mixed with sad farewells.”. (p. 406)

**Similarities between National Literacy Crusade and North South Studies.** During the interviews he granted me in February 2018, Don Paco explained why his work in North South Studies reminded him so much of the National Literacy Crusade.

“When organizing the North South Studies students homestays and projects in our region I apply the same methods that I had used during the National Literacy Crusade.

“During the literacy crusade, we had to find and prepare host families for the young Nicaraguan students - brigadistas - who came to help the campesinos learn to read and write. We did this through the Comarca committees. They were the ones that prepared the families to receive the brigadistas.

“The work I am doing today in finding and preparing host families for North South students is very similar. I find the host families each year. I do this in collaboration with the person in each comarca who is responsible of assuring the success of the homestay of students.

“Donna, for example, has often assumed this responsibility in El Carrizal, Dalí in El Espino, Adíra in La Uva, and Lester in El Jícaro.

“We refer to them as promotores, the same name we gave to those directing the literacy effort in their comarca during the literacy crusade.

“These promotores were part of what we called, during the revolution, Comarca Committees.

“Today, the promotores in each comarca working with North South Studies are part of what we call Comisión Pro-Brigada Canadiense.<sup>17</sup>

“How do I prepare the host families each year to receive the North South Studies students who will be living with them for two weeks? I do the same things we did during the revolution to prepare the host families of the literacy brigadistas.

“I organize meetings with them. In these I discuss various aspects.

- I talk about the food that they will serve their host student. When cooking, be careful not to use too much oil; students might not like that, and it may even cause them to get sick.
- I explain that when they see a student having digestive problems, serving them soup often helps them overcome this problem.
- I talk about the importance of welcoming their student with open arms, of offering him or her friendship.
- I encourage them to have the student participate in the normal activities of the family, be that making tortillas, milking a cow, washing clothes at the river, or simply going to visit friends and relatives, etc.
- I stress the importance of doing everything possible to assure the safety of their host student. Don't allow

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<sup>17</sup> Several years ago, I prepared a document outlining the responsibilities and salary of the team of Nicaraguans who help us prepare the homestays and development projects in Nicaragua. Don Paco and other leaders in the Cinco Pinos region chose to call this team 'Comisión Pro-Brigada Canadiense'.

them to go out at night alone. Always accompany them.

- And I give the police a copy of the field trip itinerary, so they know exactly where the students will be each day and take whatever steps they deem necessary to assure their safety.

“During the literacy crusade, it was the Civil Defense Committees that would assure the security of the literacy brigadistas.

“When the Contra killed Georgino Andrade, a brigadista in San Francisco - he was not under my responsibility - that dramatic event caused panic among the literacy brigadistas of our region. Of course, they were afraid the same thing could happen to them.

“So, I met with them, discussed, and helped them overcome their fear so they could go on with their work.

(Inesita, who was standing close to us as I was interviewing Don Paco, suddenly started talking loudly and seemed very upset. Don Paco had to intervene several times to calm her down. As he did so, Wilmer, who was also present, came over to me to explain what was happening. Whenever someone refers to Georgino Andrade, mom gets very upset, he told me. Georgino was her cousin and she knew him very well.)

“If a student lives in a host family that happens to be evangelical, the family knows that it is important not to oblige the student to participate in their religious ceremonies. We asked the families to do the same thing during the literacy crusade.

“North South Students refer to their host family members as mom, dad, brother and sister. Members of the literacy brigades did the exact same thing!<sup>18</sup>

“During the literacy crusade, we would organize parties and celebrations for the literacy brigadistas in the comarcas. We do the exact same thing with North South Studies students today. There is a welcome ceremony when they arrive, a piñata event in each comarca, and a farewell party at the end of their homestay.

“About one week before the North South Studies students arrive in our community, I purchase and distribute basic food supplies to the host families: soap, toilet paper, cooking oil, beans, rice, sugar, salt, etc. And during the homestay itself, I purchase and distribute, on a regular basis, fruit and vegetables.

“During the literacy crusade, it was the national government that would send us food that we would then distribute to the literacy brigadistas and their host families. I did not get personally involved in the distribution of food during the revolution. For this task there was someone responsible at the municipal level, and another person in each comarca.

“During the revolution we didn’t have electricity, so we asked the national government for kerosene lamps for the

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<sup>18</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *La Revolución Perdida*, Anama ediciones centroamericanas, 2003. “The literacy workers who lived in peasant families were called “daughter” and “son”; they in turn would refer to the heads of their host family as “mom” and “dad”. They would return to their own homes in the cities feeling that they now had another humble and poor home in the countryside. The entire country had bonded beautifully. All this had been the triumph of love.”

literacy brigadistas and it eventually sent us some.<sup>19</sup> These lamps stayed in the host families at the end of the literacy crusade. North South Studies students come with flashlights that they often leave with their host families when they depart.

“If a literacy brigadista got sick, we had to intervene and address the problem. Exactly like we do today with North South Studies students in collaboration with the accompanying teachers.

“The literacy brigadistas came with health kits. They used these for their own needs but also for their host families. North South Studies students do the exact same thing.

“The literacy brigadistas used mosquito nets. North South Studies students do the same thing.

“During their homestay, North South students carry out small development projects in their host communities. Help build a house, repair part of a road, etc. The literacy brigadistas did the exact same thing.<sup>20</sup> I remember when they helped build a house in El Jícaro. They also helped to repair damaged segments of roads, just as North South students do today.

“The literacy workers distributed eyeglasses to many campesinos. North South Studies has donated thousands of

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<sup>19</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *La Revolución Perdida*, Anama ediciones centroamericanas, 2003. Cardenal asserts that Sweden donated 60,000 Coleman lamps to Nicaragua during the revolution.

<sup>20</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *La Revolución Perdida*, Anama ediciones centroamericanas, 2003, p. 410. As mentioned previously, Cardenal explains that the literacy workers were also involved in other tasks “for the benefit of the community, such as the construction of parks, schools, wells, latrines, roads, bridges, etc.”

eyeglasses to the campesinos of this region, which I distributed with the help of an optometrist.

“The literacy workers kept diaries, just as North South students do today. For several years, I was given a copy of the diaries written by both students and teachers the year before.

“Working with North South Studies reminds me a lot of the work I was doing during the crusade. That’s why I find it so gratifying to work with North South Studies.

“As the literacy crusade was about education, in the Comarca Committee of each community there was a técnico, who was a teacher; a person directly in charge of the literacy brigadistas; another whose responsibility it was to provide food for the literacy brigadistas and assist them in case of sickness; and one in charge of the Sandinista Defense Committee, which protected the community.

“In Las Pozas it was Manuel Martínez, Rodolfo’s father, who provided food to the literacy brigadistas and addressed whatever health issues they may have had during the crusade.

“The literacy brigadistas would teach two hours a day. Some had two students, others four or five, depending on the number of illiterates in the family.

“Normally they would teach those in their own host family who did not know how to read and write. In special cases, they would also give classes to others who were illiterate and lived close to their host family.

“Some comarcas, such as El Júcaro, had up to 18 literacy brigadistas. In Zacatón, there were 15; Las Pozas, 12; La Montaña, 11; El Espino, 10; and in El Carrizal there were 5.

“The literacy crusade in Cinco Pinos - this was true as well at the national level - was an extremely popular and intense campaign. Everyone participated, all sectors of society, all state institutions, and all mass organizations.

“There was a very strong spirit of common welfare.

“Do you know what the hardest thing in all this was?

“The despedida. It’s when, after five very intensive months, the time came for the literacy brigadistas to say goodbye to their host families. Both they and the families would weep abundantly as they said goodbye.

“Some of them had fallen in love with someone in the comarca where they were working. Some even left a future son or daughter behind. These were emotional moments.

“Several literacy brigadistas vowed that they would return in the future to visit their host families. And some, months later, did exactly that.

“Several North South students vowed that they would one day return to visit their host families, and some have done exactly that in the past years. Khémarie (she appears in the photo below), who lived in a host family in El Espino, even came back to visit her family twice. Such was the bond she had with this family that it decided to name its newborn baby girl Khémarie.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ernesto Cardenal, *La Revolución Perdida*, Anama ediciones centroamericanas, 2003. Cardenal quotes the words of a literacy worker,



*Party after the December 2001 trip to Nicaragua.*

**Front, from left to right:** Julie Champagne, Erin Byrnes, Katerina Perez, Ovide Bastien and Khémarie Tith.

**Back, from left to right:** Richard Belliveau, Erica Reade, Ruby Anyumba, Amy Boissoneault, Nick Soden

“Though North South Studies students only live in their host families for two weeks, parting is also always very emotional and painful.

“I remember seeing a student, Ovide, that you had to literally pull out of the arms of her host mother. All other students and the teachers had already boarded and, even though the bus had been waiting a few minutes, she just continued giving her host mother a big hug. Both of them were weeping.

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17-year-old Rolando: “At the moment of our departure when we climbed into the truck and the driver turned on the motor, the people stood watching us and started weeping quietly. That brought tears to my eyes. All the campesinos standing there waving us goodbye. When I arrived in Managua, I simply wanted to visit my family, stay for a while, and then return to my campesino host family.”

“You had to off the bus, and literally pull her away from her host mother so you could all leave for León.”

“Today when I go to Chinandega, some literacy brigadistas that knew me in 1980 still come and give me a big hug. And they tell me, Don Paco, do you remember when I was a literacy brigadista in Santa Fe, or in Las Pozas?”

“Fernando Cardenal, the Jesuit priest who was the Minister of Education during the Sandinista Revolution and who led the National Literacy Crusade, came to visit us in Cinco Pinos during the crusade.

“A big ceremony was held in the Plaza in Cinco Pinos during which Fernando Cardenal spoke to all the literacy brigadistas of the region. I have photos of him on that occasion.

“As I mentioned earlier, Georgino Andrade was killed by the enemies of the revolution, the Contra, who were stationed in Honduras. The Contra would knock down electric poles, destroy bridges, and burn sugar cane crops. There was a massacre in San Francisco.

“In August 1980, immediately after the end of the National Literacy Crusade, the post-literacy follow-up plan was implemented.

“Since I had been the coordinator of the literacy crusade in the municipality of Cinco Pinos, I continued as coordinator of this Adult Education Plan.

“The Contra had already started causing us problems. When I would travel from Cinco Pinos to Las Pozas I had to do so with an armed guard. Edelberto Zelaya was then a member of the Sandinista Army.

“The situation was so tense that we could not go bathe in El Pilón, the river close to my place, because we were afraid of the Contra.

“People lived in fear. The government asked each family to sleep with a candle lit in front of their house at night.

“We all mobilized to assure the security of our comarcas and of our region.

“What Ernesto Cardenal says in his book *La Revolución Perdida* (The Lost Revolution) is true.

“Politics, as far as I’m concerned, are about 99% negative and only 1% positive. That’s why I have never wanted to participate in political parties.

“Many of the leaders of the Sandinista Revolution are now very wealthy. A revolution that meant so much to us and for which we sacrificed so much.

“Literacy was one of the revolution’s greatest achievements. What we are presently doing today with North South Studies is also a great achievement.

“Life has its highs and lows, Ovide. That’s life. One has to learn to live and to adjust to various situations.

“When the liberal government of Arnaldo Alemán was elected, I knew it did not want me. They dismissed me with no compensation whatsoever.

“I left education at 60 years old and I did so of my own free will.

“Who was my principal when I was dismissed as principal of the Las Pozas elementary school? A girl whom I taught.

“I do not like being under other people’s orders. I like being autonomous and doing my own thing.

“In the last decades, the FSLN asked me several times to present my candidacy for mayor of Cinco Pinos. They asked me to be their candidate because they were afraid of losing the elections.

“Not once did I accept.

“The Sandinistas of today are not like the Sandinistas during the revolution. They want to become wealthy.”

**Testimonies of a few North South Studies students about their field trip.**

**Erik:** “For me buying ice cream is nothing at all in Canada. I can go to school if I want. I can eat steak when I want. I have a roof over my head. Things are not like that in Nicaragua. This has been the hardest month of my life. I’ve discovered how most people in the world live and I want to do something to change that. As I have told many of you, I want to become a politician. I know I am crazy, but aren’t most politicians also a bit crazy? Now I know that I want to pursue my studies.”

**Marta.** “I’ve learned how other people live their daily life. I’ve experienced a deep awakening and would like to return here one day to work in the field of development.”

**Mélodie:** “I miss tickling my sister, swimming at El Pilón with my clothes on, hanging out at Don Paco’s, greeting everyone on the street; I miss the smiles, I miss hanging out at the pulpería, talking at night by candle light, washing my clothes in the river, throwing shampoo at my kid sister when I was showering with a bucket of water, having children pick flowers for me everywhere I went, seeing the cows pass by day and night, hearing sheep doing ba ba in the mountains, dancing cheek to cheek with my cousin at the despedida (farewell party), watching the beautiful stars at night at El Pilón, rocking in a hammock and enjoying the peace and tranquility of the moment, having my sister fix my hair before important outings.. My host mother was a very reserved person. When we were saying good bye at Don Paco’s the day of our departure, I was taken aback and very moved to see her weeping”.

**Annie:** “On the morning of our departure, I remember how my host mother, in an effort to escape the sadness she was experiencing, worked frantically from 4 a.m. until the

moment the truck arrived for us. And I was so shocked to see my host father burst into tears.”

**Rodrigo:** “This was the morning of the departure and I felt really sad. I didn't think I would cry, but when I saw my Dad and after that Don Erasmo cry, I couldn't contain myself anymore. When I got on the bus I was crying like a baby, and as we were leaving I sat on the bench and continued to cry for at least ten more minutes.”

### **Don Paco's religious beliefs**

“I'm not going to hide the fact that I come from a very Catholic background.

“I made my first communion, I was confirmed, and I got married as a Catholic.

“However, there are things in Catholicism that I never accepted. For example, even when I was a child, I never accepted to kneel in front of an image or a statue.

“My mom would punish me for not kneeling down. She would plead with me, nearly order me: Adore it, adore it!

“However, I never accepted to kneel down. I never accepted to worship an image or a statue. Never!

“However, I have always believed in God ever since I was a child. That was true when I was a small boy in La Montaña, it was true during my stay in Choluteca, Honduras, and it's been true ever since. Never, to this day, have I abandoned my faith in God.

“When I would do my homework as a child, I would say to myself: When I grow up, I'll have a house like this, I'm going to get married and I'll have children.

“Imagine, Ovide... Believe it or not, the first house I built in El Guásimo was exactly like the one I would draw when I was a child!

“Who am I today?

“A Catholic? I don’t think so.

“An Evangelical? Not really.

“I love the ten commandments of God. Which is not to say that I always put them into practice.

“As far as I’m concerned Catholics and Evangelicals are basically the same, with only slight differences. Both praise the same Lord, the same God.

“For me, to praise God is to have faith in Him and to fulfill His commandments.

“In school, I would always teach my students to pray.

“Here’s how I see things. We are all made up of three elements: spirit, body, and soul. And how does one nourish each one of these elements?

“Our spirit and our soul are nourished by prayer. And our body requires material food like rice, sugar, beans, etc.

“To nourish one’s spirit and soul one must pray every day, just as one must also eat every day to nourish one’s body. Prayer must be a permanent part of one’s life.

“That is my theory, my philosophy, Ovide. That is my religion.

“I do not adore images and statues.

“Faith is what leads us to what is good. God is faith and love.

“If we have love and friendship, then we have God. It’s a simple as that, Ovide!

“The devil has no place whatsoever in my worldview. I do not worry at all about a so-called devil.

“I would always tell my students in class that life is like a recess. At the moment of our death we’ll all have to account for what we did during this recess.

“Living in the world is like going to school. During recess, some get into fights and do bad things and others do good things. And then teachers evaluate them.

“I will never be afraid of death. We all have to die, just as all plants do.

“When am I going to die? God only knows.

“Some say that spirits do not occupy space. Others say that there is a purgatory.

“I believe that purgatory is right here, in this concrete world. We are in purgatory when we have trials, when we’re suffering.

“And we’re in heaven when we’re not sick, when we’re free from hunger.

“God is in us. He’s in me and he’s in you.

« Secreto entre dos, solo Dios es testigo. » (Secret between two, only God is a witness).

“There’s absolutely nothing we can do without the power of God. Everything is done by Him. It is because of Him that we are both sitting here.

“That is my faith, Ovide.

“God is the one who brings me back home. And it is through God that I’m sitting on this chair right now.

(At this point in the interview, I asked Don Paco if he prayed every day)

“I pray every single day. I pray to receive my Father's blessing, He the one and only.

“I am a very religious person. Everything that I think or do comes from God.

“Three distinct persons in one single God. Between us, the witness is God. The powerful.”

# **Part 2 - Moments Shared**



## **December 22, 2001: My first experience in Don Paco's family**

Once again, a wonderful experience. And once again, it's hard to know where to start...

My family: Don Paco, the father; Inesita, the mother, Wilmer, the 26-year-old son and Ena, the 17-year-old daughter.

A few minutes ago, we had, first a wonderful piñata and then La Purísima.

My sister, Ena, organized both events.

The piñata started in a different manner this time. I was first invited to try to hit the piñata, then each one of the students was invited, and finally the kids. It was a very happy event.

Julie, her face just radiating with joy, exclaimed: "Ovide, I really love this!"

My host father, Don Paco, explained that La Purísima, in other words the Virgin Mary, is the Patron saint of Nicaragua. The Purísima is celebrated throughout Nicaragua from December 7th until the end of December each year.

What happened tonight is typical. Kids, their parents watching, sit in front of a statue or picture of the Virgin Mary, in front of which there is a burning candle.

They are asked to sing religious hymns in order to receive a candy, a cookie, etc. The more they sing, the more food they receive until the food supply runs out.

Ena told me yesterday, her face very enthused, that she gets up every morning at four to go to church. For nine consecutive days, she and a few of her girlfriends will say prayers and sing hymns.

During the school year, Ena leaves for school at 5 a.m. and walks to Cinco Pinos, some 9 km from Las Pozas. She arrives in Cinco Pinos at 7 am, at which time school starts. In the

afternoon, she takes the bus from Cinco Pinos for 6 km, gets off at the intersection at El Carrizal and walks the remaining 3 km to Las Pozas.

Every morning, Ena has to fetch the water for the family's needs. Bathing and drinking water. Not long ago, USAID financed the building of a few latrines and an excellent well for the primary school. That's where Ena, as well as girls from many other families, obtain their daily supply of water.

When I offered to help Ena carry the water, she replied:

“Oh, that is too hard for you. You could fall and hurt yourself.”



Girls carrying water in Las Pozas (Photo: North South student)

Las Pozas is very different from El Espino in that here it's more like a small village. The houses are located in a kind of cluster. In El Espino, the houses where we lived were located

on a single road. And the road was rough and hilly. Here, it's much flatter.

I've only been here for 24 hours and already I feel like my heart is being pulled out of me. Such simplicity! Such a warm welcome!

Each host family had written a big welcome message on the bedroom wall of the Canadian student. It's obvious that the trip has been very well organized.

Last night, an electricity blackout. This morning, as I was shaving outside, Ena came to me. "Ovidio, no voy a enojarme todo el día!" (Ovide, I'm not going to get upset the whole day!) And she went on to explain why.

"Last night I had the most beautiful dream. I saw the Virgin Mary. And when I woke up, tears were running down my cheeks".

When I asked her why she thought she was crying in her dream, she answered, her face glowing with joy:

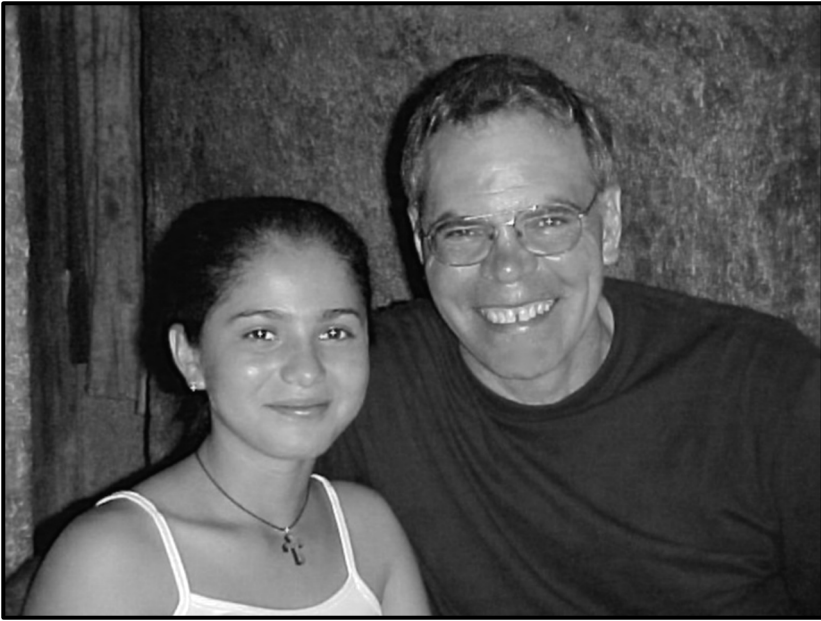
"I don't know."

### **December 31, 2001: Ena starts writing a diary and poems**

When we returned from our stay in León my family gave me a very warm welcome and very rapidly healed both my body and my soul.

Don Paco was very excited and spoke very highly about Ena.

The night before we left for León, Ena had supper with me. We spoke for nearly two hours. I asked her if she ever wrote a diary and when she answered that she didn't I explained why I felt that diary writing could be so meaningful and often helpful. And just before leaving, I pulled two writing pads out of my suitcase and gave them to Ena as a gift.



Ena and Ovide (Photo: North South Studies student)

During our two-day stay in León, Ena wrote a detailed diary. One and a half pages approximately per day.

She also wrote a one-page poem for each one of us – the six students and me – in Las Pozas as well as one for Carlos.

After having supper with me, she disappeared into her bedroom and returned with her diary and poems. We read them together for at least an hour.

“I want you to read the poem I wrote for you, Ovidio, only after I leave for León on January 2,” Ena insisted.

She was just glowing with joy. Her stomach-aches, fairly constant in the days preceding our departure for León, were gone.

## **January 1, 2002: Don Paco, educator and lifelong financial supporter of the poor**

Don Paco also told me that he was deeply hurt when Edelberto, following the viewing in Las Pozas at 4 pm of the Dawson video the students produced on last year's field trip, told him that because APRODESE was giving a university scholarship to Ena, he should no longer give scholarships with his own money to high school students.

“Edelberto's comment hurt me very deeply. If APRODESE wants to give Ena a scholarship, that's their business. But why should Edelberto ask me not to help the poor anymore? Why? I know the people in Las Pozas very well, much more than he does.”

**(Comment added in 2019.** When Raymond Robitaille returned from Nicaragua in March 2019, he told me that even though Don Paco was no longer receiving any money from North South Studies for high school scholarships - following the April 2018 crisis Dawson students stopped going to Nicaragua for their field trip - he is still providing some students with scholarships with his own money)

## **January 2, 2002: Don Paco weeps as Ena leaves family for first time to start university**

As we walked on the rugged and steep path from Las Pozas to El Jícaro, Don Paco indicated the sharp and very rocky slope where Fred fell last year and was injured.

Don Paco and I walked ahead of the students. A 10-year-old girl walked just behind us. She sang happy-go-luckily for the entire half hour that our walk lasted. She did the same thing when we walked back at 5:30 pm from El Jícaro

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It's just a little after 5 am. I got up to say bye to Ena who is leaving for León this morning. The friendship that I have

developed with her is quite remarkable. There is so much goodness in her. So much life, spontaneity and beauty.

Perhaps that is the main quality I find when I come to Nicaragua. Feeling... Feeling close to others, to myself. Yesterday, when I saw the students in El Jícaro, I was happy to see them. When I hugged them and told them I was happy to see them again and wished them Happy New Year, my words matched my feelings. No fake.

When I got up at 5 am, Ena had already served me my breakfast. As I wanted to accompany her and Don Paco for a part of the walk to El Espino, I started eating immediately. When Ena, who had been taking a bath outside, passed by wrapped up in her towel she remarked:

“Ovidio, porque no me espera? Podemos desayunar juntos!” (Ovide, why don’t you wait for me? We could have breakfast together!) But then she was so nervous and tense about her departure, that she had no appetite whatever.

I ended up accompanying Don Paco and Ena all the way to El Espino. It was a peaceful morning walk: a daughter leaving her family for the first time.

Don Paco had informed me yesterday that Edelberto Zelaya<sup>22</sup> would not allow Ena to meet with us in León, a decision with which he obviously disagreed. However, it was obvious that he did not have the courage to confront Edelberto on this matter.

I therefore felt that, for the sake of Ena, I had to do it. It took some courage on my part.

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<sup>22</sup> Edelberto was then the director of the Nicaraguan NGO APRODESE (Association for sustainable economic development of Espino and surrounding communities). APRODESE organized the first three stays of North South Studies students in the region of Cinco Pinos.

When we arrived in El Espino, I had a short talk with Edelberto and requested that Ena be able to meet us, at least for one night, in León. He accepted.

When I hugged Ena goodbye as she boarded the bus, I was happy to be able to inform her that she could see the North South Studies group again in León. I knew that that meant the world to her.

As I walked back with Don Paco, I sensed his sadness.

When I asked him how he was feeling, he pulled his handkerchief out of his pocket and started weeping quietly.

“My house will be terribly empty” he remarked. “Very empty...”

A bit down the road, we then heard a dog howling as dogs do when their masters leave them alone for too long.

Don Paco called it by its name and it slowly walked towards us.

“You know, Don Paco said, this is the dog of the woman who owns the pulperia in Las Pozas. This morning she boarded the bus in El Espino at the same time that Ena did. She is going to Chinandega. This dog is her companion, her friend. He was left alone, at the bus stop, just as I was. That’s why he’s sad. We understand one another”.

He then patted the dog very affectionately on the head.

As we walked, Don Paco spoke abundantly about Ena.

At one point, I pulled out of my pocket the poem that she wrote for me. He read it quietly as we followed the rocky path.

He spoke of how hard it was, in Nicaragua, to have someone go to university.

“We’ll make all the necessary sacrifices. We won’t let Ena down. We will support her to the end, so she can have a career and a good life.”



Ena and Don Paco (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

### **January 3, 2002: Ena's deep bonds with North South Studies students**

Last night we read the letter that Ena had written to us, her Canadian friends, in Las Pozas. She had written it during our stay in León but had asked me to read it to the students only on January 2 at 7 pm.

“I’ll be in León and at 7 pm exactly I’ll be thinking of you when you read my letter.”

As there were at least a dozen or so people in front of Don Paco’s house at 7 pm who were listening to very loud music on the radio I had given my host family, we decided to read the letter in the dining room.

And I invited Don Paco to join us.

First Peter read the letter, with some difficulty, and I translated.

Then Don Paco read it.

Before he started, however, he burst into tears and disappeared into the kitchen for a few minutes.

I followed him there and placed my arm around his shoulder as he wept.

*My dear Canadian friends,*

*Love and friendship are essential at Christmas... That's why it's a joy to have such good friends and greet them affectionately with best wishes.*

*I want you to know that in me you have a sincere friend. Though I am far away my heart is with you and my thoughts will always follow you. I hope that distance is not an excuse to forget our friendship.*

*I also hope that you are having a great time and I want to tell you that the days I spent with you were beautiful and unforgettable.*

*I would have liked to be able to tell you these things in person but that was not possible.*

*As I say goodbye I want you to know that I love you very much.*

*May you never forget me.*

*And may you someday come back to visit us.*

*My home is available to anyone who wants to come and I hope you will write to me.*

*See you soon.*

*Goodbye to all of you,*

*Your friend,*

*Ena Mondragon Garcia.*

Then Erin showed Don Paco the video footage of the interview they did with Ena, just before she left, on why she considered it important to pursue university studies.

Don Paco was very moved and invited Inesita, his wife, and Wilmer, his son, to watch the interview with him.

After this very emotional scene, we then went outside in front of Don Paco's house, where Adín<sup>23</sup> and his brother were waiting to give us a small musical performance.

Earlier in the day I had come across Adín and I had invited him to perform for our students. He had immediately accepted.

Both musicians were wearing white cowboy hats and were very neatly dressed.

Before starting, Adín made a little speech. I was impressed by the quality of his performance. Of course, he played "Nicaragua, Nicaraguita..."<sup>24</sup>

When I asked if he could play the despedida (farewell) song that he had composed and performed for us at the end of last year's field trip, he replied:

"I left the only copy I had of this song at APRODESE. I no longer have a copy. I gave you all the other copies I had before you left last year."

Vaguely remembering that I perhaps had brought a copy of that song in my brief case, I went into my room to check and, to my surprise, there it was!

I brought it to Adín. He examined it for about one minute, adjusted his guitar and proceeded to give us a remarkable performance.

I was really impressed by his qualities as an artist.

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<sup>23</sup> Adín is undoubtedly the most famous musician of the four municipalities of the northern part of Chinandega. His house is located in front of Don Paco's.

<sup>24</sup> A song composed by the renowned musician Carlos Mejía Godoy. Go [here](#) to listen to it.



Adín (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

## **December 23, 2002: Ena talks about her first year at university**

It's great to be back at Don Paco's and to see Ena again. I have had many long and very intense conversations with her. Last night, she went off to her room and returned with the diary that she wrote when she was studying, in the past year, at the Universidad Autónoma Nacional (UNAN) de Nicaragua. She read it to me for more than one hour. Very interesting. She also showed me her university report card, something, to my surprise, that Don Paco had not even seen yet.

The day before yesterday, when we were walking together with the whole group to the place on the river, quite a distance from El Pílon, where there is a good spot for swimming, Ena summarized, in one very long and excited

spree, an entire book --The Alchemist, -- that she had read recently.

“On December 10, when it was time for me to make a decision regarding what career I would study for at university, I sent you an e-mail,” Ena explained. “I wanted to consult you before making my decision. But you did not answer. I went through hell debating with myself, but finally opted for medicine”.

For some reason, I did not receive your e-mail, I replied. I was checking my e-mails every day in that time period.

“You know, Ovide, those who study medicine at university sleep no more than four hours a night. That’s what one has to do to succeed!

“In León, I first lived with Domitila, Edelberto’s sister. Her husband was away on a business trip. Eventually, a young woman from Germany started boarding at Domitila’s too, so I had to move in with Domitila in her bedroom, which was not a very pleasant thing for her.

“When Domitila’s husband came home from his trip, we were three in their bedroom and I really felt I was in their way.

“So, I moved into another house, much farther from university. The people there were very nice but my problem then became transport. I had courses at university early in the morning and late in the afternoon. So, I either had to stay all day at university, a very exhausting thing, or I had to take the bus four times a day; come home after my morning class and return to university for my afternoon class. As one bus pass cost 4 córdobas, that meant that I was spending 16 córdobas (about \$ 1.20 US) a day just on transportation, something that was much beyond my meagre budget. APRODESE was giving me a scholarship of \$25 US per month, and I was spending more than that just for the bus!



Ena (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

“Faced with this dilemma, I decided to apply for a university scholarship that provides room and board in the university student residence (Internado de la preparatoria). Unfortunately, my application was turned down.

“At that moment, I felt I was going towards a dead end and just had to do something about it. I knew very well that my father did not have the money to pay for my university studies and that with the APRODESE scholarship alone, I would not make it.

“So, I did not take no for an answer. I asked for an appointment with the teacher in charge of scholarships, explained what predicament I was in and, a few days later, I was informed that I had been granted the scholarship!

“My roughest experience last year was when I got sick; I had a very strong fever for a few days and felt horrible. Despite this, I forced myself to go to school and did not miss one single class.

“One day, the teacher noticed that I was looking awful and asked to see me. When she saw what condition I was in, she arranged for the university to supply me with the medication I needed.”

Ena’s marks: an average of 90%, one of the top students in her class.

### **January 2, 2003: Don Paco plants a lemon tree in my memory**

As I was writing my diary, Ena was preparing my breakfast. Don Paco came in and said:

“Ovidio, venga por aquí. Vamos a plantear un árbol de limón cerca de la casa como recuerdo de ti (Ovide, come here. We’re going to plant a lemon tree in our backyard in your memory). “I’ll water it every day and when you come back to visit us one day, you’ll see how it has grown”.

### **January 4, 2003: “Don Paco, Marta must have her toe amputated!”**

Two nights ago, Marta woke me up from a dead sleep at about 1h45 a.m. She entered my room and exclaimed:

“Ovide, my toe hurts so much it woke me up again tonight.”

Then she burst into tears.

I got up, examined her big toe, which she had injured after the New Year’s Eve party at about 1 a.m. while going to the latrine; she had walked into a log.

There seemed to be no infection but she could not move it. And when I would touch it, even very lightly, she would literally holler in pain.

I took a Popsicle – the only thing I found that was cold! – out of the freezer at Don Paco’s and placed it on her toe, hoping that that would help. But that made her holler in pain even more. I asked Marta to be patient and to bear a little with the Popsicle and the accompanying pain in the hope that after a few minutes, the pain would go away. That didn’t work either.

The following day we had a conference for the North South Studies group in Santo Tomas. So, after we arrived there I immediately brought Marta to the health clinic. Annie and Mélodie came along.

As we were all sitting in the waiting room after a doctor had examined her toe, we noticed Don Paco walking towards us.

Despite the ordeal of the night, I was in a mischievous mood and decided to play a trick on Don Paco.

I asked Annie and Mélodie to look very serious, and Marta to look sad and depressed. They cooperated. A few seconds later Don Paco entered the room, walked straight to Marta, and stooped down to examine her toe.

As he was doing this, I turned to Don Paco, and asserted with a very grave and dramatic voice: “Don Paco, the news is not at all good. The doctor thinks a toe amputation will most likely be necessary.”

Don Paco’s face dropped in a mixture of disbelief and sadness, his mouth half open.

Marta, unable to control herself, burst out in laughter.

Then it was my turn to burst out in laughter, and as I laughed I walked up to Don Paco and hugged him very affectionately.

Don Paco later confided what thoughts had rushed through his head in those crucial seconds:

“I wondered whether there would be anymore Canadian student brigades coming to Cinco Pinos. I also told myself that a doctor who makes such a diagnosis is not a good doctor.”

### **December 21, 2003: Horseback ride from El Jícaro to visit Don Paco's family**

Last night I slept like a log. Woke up to the sound of a fairly loud radio at 6 am. This, after going to bed at 8 pm and reading about half an hour. The night before, I was in bed at 7:30 and got up at 6:15 am.

I find it hard not to be living at Don Paco's where I have such deep roots, where I feel so much at home, where I feel like I'm in my own family.

But I'm happy to have been able to have lunch with them on Friday. Ena told me all about her year in medicine. She worked very hard and often could only sleep four hours per night. She lost 13 lbs., seems tired, and has parasites. She was waiting to finish her final exams before taking the anti-parasite pills.

As I was feeling tired and do not know my way from El Jícaro to Las Pozas, my kid brother Nestor, who is 13, brought me there by horse. I sat on the saddle, he behind me.

The horse sensed that I had no expertise and walked very cautiously up and down a very rough, rocky, and sometimes very steep path.

After Ena told me all about her year at university, they invited me to rest in the hammock in the front room. I accepted.

Wilmer was there, as usual, listening to the radio I gave them two years ago, and installing lights on a tiny Christmas tree.

After a delicious lunch with Don Paco and Ena, I was again invited to rest in the hammock, and I accepted.

Their love for me is genuine and I really felt a deep harmony. After the first, always very stressing days for me in Nicaragua, this was a welcome rest.

When the students from El Jícaro arrived on foot at Don Paco's, they found me resting in the hammock. They were very impressed to see me working so hard!

### **December 26, 2006: Don Paco offers Danielle and me a house in Las Pozas**

Last night we had a talking circle. Very spontaneous, very joyous. I feel very close, emotionally, to each one of the students. We finished with a beautiful group hug.

At 4:30, Don Paco and I walked to the finca, five minutes from here, where there was a micro-irrigation project financed last year by North South Studies.

On my way back, I told him that Danielle (my wife) and I would perhaps be coming to live in Nicaragua for three to four months per year after I retire from Dawson College.

During supper, Don Paco surprised me. "Ovidio, the Health Centre of Las Pozas, right next to my house, is built on land that I own. As it is now too small to meet the needs of the nearby population, they are going to build a larger one, also on some of my land. In exchange, they are going to give me the present health centre. If you come to Nicaragua for a few months every year, this building is yours. I'd be very happy to have you as neighbours. There's water, electricity, a latrine. All you would have to do is build an oven to cook your meals.



Traditional talking circle of North South Studies group at top of Cinco Pinos mountain (Photo: North South Studies student)

## **January 2, 2008: Family violence in student's host family**

I'm at Elmer Zelaya's beach in Salinas Grande. It's about 2 pm. I just moved away from the group of North South students and teachers to a quieter place, a very rustic pulperia, where I can find myself and write my diary.

Inside, a few drunken men are chatting. They desperately tried to engage in conversation with me. However, I rapidly managed to break away from them and moved to a small table outside.

Again, this year there is a strong wind blowing at this beach. Sand blowing onto the table from time to time.

During my entire stay in Las Pozas, I hardly wrote this year. Too busy.

One afternoon, as I was finishing lunch at Don Paco's Caroline\*, one of the North South students living in Las Pozas, came running to me. She was out of breath.

“Ovide, come quick. Mary's\* host mom Filomena\* has been beaten up by her compañero Alfonso\* who is drunk. He is not at home anymore. However, Mary stayed with her to protect her in case he comes back.”

Off Don Paco and I went.

When we arrived, Don Paco examined Mary's host mom, Filomena. She had a bit of blood on her neck and arm.

“Not at all serious, Don Paco noted. Just a family quarrel. All is fine.”

Mary looked at him, obviously shocked and very annoyed by this comment. She turned to me:

“How can Don Paco say such a thing! Alfonso first went to Daniel's house (the contractor), stuck his machete in the outside wall, banged on the door and literally scared the heck out of his wife. She is pregnant and very fragile; now she is traumatized.

“Then Alfonso went next door, dragged the old lady out of the house pulling her by the hair, and beat her up right in the street.

“Finally, he came over to our house and then beat up Filomena. He even tried to choke her. He could have killed her. He had a machete in his hand.”

The incidents to which Mary was referring happened at about 10 am.

When Mary came home for lunch, she realized that Alfonso had beaten Filomena up and saw that they were still quarreling.

As Filomena was asking Alfonso to leave the house, but to no avail, Mary intervened and ordered Alfonso to leave. She even started packing up his things.

Surprisingly, he simply obeyed Mary and left.

That's when Mary screamed, calling Caroline, who lived two houses away at Daniel's house, for help.

As Mary was relating this to us, we heard a motorcycle arriving.

It was Daniel, the contractor. He had heard about what had happened to his wife and immediately rushed to the scene, worried and very upset.

After a brief exchange, it was agreed that Daniel and I would both motorcycle to Cinco Pinos to inform the police and get their help. Daniel would motorcycle me to Don Paco's where my motorcycle was parked, and from there we would head out, each on our motorcycles, for Cinco Pinos.

Daniel and I had nearly arrived at Don Paco's when we came across Alfonso, shirtless and still drunk, who happened to be walking on the road in our direction.

Fuming and his eyes glaring with anger, Daniel stopped the motorcycle, got off, and told me:

“Ovide, move a few feet away from here. I want to have a word with this man.”

I got off the motorcycle and moved away.

Daniel angrily told Alfonso, and in a very loud voice, that he never wanted him to set foot again on his property. That if he ever dared to, he would be in big trouble.

“You have deeply traumatized my wife. Because of all this I’m losing time away from my work!”

Daniel repeatedly attempted to convince Alfonso to come with him by motorcycle to Cinco Pinos so they could settle their quarrel in presence of the police.

But to no avail. Alfonso simply repeatedly refused.

As I saw that the conversation was not going anywhere, I ran to Don Paco’s and quickly returned to the scene with my motorcycle. And without getting off, I turned to Alfonso.

“Look, why don’t you come to Cinco Pinos with me on my motorcycle. I’m a Canadian. I can help you. Last year, North South Studies financed a new house for your family. If you come with me, I promise you help”.

He hesitated, looked at me, and seemed to be ready to consider my proposal.

However, he stood there, hesitating.

“For me it’s still the morning after the night before. I don’t want the police to see me in this condition. Furthermore, I have a bottle of rum in my pocket... I want you to drop me off at my house for a minute so I can get a shirt and leave my bottle there”.

At first, I refused to stop at his house, given that I knew Mary, Filomena, Caroline and Don Paco were still there, and perhaps many others by now.

However, when I saw him hesitating, I finally gave in and off we went.

When we arrived at his place, I saw Milton Zelaya there, waiting for me. He had walked over from El Espino to hand me, in person, the yearly report for the micro-irrigation projects financed by North South Studies and that he manages. Given the circumstances, he knew he would have to wait.

Alfonso did as had been agreed. He walked into his house, grabbed a shirt, dropped off his bottle of rum, and rejoined me on the motorcycle.

As we motorcycled together towards Cinco Pinos, we carried on a conversation.

I was not scared but very concerned and acting instinctively. I knew I had to be very cautious and make him feel I understood him, that I was his friend, that I was on his side.

“What if they lock me up? What then? Who’ll take care of my family?”

If that happens, Alfonso, I’ll see to it that your family is provided with food. That is a promise. Last year, we built a new house for Filomena. We want to help your family.

“I know I haven’t done anything wrong. That’s why I’m accepting to go with you to the police station. Will you speak to the police for me?”

Yes, I will.

At one point, as we approached Cinco Pinos, I was afraid he might try to force me to stop so he could make a run for it. So, I switched the conversation.

Look at how beautiful nature is in this region, Alfonso! Look over there; we can see the mountains in Honduras.



Typical mountains in Cinco Pinos region (Photo: Danielle Turcot)

He agreed the view we were contemplating was beautiful. I felt that I had succeeded in maintaining a minimum of confidence.

As we drove into the town of Cinco Pinos, I went one step further in my effort to maintain a relation of confidence. I pretended that I did not remember where the police station was.

Alfonso, could you help me find the police station?

“Of course. See, he explained as he pointed his finger, it’s over there”.

There were two police officers in the station, one fully uniformed and one wearing a t-shirt. I asked to speak in private with one of them and discretely told the other one to keep an eye on Alfonso.

In a closed room, I explained to the police officer what had happened.

He informed me that Nicaraguan law only allows the police to detain a drunken person for a maximum of 48 hours, unless there is a formal denunciation on the part of one of the victims.

A few minutes later, Alfonso was in a cell, locked up.

I requested that at least one police officer come to Las Pozas to interrogate Filomena.

“We have no way of getting there. No car, no motorcycle. If you are willing to take one of us there on your motorcycle and then bring us back, we’ll go.”

I accepted the offer.

After they had finished writing a brief report, taking my name, age, etc., I left with one of the police officers for Las Pozas.

However, before leaving, I gave 200 cordobas, the equivalent of a little more than \$10 US, to the police officers so they would see to it that Alfonso was properly fed during the 48 hours he would be staying in jail.

After giving the money, I walked over to Alfonso’s prison cell and told him - I intentionally spoke loud enough so the police officers could overhear - that I had just given the police officers money for his food.

“That is my first way of showing that I will help you, Alfonso”, I commented as I left.

Just as I was about to walk out of the police station, a strange thing happened. The police officers looked at me, pulled me aside, and discretely asked if I couldn’t also give them some money so they could buy cigarettes.

Insulted, and taken aback by the fact that they would prioritize such a thing in these dramatic circumstances, I replied:

“No way, I cannot do that”.

As we drove from Cinco Pinos to Las Pozas, I chatted with the police officer. At one point, I asked him about his family, whether he had a *compañera* and children.

As he was not responding, I thought that he could not hear me because of the noise of the motorcycle, so I repeated the question.

After a fairly long silence, he commented, “I used to have a *compañera* and children. I no longer am with them.”

Not long after turning at El Carrizal and engaging on the very rough earth road leading to Las Pozas, luck would have it that we ran into a herd of about 50 cattle, totally blocking the road and walking at a turtle pace!

It took me several minutes of complicated and nerve-racking maneuvering to weave my way through the herd while avoiding the big holes.

As we entered Filomena’s house, the police officer asked everyone to leave but Filomena.

Then he turned to me:

“I want you to stay with me as I interrogate her.”

The interrogation then started.

Even though my Spanish skills are fairly good, I had a bit of trouble understanding the gist of what was going on. It seemed like the officer was encouraging Filomena not to lay charges against Alfonso.

His reason: virtually all women in a similar situation either refuse to lay charges, or, in the rare cases that they do, they simply end up cancelling them a few days later. So, why make us go through all this useless trouble?

My objective, a very delicate one for a foreigner who still has much to learn about Nicaraguan culture, was to encourage Filomena to stand up for her rights. To lay formal charges against Alfonso.

I told her that should she decide to lay charges and experience financial difficulties because of this, North South Studies would come to her help, just as we had done last year in financing a new house for her.

As I could see that despite my offer, Filomena was still hesitating, and that something else was preventing her from going ahead, I decided to intervene more directly.

Why, Filomena, are you not willing to lay charges following such a serious incident? Why?

“Alfonso has threatened to kill me if I lay charges against him”, she replied.

Filomena’s son then stepped into the conversation. Pointing to a wound on his head, he exclaimed:

“Alfonso beat me up a few days ago. He also threatened to kill me should I report to the police what is going on.”

I had trouble believing my eyes and my ears!

I had read Lancaster’s 1994 book *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua*. And much else on machismo, on violence against women.

I remembered how Daniel Ortega himself had gotten off the hook with total impunity in the Zoilamérica affair at the end of the 90s. His stepdaughter Zoilamérica had publicly accused him of having sexually abused her for several years during the Sandinista revolution when she was a teenager. However, thanks to a very opportunistic pact he made with ex-president Alemán, both were guaranteed two more terms in parliament with the accompanying immunity. Alemán thus escaped 20 years in prison for pocketing much of the

international aid following Hurricane Mitch, and Ortega did not have to face the charges made against him by Zoilamérica.

“Threatening to kill someone is a very serious criminal offence. Even without any physical violence, it alone suffices to lay charges”, the police officer explained to Filomena.

At one point, Filomena’s son seemed ready to go ahead and press charges against Alfonso. However, the police officer did not pursue this matter any further.

As we walked out of the house, the police officer told me that he also wanted to interview Mary.

However, when we met Don Paco, who had been waiting outside, the latter seemed totally opposed to this idea.

“Why do this? Why get a foreign student involved in this? I see no point in this”.

Had I opposed Don Paco, perhaps the police officer would have insisted. However, I did not feel it was right to go that far.

In the end, the police officer abandoned the idea of interrogating Mary and we I motorcycled him back to Cinco Pinos.

When I returned to Las Pozas, it was starting to get dark.

One day later, as no one had laid charges against Alfonso, he was released from prison but required to keep a good distance from his home in Las Poza.

Most Nicaraguans I spoke to believe Alfonso did not get any food from the police.

“They just pocketed the money”, they told me.

## January 20, 2008: Conflict between Don Paco and CPC leader of Las Pozas

During our field trip, we often heard about the Councils of Citizen's Power – Consejos de Poder Ciudadano (CPCs).<sup>25</sup>

Abraham Paisano, of the 'Red Nicaragüense por la Democracia y el Desarrollo Local' on Ometepe Island, spoke very highly of them. On December 23, Lester Zelaya, a Sandinista leader and our key organizer in the Cinco Pinos region, had us meet Rigoberto Palma Macareno, the coordinator of the CPC in the municipality of Cinco Pinos. Macareno, not surprisingly, spoke very highly of the CPCs.

However, [Sofia Montenegro](#)<sup>26</sup> was extremely critical of these in the talk she gave us on January 15.

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<sup>25</sup> In the article [Los Consejos del Poder Ciudadano en Nicaragua](#), Enric Font Estruch, (Rebelión, November 8, 2010) explains the nature of CPCs. "The CPCs are community organizations created in 2007, the first year of the new Sandinista government. Their creation was the government's way of fulfilling its electoral promise to return power to the people. They are citizens' organizations, but their work for all intents and purposes consists of solving problems that exist in their communities. They are open to all the people of the community, neighbourhood or town, without distinction of political creed. (...) CPCs are also an important part of the ideological struggle that is taking place in Nicaragua. The right distorts them, attacks them, perverts them. (...) CPCs and Citizen Power Groups (their local equivalent) are not subordinated to the municipal government, nor subordinated to the central government, they have autonomy and have their own work dynamics." (**Author's note in 2019:** The CPCs, from all the information I was able to gather during my annual trips to Nicaragua, are under the control of Rosario Murillo, Daniel Ortega's wife who is presently vice-president of Nicaragua. Murillo also controls mayors with an iron hand. I once traveled by car with a mayor from Cinco Pinos to Managua. He was going there to attend one of the numerous meetings of all mayors of Nicaragua. He told me that all of these meetings were chaired by Rosario Murillo.)

<sup>26</sup> "Sofía Montenegro Alarcón (born 15 February 1954) is a Nicaraguan journalist, social researcher, and feminist. (...) She fought in the [Sandinista Revolution](#) and though initially supportive of the [Sandinista](#)

During our homestay in Las Pozas, a fairly bitter conflict developed between Don Paco and the coordinator of the CPC of that comarca.

Our project in Las Pozas consisted of removing some of the lumber and all the roofing tiles from the roof of the elementary school and building a new roof, financed by North South Studies.

Don Paco, who was managing this project, suggested to me that some of the lumber and roofing tiles be used for the construction of a house for a very poor woman who lives approximately one kilometer from his place.

We first visited the woman, saw that she lived in a makeshift house of plastic tarps with very small children. Don Paco told us she worked six days a week washing clothes and acting as a maid in a house in Las Pozas. When she goes off to work, he explained, her children have to fend for themselves, even though the oldest is no more than 9 years old.

I went ahead with his suggestion.

So, Don Paco went to meet the school principal, explained what we wanted to do, and she agreed with the idea of donating the old roof material for the construction of the woman's house. The reasoning was that given that North South Studies is financing the material for the new roof (a donation of nearly \$3,000 US), it makes sense that it has a say in what is done with the old material.

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Party, later became an outspoken critic, saying it had moved to the right. She served as an editor of various divisions of the official Sandinista newspaper, *Barricada*, until 1994, when she founded the Center for Communication Research (CINCO) as an independent research organization free of government influence. She has written broadly on power, gender, and social interaction." Wikipedia, accessed May 18, 2009.

A day or two later the woman and her father came to the school and we said she could have some of the lumber and all the old roofing tiles.

A few hours later, as I was motorcycling back to Las Pozas I came across Pedro\*, Caroline's host father and the contractor who had accepted to carry out all three of our development projects during the homestay (he is receiving a salary from North South Studies for this work): that in Las Pozas, that in El Carrizal and that in El Espino respectively. When I drove by him, I thought for a second that he was calling me, but I wasn't sure, so I did not stop.

A bit later, Pedro arrived at Don Paco's and said he wanted to have a word with me.

"I was very upset to learn that the young woman and her father were taking material away from the schoolyard. As soon as I found out about it, I ordered them to stop doing this.

"Don Paco, who is aware of how the school system works, knows perfectly well that one cannot give away public property to an individual without further ado. He was dead wrong to even suggest this. Now he is going around Las Pozas spreading the rumor that it is I, Pedro, in my capacity as coordinator of the CPC of Las Pozas, who is preventing this poor woman from having the material!"

Very ill at ease, I told Pedro that we had acted in good faith. As foreigners, we have to trust the local leaders we are dealing with. In our eyes, Don Paco's credibility is very high; we simply trusted him.

Pedro suggested that a meeting be called. A meeting of the members of the school board, of the principal of the school and of the members of the CPC of Las Pozas. Don Paco and I would also be invited.

I accepted.

However, when I spoke to Don Paco about this meeting, he seemed very annoyed.

“Pedro is trying to save face. He made an error, and now he is searching for a way out. I do not think we should go to that meeting.”

I told Don Paco I respected his decision not to attend but that I felt that I should.

The meeting took place on December 31, the day before our departure from this region and only a couple of hours before our community supper with our host families and ensuing farewell party.

People arrived at the meeting one by one, the school principal, the secretary, various members of the school board and of the CPC. Attendance was taken.

Pedro chaired the meeting and tension literally filled the room.

All those present seemed to agree with Pedro: Don Paco had made a serious blunder. Public property is public property; one cannot simply give it away.

I spoke in favor of Don Paco but with delicacy. I argued that Don Paco, from what I could see, had been contributing substantially to education in the region and in Las Pozas in particular. This, not only by managing extremely well our scholarships but also by collaborating with us in various ways.

I gave a very recent example.

Don Paco and I were involved, a few months ago, in a project that would have financed, had it been a success, the construction of a high school in Las Pozas. Tomaso Batsalle, a former Chilean North South student who is presently studying at Concordia University in Montreal, thought it was possible for the Concordia Student Association to donate

several thousand dollars for the construction of this high school.

Though the project did not, in the end, materialize, it very well could have.

I admitted that Don Paco is human and may have made an error. However, I emphasized that this error should be perceived as a small thing in light of his major contribution to the well-being of the community.

Pedro drew two circles on the blackboard: one very big, and one very small.

“The big one, he said, represents Don Paco’s contribution to the well-being of Las Pozas. And the small one represents his error.

“However, given the fact that elections are coming, and that Don Paco is spreading a rumor that could hurt the CPC, this small circle, in present circumstances, becomes very large.

“Don Paco is saying that I, as coordinator of the CPC, stopped this woman from taking material. That is false; I stopped her as contractor of the project (as he spoke, he held up the keys to the elementary school building, a sign of his authority). As contractor, I am responsible for all the material on the school property; the new material that will be installed, and the old material that is removed.”

As the tension was high and I felt we were not going anywhere, and as I felt that it was not so much a discussion among those present but rather a discussion between all of them and me (and through me, Don Paco), I decided to speak my mind.

Don Paco, I said, is afraid that if that poor woman does not obtain the material, it will simply be handed out to various members of the Las Pozas community. In fact, he fears that

the beneficiaries will primarily be some of the leaders of this community, who are not among the poorest.

Pedro jumped on this with great indignation.

“Did you hear what Ovide just said? Did you hear that Don Paco is accusing us of corruption? We the leaders of Las Pozas? Write that down in the minutes. Write that down....”

I interrupted Pedro.

I do not want to misrepresent what Don Paco told me. Don Paco is not accusing each one of you here today of being corrupt.

However, the truth of the matter is that in Nicaragua, as in many other countries, there are many leaders who, though purportedly elected to serve the common good, end up merely filling up their own personal pockets as quickly as they can.

You know that and I know that! There are even some here in Las Pozas. Once they win elections the first thing you know they have a large mansion built (I was thinking of the large house built by the owner of the largest pulperia of Las Pozas, but I did not name him as such).

There are also some in Cinco Pinos, and there are some at the national level.

You also know that there are many politicians who spend much of their time quarreling and getting fat salaries instead of addressing the dire needs of the impoverished masses.

Quarrelling requires tons of energy and is so often futile. It often occurs between people who are generally very good. One side blames the other side. Events and words emanating from one side become systematically interpreted in a negative light by the other side.

I therefore propose a compromise.

No one here present would disagree with the idea of helping a very poor woman, who lives alone with small children, build her house.

And you do agree that as donors, North South Studies could have rendered its \$3,000 US donation for the construction of a new roof for the elementary school of Las Pozas conditional to the old roof material being used to help this extremely poor woman build a house.

All this being acknowledged, using the old roof material for some other public good also makes lots of sense.

I propose a compromise. Why do you not accept to give at least part of the old roof material to the woman and keep the rest for some other useful community project?

A woman objected to my proposal.

“Your idea sounds good. However, when that young woman was given material by the municipality, what did she do with it? She simply sold it to make money. That’s what she did with it! She did not use it to build a house.

There are ways, I replied, to prevent such a thing from happening, should we give her some of the material.

We could ask Don Paco, who has considerable experience in managing projects and proven to be very reliable, to assist this young woman. And to supervise that the material donated is used for the intended purpose of building a house.

Why not compromise? Instead of giving absolutely nothing to this woman, why do you not accept here and now to give her part of the old material?

That not only makes sense from a human point of view but could also help you politically speaking, that is for the forthcoming elections.

## Moments Shared

The principle that public property cannot be taken away by individuals would be preserved; and the CPC and the school board could simultaneously show their concern for the very poor in this community.

My suggestion was accepted by those present and noted by the minute-taker.

However, Don Paco has called me several times since we left the Cinco Pinos region. The last call was Sunday January 20. No material had been given to the woman by that date.

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**Note added in 2019.** In the end, this woman never did receive any of the old roof material. So, North South Studies eventually financed the construction of a house for her. Don Paco managed the project and he did it extremely well.



The house financed by North South Studies (Photo: Danielle Turcot)

## **December 25, 2008: My happiness with Don Paco and students**

Things are going well. The inner tension that inhabited me when I arrived here in Las Pozas is gone. A tension I always experience in Montreal as I prepare the field trip, especially in the days immediately preceding our departure. A tension that increased because our departure from Miami was postponed by more than two hours because repairs had to be done on our plane. A tension I only realize that I have as it begins to disappear, here in Las Pozas.

I am very happy with Don Paco, as well as with Chloé, Lara, Sabrina, Catherine and Sebastien.<sup>27</sup> We have a very open and fluent relationship. One of mutual confidence. The closeness I experience is one of the most precious gifts any teacher could ever receive from students.

## **December 26, 2008: Typical midnight intervention for sick student**

This morning, a little after 3 am, someone knocked on our door. It was Sabrina's host father. My daughter Sabrina has immense stomach pains, he explained.

Don Paco and I got up and walked over to the house. Sabrina, surrounded by her host mother and all the children in the family, was shaking like a leaf. She seemed in great pain. I placed my hand on her stomach. When I pressed down on the place where I think the appendix is located, she felt acute pain.

The memory of what happened to a former student who required an emergency operation for her appendix still fresh in mind, I concluded that she might have appendicitis.

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<sup>27</sup> North South Studies students living in host families in Las Pozas.

Don Paco and I walked back home and woke up Sergio.<sup>28</sup> He dressed up and came with us to Sabrina's side. After examining her for a few minutes and asking her a series of questions, Sergio concluded that it was not appendicitis.

When he asked Sabrina to stand up, she immediately vomited. It is just gastroenteritis he concluded.

Ovide, when it is appendicitis, the pain is located in one place, on the right side of the stomach. Furthermore, her pulse would be at about 120. She would have fever. She would not have wanted to have supper; the fact that she did is a sign that it is not appendicitis, Sergio explained.

At 6 am, Don Paco and I left for Cinco Pinos on the motorcycle. First, we paid the rest of the bill for the lunch we had in the restaurant Doña Norma on December 23. Then we checked with the bus to make sure it would pick up all the students on time for our outing to Santo Tomas. Then we stopped in a small hardware store to purchase a tap; the one Don Paco has is leaking non-stop since I've arrived.

When we motorcycled back, I left Don Paco off at El Carrizal. Then I went to see how Sabrina was. Much better, she told me.

I suggested that she not walk with the others to El Carrizal, but come with me, a couple of hours later, on the motorcycle. She welcomed the idea.

## **December 31, 2008: Roof of La Montaña cistern collapses**

We distributed 15 bags of clothes this morning to families from La Montaña. When talking with some of the women

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<sup>28</sup> Sergio was then Ena's husband. Like Ena, he was a student in medicine.

from La Montaña, I discovered that the roof of the cistern located next to the primary school of La Montaña had collapsed. And that the tap is also broken. I asked them why the roof had collapsed. Faulty construction, accident, or what? Silence.

When they left, Don Paco told me that during a party held at the school, many people, including adults, had climbed on the top of the cistern, using it as a chair. This excessive weight is what made it collapse. The campesinos were too embarrassed to tell me what had happened.

Following my visit of five micro irrigation projects – none of them working – this discovery is not very encouraging.

What patience it takes to work in these communities!

Development is not building a cistern or providing a family with a micro irrigation system. Development is changing the mind; providing training, so that people learn to manage things effectively.

I will ask Don Paco to come up with a budget for repairing this cistern. The community should have to pay part of this. Otherwise, the motivation to maintain it will not be there. The cement cap on the cistern should have a lock. A box should be built around the tap. Perhaps the cistern should also be surrounded by a fence.

### **December 27, 2009: Typical laptop distribution process**

Yesterday our entire group went to Santo Tomas and donated a new printer, a stabilizer, and 12 laptops (those given to us by CGI Technologies) to the Internet Centre of the municipality. We also gave a laptop to Azucena Hernandez,

who is the director of the high school of Paso Hondo (120 students).

Clementina Dávila, the Sandinista mayor, gave us a very good conference. It was simple, profound and very sincere.

In the afternoon, after returning from Santo Tomas, Don Paco, Rodolfo and I took six more laptops, a new printer and stabilizer to the Internet Centre of Cinco Pinos.

Martha Lorena Mondragón Aguilar, the director of the high school of Cinco Pinos (600 regular students and 200 on Saturdays), was not too happy about not getting any computers. We had them sign an agreement, as we had done in Santo Tomas, specifying that the Mayor of Cinco Pinos, Cecilio Cruz, would offer free computer and Internet courses to all the teachers and students of the high school, and on completion of these courses, would offer the Internet Centre services for half the regular price (in other words, about 25 cents per hour) to all the teachers and students. The agreement also specified that the Internet Centre would be open in the evening during the week and on weekends (presently not the case) so that those who work can have access to it.

### **January 19, 2010: Don Paco weeps while saying goodbye**

Danielle and I arrived in León yesterday afternoon by public bus. We were supposed to leave Las Pozas in the noon bus. Thanks to Don Paco, we were able to leave for Somotillo in a pickup truck with Chica, the owner of the largest pulpería of Las Pozas, and catch an earlier bus there. Chica was leaving Las Pozas at 9:30 am to bring his motorbike to Somotillo for repairs.



Danielle holding Serena, Don Paco and Ena (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

When we left Las Pozas, Don Paco wept like a child when he was holding me in his arms. He cried more than usual.

“You don’t have to pay the truck; I have paid for it”, Don Paco told us as we parted.

### **December 20, 2010: Traditional tour of La Montaña and typical project requests**

We are leaving for La Montaña in a few minutes. I can hear some of the students chatting outside near our (Don Paco’s) house.

Last night, George Turski<sup>29</sup> drove to El Carrizal with Rodolfo<sup>30</sup> on the motorcycle. They returned with at least six of the laptops. George is going to check the laptops and, with the help of Rodolfo install Windows in Spanish on the laptops.

The outing to La Montaña was very pleasant. We walked up to the house that was built with North South Studies money.

A spectacular view.

Don Paco dialled Danielle's number so I could talk to her for a while. He offered his cell phone to the students so they could call their parents; all declined the offer. He was surprised.

No doubt that this refusal results from the fact that the teachers insisted, in preparing the students for their field trip, on the importance of not constantly using the Internet to keep in touch with their relatives and friends in Canada. Being in constant contact with them would prevent them from living a deeper experience in Nicaragua.

It was a very moving experience to talk to Mari Lou, the woman who now has a new house built, two years ago, with North South Studies funds.

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<sup>29</sup> George, who was then teaching Humanities at Dawson College, accompanied the North South Studies students during their field trip to Nicaragua in December 2010. Then, in subsequent years, he often traveled with me to Nicaragua in order to help me in the management of development projects. His contribution in helping the Internet Center of Las Pozas survive has been tremendous. His daughter Kaya, an eight-time Winter X Games champion in Women's Ski slope style, was then one of the world's best freestyle skier.

<sup>30</sup> Rodolfo Martínez collaborated with Don Paco for several years in preparing the homestays of North South Studies in the region of Cinco Pinos.

When Don Paco and the students walked over to the kiosk located about fifty feet from the house, Milda, a neighbour of Mari Lou, asked to have a word with me.

“We are living in a house down there (she pointed in one direction; because of all the trees, we could not see the house). Our roof leaks. The supporting beams were not dry when they built the house. As a result, the roof has caved in and rain comes into the house in some places. Would it be possible for you to pay for the wood necessary to rebuild the roof?”

As I was not sure that she could write, I asked her for her full name, and started taking notes. The house is smaller than that of Mari Lou. Two families share it. She is living there with her *compañero* and five children. The other family represents the other three.

As soon as I shook her hand to leave, Mari Lou asked to have a word with me.

“Could you pay for the cement necessary to rebuild the supporting wall near the house? During the heavy rains we had this year, we were afraid that it would cave in and affect the foundation of our house.”

I told her that given that North South had just paid for her new home, the most beautiful in La Montaña, and given that there are many other people living in makeshift homes who have requested a house, we could not pay for the cement. Doing so would seem unfair. This, even though I understood her request and felt it made sense.

### **December 28, 2010: Ena gives talk on women in Cinco Pinos region**

I have been so busy that I have not had time for diary writing. Having at least 40 computers to distribute is proving to be a labour-intensive task.

George has been wonderful in installing Windows in Spanish on these computers, and in installing Microsoft Office in Spanish. Last night he went to bed at 4 am.

At about 6 pm, he went off on Rodolfo's motorcycle with two kids and had an accident. Nothing serious (he had scratches on his legs and stomach, but no one was otherwise hurt) but the motorbike was damaged. After repairing the motorbike enough to allow Rodolfo to drive to Somotillo to have it fully repaired, he went to the Internet Centre for the rest of the night.

At 11 am today, Ena, my host sister who is a doctor, gave us a talk on the condition of women in this region and in Nicaragua in general.

Gabriel was the only one missing but for a good reason; Don Paco had asked him to go off on a horse, with a Nicaraguan who acted as guide, to inform the families in La Montaña to come and get a bag of clothes that we are donating to them.

Ena's talk was simple and very down to earth. I am sure it will have quite an impact on the students.

She gave the example of Suley, the young woman of 18 years old who lives right across from Don Paco's house. Suley has a child of two and a half years old. Her younger sister, who is fourteen years old, has a child of one and a half years old. Suley has abandoned her studies. In the past couple of months, she has been working in Costa Rica as a maid; she just returned home. She has a cyst on one of her ovaries and because of the pain limps when she walks. She will be operated on January 10.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Oscar René Vargas notes, in *Pobreza en Nicaragua: Un abismo que se agranda* (Instituto de Investigación y Desarrollo Humanístico de la Universidad Politécnica, Managua, Nicaragua, August 1998) :

“Teenage girls who become pregnant and give birth experience deep problems:

During the conference, I told the students about the interview we carried out about three years ago with Suley's mom. Our research project that year focused on the condition of women in Nicaragua.

One of the questions we asked: "What is a favorite moment that you had with your own mom?"

Suley's mom, who now teaches primary school in Las Pozas, just stayed silent for several minutes.

When an answer finally came out, it took all of us for an unpleasant surprise.

"My mother had a very hard and sad life. She had 10 children, nearly all of them with different men. As soon as the child was born, the man would abandon her. They would not help her support the child; they would just leave. She had to work extremely hard to make ends meet."

**Note added in 2019.** After the field trip of December 2010, I was particularly moved by the condition of women in Nicaragua. The experience of a student during the field trip of

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- 81% of the women giving birth for the first time are teen-age girls. (...)
  - approximately 21% of the women between the ages of 14 and 19 have at least one child. The majority of them have not completed their grade school. This means that they do not have enough education to obtain decent jobs in the job market.
  - a fairly high percentage of teen-age mothers live outside of their family and without their partner. This makes for instability and insecurity and forces them to cope with their offspring alone. The majority of the mothers below the age of 19 are single-parent mothers.
  - More than 60% of pregnant teen-agers are unmarried or live in free unions.
  - Seventy percent of the girls in Nicaragua start having sexual relationships between the ages of 14 and 18 years old. They make very little use of modern contraceptive methods."

December 2007 witnessing her drunk host father aggressing her host mother with a machete was still fresh on my mind.

So were all the stories of family violence that Thelma had told me about on previous trips; as a doctor, she often had to treat women who had been beaten up by their husband.

I was particularly moved by the testimony of a student during the December 2010 trip. Her host sister wrote her a long letter explaining the sexual abuse she had suffered from her alcoholic father for several years. The latter had threatened to kill his wife if she tried to run away.

As a new health center was being built in Las Pozas, the former health center located right next to Don Paco's house would soon become vacant. I wondered whether it could be used as a "Casa de mujeres". Not a shelter for battered women (I knew that would not work) but rather a place for women to give birth, a place where they could have meetings and receive various kinds of assistance, including psychological support. After bringing that up in a North South faculty meeting, I was given the go ahead to at least explore various possibilities.

For several weeks, I worked on this issue. Having tried, unsuccessfully, to get a women project going with the help of Dr. Thelma Zelaya a few years ago, I knew things would not be easy but was willing to give it another try. With the help of Rodolfo, I was able to talk on the phone to the director of the Cinco Pinos Health Centre. As she also manages the new health center in Las Pozas and is responsible for the building where the old one was located, I thought she might be very interested. She was, or so it seemed. In a matter of weeks, she had organized a meeting with women from Las Pozas and the surrounding comarcas in order to consult them on the possibility of a women project. As so often happens, that was the last that I heard about it; she had promised to get back to me after the meeting but never did. Once the Las Pozas water

project started taking up my time and energy, the women project got pushed aside.

My only consolation lies in the fact that the water project successfully carried out in Las Pozas represents a concrete way of helping women. Traditionally women are always the ones who have to carry water from a nearby river, or from a nearby well, sometimes for quite a distance.

### **December 31, 2010: My last talking circle with comarca students**

Right now, I am doing the trip finances with Don Paco. As he is taking forever to note all the details, I am writing instead of sitting there doing nothing.

This morning at 5 am Ena and Sergio left for Diriamba with their daughter Serena. I motorcycled Sergio to El Carrizal then Albert motorcycled Ena and Serena.

Last night we had our last talking circle in Las Pozas. Who knows? It may turn out to be my very last talking circle ever here. Next year I am not going to organize the trip nor come with the group to Nicaragua. In the future I plan on helping out as a volunteer, but that may change. Life being life...

In Las Pozas we had a very united and harmonious group. As George pointed out during the circle, the students were very autonomous. After the first four or five days, George spent countless hours in the Internet Centre installing Windows in Spanish on all the laptops and the desktops. I was busy with coordination tasks.

Despite our lack of availability, the students did very well. No conflicts, no big crises. Dahlia was sick for a couple of days, Jaelle had problems with bed bugs and Meaghan was not feeling well for a day or two; other than that, all went amazingly well.

## **January 19, 2011: Playing another trick on Don Paco**

Ricky Friedberg was one of the students participating on the last trip (December 2010). His father, Fred Friedberg, was able to obtain a few thousand dollars of medical supplies from AGM Medical, the company for which he worked. Donations that would go to health centers and hospitals. This included a wheelchair.

We knew we could fit the medical supplies of AGM Medical and the pharmaceutical products obtained via Health Partners International of Canada into our luggage, but how could we manage to go through customs with a wheelchair? And how could we avoid having to pay the airline for its transportation?

Someone in class proposed that a student pretend he or she was cripple. Ricky volunteered to play this role, one he meticulously practiced in Montreal before our departure.

And it worked perfectly! We had no problems whatsoever passing through customs in all airports, Canadian, US, and Nicaraguan. And not only did we not have to pay the airline any extra baggage fee for the wheelchair, but Ricky was served as a king by the air hostesses!

When, on December 18, our bus was arriving at the elementary school of El Carrizal for the welcome ceremony in which students would be formally introduced to their host families, I proposed that we play a trick on Don Paco, who would be acting as master of ceremony.

“Let’s pretend you are really cripple, Ricky. When we get off the bus, I’ll immediately tell Don Paco that I had forgotten to inform him that one of our students was unable to walk. So always stay in your wheelchair, Ricky.

“When, during the ceremony, Don Paco names your host mom and dad and they come to greet you, simply stand up

from your wheelchair, walk over to them and give them a big hug.

“At that very moment, I’ll turn to Don Paco and exclaim, Don Paco, it’s a miracle! It’s a miracle! Ricky can now walk!”

That is exactly what we did.

When Ricky got up and started walking towards his host parents, I announced it was a miracle.

Don Paco’s face dropped in disbelief, and all Dawson students and teachers broke into laughter.

I then explained to the Nicaraguan host families the trick we had decided to play on Don Paco and they also broke into laughter.

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The wheelchair was donated to Estebana Maldonado, a woman who lives in La Honda, a community located not far from Cinco Pinos. Because of diabetes, she had just lost her two legs. Two of her sons had been assassinated in El Salvador just before we arrived, and her husband had been brutally beaten and robbed in his home. As the earth floor in her house was not appropriate for a wheelchair, we financed, the following year, the construction of a cement floor for her. It cost \$500 US to do so.

### **January 11, 2012: Las Pozas thanks North South Studies for water project**

Last night, that is the day before George Turski and I left Las Pozas, the community organized a farewell party for us. Approximately 50 people attended. It was a farewell, but also and more importantly a huge thank you to North South Studies for having allowed 61 families, virtually all those of Las Pozas and a few in the sector of El Espino known as El

Rincon, to have access to potable water. People lined up, men, women and children of all ages, to give George and me a very big hug.

When George and I were given a tour of the artesian well itself, of the kilometers of trenches dug by the entire community, and especially of the two immense water reservoirs with a capacity of 8,000 gallons each that were constructed some 1,300 meters up a fairly steep mountain, we were in disbelief! What an incredible amount of labour had been carried out by this community to complete this project! The installation of the pipes and the construction of the cisterns were supervised without pay by Daniel, one of the main contractors of Las Pozas. People volunteered to carry all the material required to build these reservoirs up a steep and sometimes very taxing path.

### **January 8, 2013: Meal with mayors to make possible La Uva water project**

This morning, the Casa Canadiense<sup>32</sup> representatives - Michael O'Sullivan, Carolle Domen and Madeline Mendoza - left for Managua.

They had arrived here at about 6:30 on January 6. That night we had supper together at Don Paco's.

I am so happy that the Casa Canadiense personnel, after all these years of collaboration, has finally come to visit this region.

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<sup>32</sup> Casa Canadiense, now known as [Casa-Pueblito](#), has collaborated with North South Studies for several years. This Canadian NGO, which has an office in Managua, organized our stay in that city and helped us in the implementation of several development projects in the region of Cinco Pinos..

Marcia, a researcher, is supposed to come here in a few days to see what impact the field trip has been having in this region.

Last night, I was able to organize a meal in the restaurant 'Meyling' in Cinco Pinos. Present were Meyling Mendoza Corales, newly elected mayor of Cinco Pinos, Wilfredo Ramos Cadena, newly elected mayor of Santo Tomas, Concepcion Cuarezma, Wilfredo's assistant, Edelberto Zelaya, Lester (Chavelo) Maradiaga Cruz (leader of El Jícaro who had collaborated in the organization of the student stay in host families in his comarca), Dali Casco Zepeda (leader of El Espino who had collaborated in the organization of the student stay in host families in his comarca), Michael O'Sullivan, Carolle Domen and Madeline Mendoza (latter three from Casa Canadiense), George Turski, Merrienne Couture,<sup>33</sup> Don Paco and Rodolfo Martínez.

The purpose of this meal was to build bridges between people in order to render the La Uva water project more doable.

Wilfredo and Meyling promised to provide \$2,000 US each for this project.

I emphasized the importance of not making empty promises like the one the outgoing mayor of Cinco Pinos made to me last year: he promised to provide about \$20 US per month to help the Las Pozas Internet Centre survive, but never gave the center a single penny.

Although both Meyling and Wilfredo are facing a debt because of the outgoing mayors, they seemed very sincere and promised that I could, this time, count on them.

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<sup>33</sup> Merrienne Couture, English teacher at Dawson College, accompanied the North South Studies students during their stay in Nicaragua for five consecutive years. She was also accompanied by her husband Paul Van Galder.

The barbecued chicken meal was delicious and the atmosphere very friendly and relaxed.

Don Paco helped me considerably in making it happen.

### **January 10, 2013: Lunch with Merrienne, laptop distribution, meeting to discuss projects**

Yesterday Merrienne came to have lunch with me at Don Paco's.

The next-door neighbor cook that he hired served us a soup, la sopa levanta muertos.

To prepare this soup Don Paco, who got up at 4:30 am, went to get yucca, carrots and other vegetables from the field. Then he took the 'rutita'<sup>34</sup> to Cinco Pinos where he bought beef. In the morning, he helped make the soup. It was absolutely delicious. (...)

This morning at 10 am, the mayors of each one of the four saints were supposed to come to get the laptops we are donating to each of these municipalities. In the end, only the mayor of San Francisco (known here as San Pancho) showed up. Some delegates from the central government showed up to meet with the other three mayors. That is why, we were told, they could not come.

Last night we had a meeting in Las Pozas to discuss the Internet Centre, to decide on the distribution of the computers, memory sticks and soccer balls, and to discuss briefly the functioning of the water project in Las Pozas.

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<sup>34</sup> 'Rutita' is the name people gave to the pickup truck that provided transportation from a few of the comarcas to the town of Cinco Pinos. It came by twice a day and the fee was very small.

## **January 11, 2014: Meeting to discuss Las Pozas Internet Center and laptop distribution**

Three-hour meeting this morning with Don Paco, Rodolfo, Marisol, Evelyn and Michelle.<sup>35</sup> Two topics: distribution of the laptops and functioning of the Internet Centre.

### *Internet Centre*

Average monthly income in 2013: about 3200 córdobas, or \$128 Us. Cost of Alfanumeric (the signal provider): 144.2 US (140 x 3%). Salaries: 20 US plus 30% of gross income= 20 + 38= 58.

Thus, monthly deficit, excluding paper, ink and small repairs: 128-202=74. Yearly deficit in 2014= 888 US.

We decided to increase the cost of use to 12 córdobas per hour, effective February 1, 2014. To charge 4 córdobas per page for printing for all users, including teachers. In the past, teachers only paid 3 and others 4.

It was agreed to try to find and train more volunteers for the center. Both Evelyn and Marisol say it becomes very boring to spend long hours in the center. Sometimes they have to sacrifice parties, celebrations, etc. I suggested that, should they find more help, they might consider staying open until 8 instead of 7 every night.

### *Laptops:*

It was agreed to give 7 to the Las Pozas Internet Center. That means 3 more than now, for a total of 12. The four laptops that are not very good will be removed from center and

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<sup>35</sup> Marisol Martínez, Evelyn Martínez and Michelle Martínez worked several years as supervisors of the Internet Center of Las Pozas. Most of their work was voluntary. Evelyn is presently managing, and this on a very modest salary, the Internet classroom in the Las Pozas high school.

distributed to someone who needs a computer but not the Internet.

The municipality of Cinco Pinos received 27 laptops in all. This includes 6 to the APRODESE center, one to Yulieny Puig Cabrera (Cuban who worked in APRODESE) in exchange for his commitment to repair things in the Las Pozas center; one to Julian Zelaya for his business, one to Luis Manuel, the político of Cinco Pinos, 3 to high school of Las Pozas, 1 to school of El Carissal, 1 to secretariat of judge, 7 to Las Pozas Internet Center, etc. The total is really 23, not 27, as 4 from the Las Pozas center are being freed for other uses.

That means that we have 46 laptops left for the other the three other municipalities, namely Santo Tomas del Norte, San Francisco del Norte, and San Pedro del Norte.

### **January 10, 2014: Ever more motorcycles and cell phones in Nicaragua**

Conversation last night with Wilmer and Don Paco. The number of people with motorcycles in Nicaragua has increased significantly. People drive carelessly and most often without a helmet. In 2013, there were 14 casualties resulting from motorcycle accidents. In the very first days of 2014, there are already 12 casualties.

Wilmer purchased a motorcycle about three years ago. He only uses four or five times a year; no more. When he tried to start it recently, he realized his battery was dead. His brother, who lives in El Salvador and is better off, bought him another battery recently. However, as he does not use it, it is clear that this new battery will not last long. He never bothered to obtain a license plate for his motorcycle. It is an object of contemplation primarily, not one of use.

The number of people with cell phones has also increased sharply. In Las Pozas, virtually every family has a movie star phone in their house. In most families, there are also cell phones, sometimes up to five or six. Virtually all young people have a cell phone. "They will spend 20 córdobas to purchase a calling card and then not have any money left to buy food", commented Wilmer.

### **January 16, 2014: North South Studies donates 886 used eye glasses**

Yesterday we distributed 10 laptops to the new mayor of San Pedro del Norte. We had already given one to the police of that municipality. Afterwards we had lunch in Concepcion's restaurant<sup>36</sup> with Don Paco, Rodolfo, the mayor and his driver. Then, Don Paco and I went to the storage room in El Carrizal to count the eye glasses: 886 of them! It was very hot in the storage room.

### **January 18, 2014: Don Paco and I visit Ometepe Island**

#### **Note added in 2019**

In 2011, I invited Don Paco to come and spend a couple of weeks at my place in Canada. As a way of thanking him for his immense contribution to North South Studies and as a sign of our friendship, I would pay all the expenses with my personal money, including his airplane ticket.

He seemed to consider this a possibility, so I spent a considerable amount of time giving him all the information he needed to travel to Canada.

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<sup>36</sup> Concepción Cuarezma Herera was then the political representative of the municipality of Santo Tomas del Norte.

In the process, I rediscovered what I theoretically knew but had placed on my psychological backburner: while it is very easy for people from wealthy countries such as Canada to travel to Nicaragua for a few days or weeks, it is extremely complicated for a Nicaraguan to do so. All North South Studies students and teachers need to do each year to come to Nicaragua is have a passport, purchase a plane ticket and pay a small ten of fifteen-dollar one-month visa upon arriving at the Managua airport.

However, for Nicaraguans traveling to Canada is very complicated and full of red tape. Not only because of all the paperwork they have to do, but, also and more importantly, because they have to present solid proof that their stay in Canada is temporary, they have to show they have tons of money, or a Canadian ready to sponsor them during their stay in Canada.

At the end of the day, Don Paco finally turned down my proposal.

“Ovide, what am I going to do in Canada? I cannot speak French and I cannot speak English. Virtually no one will understand me, and I will not understand them,” he told me over the phone one day.

My counterproposal was to offer him an all-expenses paid trip in Nicaragua. As most Nicaraguans, especially the majority made up of the rural poor, Don Paco had never had the opportunity to visit many parts of his own country.

Don Paco accepted this proposal and finally, in January 2014, we spent several days visiting Nicaragua together.

I was not surprised when Don Paco suggested that we visit those places in Nicaragua that are closest to his heart. First, the regions in Nicaragua, besides that of Cinco Pinos, where North South Studies has had activities over the years. Second, Diriamba, the place where his daughter Ena was then living with her compañero and their daughter.

We thus spent time with the Casa-Pueblito personnel in Managua, the Balgüe community on Ometepe Island where North South Studies students had many homestays, and Diriamba. The famous San Sebastian traditional ceremonies happened to be taking place in Diriamba at that time.

What follows are extracts of the diary I kept during this holiday we spent together.

A very big day yesterday. Wilfredo Ramos Cadena, the mayor, was supposed to come and get Don Paco and me at 4:30 am. However, he arrived at 4 am, so he sat with me at breakfast and had bread and coffee.

Wilfredo drove us to El Carrizal where we took the bus for Chinandega at 5 am. A long ride. Much better, however, than it used to be a few years ago when the highway was not paved, and we spent our time bouncing up and down as the bus swerved left and right and as we swallowed lots of dust.

Arrival in Chinandega; 7:30 am. Within a few minutes we were on our way in a microbus to the Israel terminal in Managua. As soon as we arrived at 10 am, we jumped into a taxi and drove to Casa Canadiense.

The Casa Canadiens personnel - Madeline Mendoza, Carolle Domen, and Elizabeth Guillen Medina - gave Don Paco and me a very warm welcome. (...)

After conversing with them for a while, off to a nearby restaurant in a taxi. I was offering a meal to the Casa personnel with Don Paco. The taxi had to make two trips as we did not all fit into one taxi.

A pleasant meal, even though I was a bit stressed out by the fact that we had to leave to catch a bus for Rivas and didn't know how long that ride would take and whether we would arrive on time to catch the last ferry in San José at 5 pm.

We left the restaurant at 2 pm, drove to the Roberto Huembes market where luck would have it an express bus was just leaving for San Jorge!

Don Paco got a seat, but I was left standing. Of course, in typical Nicaraguan politeness he wanted me to take the seat, but I flatly refused.

After taking a beer in a restaurant in the port, we took the ferry at 5 pm. One no longer has to purchase tickets in a booth before boarding the ferry; someone sells tickets once the ferry has moved away from the port.

When we arrived at San José, Marcos was waiting for us and taxied us to the hotel he owns with his wife Estela, *Así es Mi Tierra*. (...)

Don Paco and I placed things in our rooms in the hotel then had supper in the nearby restaurant *Café Campestre*.

I chose a plate of fettuccini. When it arrived, I poured the entire small container of what I believed to be Parmesan cheese onto the fettuccini, and then took a bite. So strong was the taste of salt that I was unable to eat even a small portion of my bite!

I explained my error to the waitress and after consulting her boss, I was offered another plate of fettuccini, this time accompanied by a small container of real Parmesan!

When we went to bed, we were both totally exhausted. That morning, I was awake at 2 am; Don Paco at 3 am. And we did

not sleep a wink the whole day. Furthermore, I was sick to my stomach on several occasions on the bus.

Today, a very pleasant day. In the morning, Marcos gave us a ride to the [Finca Magdalena](#).<sup>37</sup> There we immediately met Don Jaime Sánchez\*, with whom I really had not chatted since the big crisis about five years ago when we had decided to discontinue having him as our leader in Balgüe. The reason was that he seemingly had artificially increased the price of building the pedestrian bridge.

Not long after we started conversing, I pulled out a new 8gb memory stick out of my pocket and gave it to him.

“En memoria de todos los buenos recuerdos que tenemos,” (In memory of all the fond memories we have of you) I told him.

He reacted with considerable emotion, gave me a very warm hug, and told me to greet all the former North South students and faculty.

Don Paco had a very long conversation first with Don Jaime, then with Felix Pascual Morales Hernández who is still president of the Finca Magdalena cooperative.

Don Paco and I then walked down to Balgüe, chatting along the way.

We visited the various projects financed by North South Studies in the past:

- Renovation of the Community Centre of Balgüe.
- Long sidewalk leading from the main road of Balgüe to the primary school.

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<sup>37</sup> Founded during the Sandinista Revolution, Finca Magdalena is an agricultural cooperative managed by 24 families. It produces organic coffee, plantain, milk, corn, beans, rice and vegetables, and protects the surrounding natural environment. It also runs a hostel, restaurant, camping services and provides guided tours up the extinct Madera volcano.

- Immense concrete floor, covered with a huge roof, built next to the primary school of Balgüe.
- Construction of a waiting room for the Public Health Center of Balgüe.
- Bus stop bench covered with a roof at the foot of the road leading to Finca Magdalena.
- Pedestrian bridge that proved to be a blessing when Ometepe Island experienced torrential rains in 2010.

Then we stopped in a small restaurant overlooking the lake near the new pedestrian bridge and had a most delicious glass of papaya juice.

From there we walked to Sonia and Saul's place, my former host family for a couple years. Sonia was not home, but Saul was, and he was very warm and welcoming. So were Osman, and his wife Maria and their two-year old daughter. I gave two 8gb memory sticks to Osman; one for Sonia and one for him.

At 12:30 I motorcycled with Don Paco to the Charco Verde beach; a good motorcycle and a beautiful highway. Then an excellent meal -- fish -- and a couple beers. A rest, a long swim (Don Paco did not swim), and we returned to Balgüe.

We just returned from the supper we had with Marta and Keith<sup>38</sup> in the restaurant owned by Isabel. She was the leader of the committee that organized the homestay of our North South students here.

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<sup>38</sup> Marta Bonelli and Keith Uhrig are a Canadian couple from Ontario who have been spending about five months annually on Ometepe Island over the last fifteen years. They carry out impressive development projects with the funds they manage to obtain from Canadian donors. They have collaborated with North South Studies also during the homestays on the island.

## **January 20, 2014: Discovering the San Sebastian traditional celebrations in Diriamba**

Yesterday Don Paco and I left Ometepe Island on the El Rey ferry at 7:30 am.

The lake was relatively calm, and all went well.

I was very impressed to see that the ferry was full, mostly with Nicaraguans and equally impressed to see them lining up to purchase breakfast in the ferry restaurant. Clearly, Nicaraguans are starting to have more money. Their standard of living is improving.

Ometepe will soon have its first windmills to produce electricity. It now has an airport and paved roads all the way to Balgüe. Charco Verde has been completely rebuilt.

According to Marcos who taxied us to San Jose to board the El Rey ferry, the government gave subsidies to Charco Verde, but not to smaller hotels and restaurants.

“Only the larger firms are getting government help,” he complained.

Marcos also complained about the speed bumps on the highway.

“There are too many. About 17 from Balgüe to the main highway.”

People obviously like to complain. In the past, people on Ometepe Island constantly complained because the main highway was not paved. Now that it is paved, they gripe about speed bumps arguing that the government is overprotecting children and slowing down traffic.

After the ferry had arrived in San Jorge, we made our way with difficulty through an immense crowd and took a taxi to Rivas.

The taxi ride to Diriamba was incredibly long as we were often caught up in traffic jams caused by the fact that several segments of the highway are being repaved. As we approached Diriamba, other traffic jams caused by the fact that the famous Diriamba celebrations had already started.

Entering the family of Sergio, the Mena family, was a culture shock for me even though I have been coming to Nicaragua for several years.

The house is located right on the busy Pan-American Highway. All there is between the entrance of the house and the highway is a narrow three-foot-wide sidewalk. Not exactly a place for children to play! Especially when you see immense and heavily loaded trucks rush by.

The house is very large and has two bathrooms. Ena and Sergio have been living there for seven years with their daughter Serena.

Sergio's 84-year-old grandmother lives with them. I believe there are eight in all but there were many more people than that in the house when we arrived.

The oven is located in the open space surrounded by rooms. It has a chimney and its construction is very different from what I've always seen in the Cinco Pinos region. One shoves wood, about two and a half feet long and fairly thin, into an open space no higher than eight inches and no wider than 20 inches wide. Don Paco is very proud of this stove and has spoken highly to me about it for years. However, I found it to have one big fault, which the grandmother acknowledged even before I mentioned it: the chimney is not very high and the smoke, when I was there, would sometimes descend right into the open space where we were sitting and chatting. Smoke, surrounded by four walls, is not the best place for human beings!

Our visit with the family was special for two reasons: it coincided with the very famous traditional San Sebastian celebrations of Diriamba - January 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> - and with the famous promesa event in the Mena family.

*San Sebastian Diriamba celebrations.* Ena asked Sergio's uncle, Don Sergio, a lawyer who teaches law at university and Spanish in high school, to brief me on the historical origin and meaning of the Diriamba celebrations. Fascinating!

San Sebastian is the patron saint of Diriamba, a city of about 64,000 inhabitants.



San Sebastian, patron of Diriamba (Photo: Ena Haisel Mondragón)

This saint was a member of the Praetorian Guard in the Roman Empire at a time when simply being a Christian meant that one was condemned to death. When he converted to Catholicism, the Roman Emperor attempted to have him assassinated. He was attacked by multiple arrows. Miraculously, he survived. The Emperor, frustrated, once again ordered he be murdered in the most atrocious manner; this time, they succeeded.

A great martyr of the Catholic Church - there is a basilica dedicated to him in Rome, one that Danielle and I visited during our stay there in October 2012- he was also honored in those parts of Europe occupied by the Romans for a few centuries, including in what today is Spain.

Spain was occupied by the Arabs for nearly seven centuries. When, in the 16th century, the Catholics kicked the Arabs out of Spain, Spanish colonizers were immediately sent to Central and South America. Whence the tradition, in Nicaragua, and more specifically in Diriamba who chose San Sebastian as their patron, of celebrating each year with various very colorful costumes and dances.

These celebrations in Diriamba unfold in the following manner.

The image of San Marcos, the patron saint of the city bearing that name, the image of Santo Santiago, the patron saint of Jinotepe, and the image of the patron saint of Dolores, located only one kilometer from Diriamba are carried in procession by their respective population on January 19.



The image of the three saints in the procession from Dolores to Diriamba  
(Photo: Ena Haisel Mondragón)

The first meeting point is in front of the church in Dolores, located right next to the municipal park. When the three images first meet in Dolores at about noon, thousands of people gathered in the park start waving a small handkerchief and shouting, and many start dancing. Then, after about an hour of music and dancing, a time during which many families sit down to eat the food they have brought with them and drink beer - both men and women drink - the crowd slowly walks in procession to the basilica of San Sebastian in Diriamba.

The patron saint of each city, carried by a group of people, is accompanied by hundreds of its inhabitants and various groups of musicians and dancers, all very colorfully dressed. Behind the three saints, a large image of the Blessed Virgin, also carried by a group of men, follows.

Eventually, each image enters the Basilica of San Sebastian, one by one.

A little later, on a large stage located to one side of the church in the park, various comedian ballets are performed. El Viejo

y la Vieja, El Toro Huaco, El Gigante, Las Inditas del Guacal, and El Güegüense, the very first comedian play composed in the Americas in 1500.

El Güegüense is one of the most distinctive expressions of colonial times and represents a synthesis of Spanish and indigenous cultures. As with the other ballets mentioned above, it combines theater, dance and music. In 2005, it was declared by UNESCO as Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

El Güegüense was composed by the indigenous in their Nahuatl language, eventually translated into English, and only later translated from English into Spanish. It basically depicts the indigenous literally making fun of their Spanish conquerors, a humor that the latter did not understand as they watched the ballet, given that they did not understand the Nahuatl language

In the play, you have an indigenous leader and his two sons, one reported to own vast amounts of gold, and the Spanish General who conquered Central and South America.

The indigenous leader offers alcoholic beverages they produced for the General. Once the latter is fairly drunk, he announces that his son, who owns nearly all the gold in the Americas, is willing to marry the General's daughter.

The General, very gold-hungry as were all Spanish colonizers, immediately accepts the marriage.

However, the fact of the matter is that the son of the indigenous leader does not own any gold at all!

In the play you have the violin, which originates from the Spanish conquerors, and you have other musical instruments originating from the indigenous.

“The marimba comes from Nicaragua,” explained Don Sergio.



Playing the marimba during the procession in Diriamba  
(Photo: Ena Haisel Mondragón)

I interrupted Don Sergio by pointing out that in Chile, in the late seventies and early eighties, the resistance to the Pinochet dictatorship was first expressed through plays. The latter were comedies involving two levels. On the one hand, you had the obvious story being told in the play; on the other hand, you had the various meanings hidden behind the appearances. Subtle but very sharp criticisms of the dictatorship. Thus, the indigenous in the Americas resisted to the Spanish conquerors exactly as the people of Chile, hundreds of years later, would resist to the Pinochet dictatorship. An interesting resemblance.

Today, January 20th, after a good night of sleep, Don Paco and I attended another ceremony at about 11 am. This time, the saints were not outside - I assume they were still in the basilica - and the crowd, not quite as large as the previous day, watched musicians and dancers originating from each one of the cities involved as they enacted various ballets.

As in all Nicaraguan celebrations, one could hear a string of firecrackers exploding.

As we stood outside watching the performance, the Archbishop Leopoldo José Brenes Solarno of Nicaragua, named Cardinal by Pope Francis about one week ago, was celebrating the Eucharist in the basilica of Diriamba. The basilica was literally packed with people. Benches full, and people standing in all the open spaces, aisles, etc.

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Sergio is now working in the public hospital in Leon. He works there all week and then comes to Diriamba to be with Ena and Serena for a short visit each weekend.

He leaves Leon at 6 am on the bus and arrives in Diriamba at 9 am. He has to take two buses. His specialty: orthopedics. Yesterday, a 54-year-old campesino died when Sergio was operating him. A horse had walked on his chest.

Sergio has to work 24 hours straight when he is on duty.

“One gets used to only sleeping four hours a night,” he explained.

Ena, who works in pediatrics in the public hospital of Diriamba located very close to the Mena family house, also has to work 24 hours straight when she is on duty.

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*Las promesas.* There is something profoundly beautiful about Nicaraguans.

I observed the Mena family this morning. They were all busy preparing the promesas of the grandmother, who was master of ceremony in the preparations.

What are the promesas?

In order to obtain a favor from God through the intercession of San Sebastian, the grandmother promised to feed about two hundred neighbors and friends. People were expected to arrive at about 1 pm.

In the morning, they prepared a large quantity of soup made up of mashed corn and various spices. The soup was cooked outside on an open fire in an immense aluminum bowl placed on cement blocks on the floor. More wood was regularly placed into the fire and a man constantly mixed the soup using a long wooden stick. As the soup thickened, previously cooked pieces of meat were introduced into the soup, followed by yucca, onions and mint.

Some Nicaraguans call this soup Indio viejo. In Diriamba, however, people give it another name. (I forget the name they told me).

This very thick soup is then served in a plate, accompanied by a plate of rice and plantain. The drink that accompanies this meal is made with pure ginger - and lots of it - and sugar.

The taste of ginger is very strong. I doubt that Don Paco liked it even though I am sure it is very good for one's digestion!

Who pays for the food that is served to these 200 guests?

The entire family. And family here seems to represent the extended family, not just those living in the house.

When I say there is something profoundly beautiful about Nicaraguans, I mean more than their tradition. I am thinking about how they relate to one another. So natural. So simple. Nothing artificial.

Tonight, for example, I went to have supper at the small restaurant located no more than one block from Hotel Los

Felipe. Chicken and beef are barbecued on an open fire outside, near the sidewalk and road.

The owner - a lady in her seventies - sits in a comfortable rocking chair near the sidewalk and gives instructions to her workers.

Occasionally she converses with the clients.

The food is delicious and very fresh, and prices are very reasonable.

Sitting there and watching them converse was like watching a beautiful sunset. Harmonious, simple.

A small boy, about 9 years old, very dirty, dressed in rags, bare and filthy feet, came to my table and asked me for money.

I consulted the owner who was calmly rocking in her chair. What should I do? Should I help him?

“Yes, but only with food, not by giving him money. I sometimes give him food.”

I told her to give him food and to add the price to my bill.

After the boy had been served a plate of food, he returned to me and asked for money to buy shoes.

I told him I would give money to the owner of the restaurant for her to buy him shoes the next day.

When I came to give money to the owner, she consulted her workers on the price of shoes.

About 250 córdobas, or 10 dollars they replied.

So, I gave her ten dollars and started walking away.

The boy ran up to me and insisted that I give him the 10 dollars for food the next day. But you just asked me for shoes? Now you're changing your story.

The owner, who overheard our conversation, made a sign with her hand, calling me over.

She returned the ten dollars I had just given her.

“Keep your money. It is better that way.”

I am getting tired; it is 8:30 pm. so I think I will hit the sack.

### **January 19, 2016: Discovering precious indigenous values**

“Wilmer le gusta hablar con las aves, los animales y las plantas” (Wilmer likes talking to the birds, the animals and the plants), commented Don Paco this morning.

This comment stopped me in my tracks. That is precisely the indigenous worldview that Naomi Klein constantly talks about in *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*; a worldview that we must learn to adopt if we are to come to grips with climate change.

I had heard Don Paco tell me this in the past, but never had I realized the astounding depth of this comment.

Wilmer does not like going to the city. He takes care of his small farm, his bulls and cows. Every day of the week, seven days straight, he leaves for the field at about noon and then returns at 9 pm. Then, at about one or two am, he goes back to the field to bring his cows and bulls back to the house.

“He wants his animals to stay in the field and eat a bit more when it’s cool”, Don Paco explained when I asked him why Wilmer did not bring the cows and bulls with him at 9 pm.

## **January 31: 2018, Don Paco's typical othermindedness and savoir-vivre**

I am standing next to the Alfanumeric tower located next to the regional high school of Las Pozas and talking on the phone with Danielle, using WhatsApp.

I just called her because I'm worried about Johanne, my daughter, who is 29 weeks' pregnant with twins - a boy and a girl - and has been lying in a hospital bed for nearly two months. Two days ago, she started losing amniotic fluid.

I'm also worried about Danielle's 72-year-old brother Jacques who suffered a severe stroke a few days ago. As a matter of fact, that happened just a few days before I arrived in Nicaragua (Danielle and I only learned about it the day after I arrived in Nicaragua). He is in the hospital's intensive care unit, in a comma, able to move but unable to talk.

Don Paco arrives with a plastic chair, places it on the ground next to me, and makes a sign with his hand, inviting me to sit down.

Such is the othermindedness of Don Paco.

## **February 1, 2018: Don Paco distributes high school scholarship supplies**

Yesterday morning Don Paco got up at 3 am, walked about 3 km to catch the 5 am bus leaving for Chinandega. He went to purchase the pencils, scribblers, erasers, school uniforms, etc. for the 50 high school students who receive scholarships every year from North South Studies.

At about 6 am he phoned, waking up Wilmer and Maria José.

“Get up and prepare bananas, water melon, coffee and bread for Ovide,” he told them.

That afternoon, Jaime Martinez, from El Carrizal, arrived in a pickup truck with Don Paco and two other young helpers.

They placed all the boxes, full of scribblers, backpacks, pencils, erasers, etc. in the front room of Don Paco's house. Sunday, all this will be distributed to the children who are starting school the following Monday.



Don Paco opening the boxes (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

Today I helped Don Paco distribute these school supplies to some 50 students. The distribution lasted from about 7:30 am to 4 pm. We would welcome one student at a time, distribute to him or her the appropriate quantity of each item - pencils, scribblers, erasers, etc. - and have them sign as proof that they had received the supplies.



Don Paco making a student sign (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

By 1:30 pm, I was pooped and hungry, so I stopped to eat. However, Don Paco, who had just celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, kept on going nonstop and with an unbelievable energy, and this to the very end, 4 pm. Without stopping to eat or rest!

When I spoke to Wilmer about it and pointed out that such a work spree made little sense for a man of his age, he replied:

“Ovidio, that’s my father. He’s always been that way! You won’t change him.”



Students waiting to receive their school supplies (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

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This morning a teenager arrived at the window next to the small table where I was having breakfast with Don Paco. He was coming to get his school supplies - scribblers, pencils etc. - for his scholarship.

After we had given him the supplies and he had left, Don Paco jokingly remarked:

“He's one of Wilmer's children. Wilmer has eight in Las Pozas.”

I knew that what Don Paco was saying was perfectly true



Wilmer (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

### **February 3, 2018: Paso Hondo celebrates Don Paco's 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary**

A memorable day. Three motorcycles from Paso Hondo arrived at 9 am at Don Paco's where I'm living. They are going to bring Don Paco, George Turski and me to their community for the day.

Ruber Alex Ríos Mondragón, who is responsible for the internet classroom in the Paso Hondo high school, is the one who brought me there on his motorcycle.

When we arrived in Paso Hondo, we were given a warm welcome in the high school internet classroom.

Clementina Dávila, former mayor of the municipality of Santo Tomas del Norte and present high school teacher, and other teachers and members of the Paso Hondo water committee served us fruit, coffee, a special kind of tortilla, cheese, and mashed beans. We were each given a bottle of water which they had purchased for the occasion.

After sharing food and chatting for a while, we left for a two-hour walking guided tour of the comarca.

The landscape in Paso Hondo is extraordinarily beautiful. Very high mountains. Constructing the roads and paths there must have been a very challenging and arduous task.

As we walked we came across grouping of houses which they referred to as ‘asentamientos’. An asentamiento is generally made up of the members of a family, our guides explained. The parents live in one house, and their children, once they have become adults, live with their spouses in surrounding houses.

We stopped to visit the primary school of Paso Hondo, which obviously needs repairs. Our guides pointed out, of course in the hope of obtaining future donations, that teachers and students had no laptops whatsoever. They also mentioned that because there is no school playground, the children must

play, during recreation, in the street located right next to the school.

“This is dangerous. Many motorcycles and a few trucks and cars regularly pass by here”, our guides pointed out.

Another clear request for funding!

Our next stop was the health center, located a little further down the road. The doctor who works there Monday to Friday was there to welcome us, even though he does not normally work on Saturdays. He showed us around and pointed to a very humble pharmacy, equipped with very few medical supplies.

“There are no beds for our patients, as you can see, except this small bed for women who are giving birth.

“You see that antenna over there? It allows me to catch the signal with my cell phone so I can call for an ambulance in case of emergencies.”

Our guides explained that, because the rubber hose that supplies water to the primary school, the health center, and the nearby houses is too small, water is a problem in this sector of Paso Hondo. Very little water, and a very insufficient pressure. The minute someone opens their tap, the others do not have any water.

Thanks to the donation that North South Studies hopes to obtain from the International Roncalli Foundation in Quebec, this community will obtain a new water pump for their artesian well, and solar panels to provide it with power. They will also be able to improve their water grid by installing

larger plastic pipes so that this whole sector - 14 houses, the primary school and the health center - will have an abundant supply of water.

After visiting the health center, we headed back to the high school internet classroom.

During the walking tour of the community, George and I had jokingly mentioned that what was missing in the day's program they had planned for us in Paso Hondo was a nap.

So, what do we find upon returning to the high school after our tour? Two beautiful hammocks set up for us in the school yard!

"These are for the two of you they pointed out to George and me. Have a little rest and we'll call you when lunch is ready."

We had lunch with the members of the Paso Hondo Water Committee and some of the teachers. Once again, very delicious food - a soup they called albotín - and virtually all of it produced in Paso Hondo itself. It included pieces of chicken, vegetables and rice and was served with tortillas.

Soon after we had finished eating members of the Paso Hondo community started arriving for the general assembly called by the Paso Hondo Water Committee.

The assembly began with a very long prayer, which included both the Our Father and the Holy Mary.

The main topics of the assembly were water and education.

In previous discussions with leaders of the community, I had made it clear that I would only complete a request to the

International Roncalli Foundation for solar panels if the community accepted to use part of the savings resulting therefrom to help their high school's internet classroom and other community projects. Besides protecting the environment, I had pointed out, such a project would help their children develop computer skills which, in today's world, are absolutely essential.

About 60 people attended the general assembly. Mothers and fathers, teenagers and children. Also present was an old woman who had considerable difficulty walking.

After the long opening prayer was over, they asked me to speak.

I explained how the idea of requesting funding for the community's water grid had all started. I insisted on the importance of potable water for their health and of good education, including access to the Internet and learning to use computers, for the future of their children and that of Nicaragua as a whole.

I stressed the importance of having water meters, something the community presently does not have and that would be part of the project.

Water meters would allow the community to avoid wasting water. There is little incentive to repair a leaky tap when one pays a fixed monthly fee regardless of water consumption.

Water meters would make for greater justice between users, something that does not exist when those consuming large

amounts of water pay the same monthly fee as those who consume little water.

Water meters, especially if the water price is set high enough, would lead everyone to consume water carefully and in a limited manner, something that would protect the durability of the water supply, and something that is especially important in a region in which wells are drying up ever more because of climate change.

Finally, I highlighted the importance of moving from fossil fuel energy to alternative energy, such as solar panels, to fight climate change. Of having a community spirit and to accept that the economies resulting from solar panels be used to support the high school internet classroom and other community projects. I gave the example of the Finca Magdalena in Balgüe on Ometepe Island, where the community accepted to donate some of the revenues of its water grid for a project to help the needy in an African nation.

After my intervention, a woman got up and intervened with considerable emotion:

“There are eight of us families, not far from here, that are not connected to the Paso Hondo water grid. Our houses happen to be located at a higher altitude than the water tanks of the artesian well. All other families receive water from gravity, while we have none whatsoever. Please, try to find a solution! Please, Canadians, don’t forget us!”

Don Paco reacted to this intervention by telling the general assembly about the solution we had found, about four years ago, for the community of La Uva. Thanks to a small well that happened to be fed by an abundant and apparently inextinguishable source of water, the La Uva water grid is working well. That the Paso Hondo water committee should explore the area to see whether a similar source of water can be found in this area. One that could supply water to these eight families.

Another person made the following suggestion.

“If we obtain funding for solar panels and to improve our water grid, there will undoubtedly be some leftover water pipes. These could be used to bring water from our grid to the closest point possible for these eight families. There could be a community tap installed there for the eight families. Not a perfect solution, but at least a temporary one in the hope of a definitive solution.”

Then, Clementina Dávila, the president of the Paso Hondo Water Committee, spoke. And she did so with tremendous eloquence and considerable emotion. She reiterated the points I had made in my intervention. She especially emphasized the importance of unity. The importance of absolutely everyone in the community pitching in to make this project work.

Clementina’s intervention was followed by several other very beautiful interventions including that of the director of the high school, José Gamaliel Zepeda and a second one by Don Paco.

Then, as Don Paco had just celebrated his 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary a few days earlier, namely on January 29, the community rendered him a heartfelt homage. They thanked him for his immense contribution to the communities of the region, including their own. Especially, but not exclusively, in the realm of education. His excellent management of the high school scholarships provided in the past years by North South Studies was duly noted.

Following these beautiful signs of appreciation, the entire assembly started singing a religious hymn specifically honoring Don Paco. They sang very energetically and sincerely, and with considerable emotion. A guitar accompanied their voices.

As the community sang, each one of its members walked up to the front where they had asked Don Paco to stand. One by one they gave Don Paco a big long hug.

Once everyone had hugged Don Paco - the song and hugging lasted a full eight minutes! - the community ended their general assembly by singing yet another religious hymn, once again their faces beaming with joy and energy!

Following this very moving event, which ended the assembly, Clementina took me aside and asked if I could stay a while to meet with the members of the Water Committee.

“I’d like you to provide us with whatever recommendations you may have regarding the project”, she said.

By then it was about 4:30 pm and I felt pretty tired. However, I accepted.

After meeting with the Water Committee, Ruber asked me, just as I was getting onto his motorcycle to return with him to Las Pozas:

“Ovide, the representative of the FSLN in the municipality of Santo Tomas del Norte, Alexander, would like to have a word with you.”

Once again, I complied, got off the motorcycle and chatted with Alexander.

Then the director of the Paso Hondo elementary school gave me a letter requesting that North South Studies bring down a laptop for their school in the following year.

As we were motorcycling back to Las Pozas, Ruber asked if I could stop in El Granadillo for a few minutes.

“The president of the El Granadillo Water Committee, Alduvin, would like to have a word with you about the possibility of obtaining funding for solar panels for the water grid of his community.”

I was totally pooped and told Ruber that would have to wait!

### **February 5, 2018: Don Paco collaborates in financing pump for La Montaña**

Last night I thought about the gas-powered pump that the campesinos from La Montaña have been requesting in the last years.

The well of La Montaña supplies water by gravity to a large reservoir. The water goes by gravity from the reservoir to

some twenty families, plus the Catholic Church and the grade school.

This works for nearly ten months every year but in March and April, when the level of the water in the well falls below the level of the pipe that supplies water by gravity to the reservoir, the families must come and get water manually from the well. This is hard work.

When Maria Jose, Wilmer's compañera, who comes from La Montana, told me they still had no pump, I made the following offer to Don Paco.

“Would you agree to use the money I usually give you for my homestay to help pay part of the pump? I will pay for the rest of the cost, and I'm confident that George will also make a contribution.”

Don Paco enthusiastically replied that he fully agreed and was willing to share the cost with us.

# **Part 3 - My Concluding Hypothesis**



## **Pharmacy in Choluteca, National Literacy Crusade, North South Studies: Same Skills**

I have shared many experiences with Don Paco over the years, most of them wonderful and very rewarding, and some very challenging and taxing - for example when students were ill or when there were conflicts in comarcas about projects.

Through all of these our friendship has developed and strengthened.

I would like to conclude this book on his life and the many experiences we shared by presenting the following hypothesis.

Could it be that the excellence Don Paco has demonstrated while coordinating the 1980 National Literacy Crusade and post-literacy efforts in the municipality of Cinco Pinos, and several years later while coordinating our North South Studies homestays and development projects, stems, to a considerable extent, from the skills and work habits he developed in Choluteca, Honduras?

Though he ended up leaving Choluteca following a very deep crisis in which he discovered that he was being exploited by the doctor and his wife, an experience that he recounted to me with considerable emotion when I interviewed him in February 2018, I believe that the years he spent working in their pharmacy - learning both accounting and management skills - marked in a very positive manner his entire life.



Don Paco planning activities (Photo: Ovide Bastien)

Not only did these skills affect his life as a grade-school teacher in Las Pozas, but they also deeply influenced the work he carried out while following the two greatest passions of his life: coordinating the National Literacy Crusade of the municipality of Cinco Pinos and later the homestays and development projects of North South Studies in his region.

During my fifteen homestays in his family, I have often witnessed Don Paco getting up at 4 a.m. in order to update the accounting of the field trip expenses, to plan the activities of the day, and to run errands - often walking several kilometers to do so - to assure that these activities would go on smoothly.

When one observes the tasks that Don Paco carried out and responsibilities he had in the pharmacy in Choluteca, and then the work he did during the National Literacy Crusade and later in his involvement with North South Studies, one

notices in all three a common pattern, a similar set of skills and organizational qualities.

As noted previously, Don Paco, though still a very young man, assumed considerable responsibilities in the pharmacy in Choluteca. He did the accounting, made bank deposits, and was responsible for supervising, during the frequent absences of the doctor and his wife, at least half a dozen workers.

What is striking about the literacy crusade in Cinco Pinos, as witnessed by the collectively produced report “The Elimination of Illiteracy in the Municipality of Cinco Pinos” - see Annex 1 in following pages, is the remarkable methodology followed. Literacy activities were carefully planned and carried out; all state institutions and mass organizations were mobilized around the same overriding goal, and more than a dozen forms were used to gather various statistics throughout the crusade.

What is also striking about Don Paco’s management of North South Studies activities is the meticulous care taken to prepare the host families for the students and to organize the development projects that take place in each comarca, both during the field trip and throughout the year.

Particularly impressive is the educational passion that Don Paco always demonstrated in the management of student scholarships. He followed the academic evolution of each student, meeting regularly with them. When he noticed that a student was not attending classes, or neglecting his or her studies, he intervened immediately, not hesitating to walk several kilometers along difficult paths in steep mountains to do so. He regularly organized meetings with both students and their parents to highlight the importance of academic achievement and stimulated the latter by offering awards each year to those with the highest grades.

One need but take a quick look at the report Don Paco produces each year on the management of these scholarships

- see Annex 2 for the report of 2011 - to see what importance he gives to detail and statistics.

In 1959, the Honduran doctor was perfectly right to beg Don Paco to return to work at his pharmacy in Choluteca.

In 1980, the then Minister of Education Father Fernando Cardenal was perfectly right when he asserted during workshops attended in Managua by the municipal coordinators of the National Literacy Crusade:

“I would like to have a Paco in each of the four regions of Nicaragua.!”

And in 2019, I think that I was perfectly right to produce this book that recounts the life of my great Nicaraguan friend, Don Paco Mondragón, and some of the experiences we have shared in North South Studies.

# Annex 1 - Eliminating Illiteracy in Cinco Pinos

Chinandega, Region II  
Nicaragua  
San Juan de Cinco Pinos, June 1988

## National Literacy Crusade Hymn

Let's advance, brigadistas,  
guerrillas of literacy,  
your machete is the primer  
to annihilate with one chop  
ignorance and error.  
Let's advance, brigadistas,  
many centuries of ignorance  
will fall,  
let's lift barricades  
of notebooks and  
blackboards,  
We are going to the cultural  
insurrection.  
Fist raised! Open book!  
All the people to the  
National Crusade.  
We will win the destiny  
of being Sandino's children,  
turning darkness into light.  
Let's advance, brigadistas,  
guerrillas of literacy,

your machete is the primer  
to annihilate with one chop  
ignorance and error.  
Let's advance, brigadistas,  
many centuries of ignorance  
will fall,  
let's lift barricades  
of notebooks and  
blackboards  
we are going to the cultural  
insurrection<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> (Letra y música: [Carlos Mejía Godoy](#)).

Cruzada Nacional de  
Alfabetización, Wikipedia  
[https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruzada\\_Nacional\\_de\\_Alphabetización](https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cruzada_Nacional_de_Alphabetización)

## **Introduction**

Eliminating illiteracy in the municipalities of San Pedro\* del Norte and Cinco Pinos, Chinandega, (Region II), in November 1987 is one of the many present accomplishments of Nicaragua.

Learning about such a successful achievement is important as it provides useful lessons for the design and implementation of similar literacy efforts elsewhere.

One frequently finds that those who work in the field of literacy or adult popular education often have no idea whatsoever about similar experiences in other countries. Such a practice is not only absurd but also time consuming as it means that one will always be starting from scratch and learning the hard way instead of gaining insights and lessons from the successes and failures of other similar experiences.

Such ignorance can come from the fact those directly involved in literacy efforts at the grassroots level simply fail to document their experience. They usually write very little about their popular education efforts, and what they do note is generally too general and vague to be useful. Or they simply limit themselves to oral reports. Very little is thus added to what we already know about literacy work.

This document, which represents a detailed report on how illiteracy was wiped out in the municipality of Cinco Pinos, wants to address this problem and hopes to be a precious tool from which others can learn a great deal.

The report was collectively produced by those directly involved in the Cinco Pinos literacy effort and with the assistance of experts who helped in its systematization. From May 31 to June 4, 1988 they met in the town of San Juan de Cinco Pinos for intense workshops, following the methodology designed, in close collaboration with a group of Latin American experts, by the Directorate General of Adult

Education of the Ministry of Education of Nicaragua (MED) (See, at the end of this document, the complete list of those interviewed to produce this report).

The knowledge and dissemination of this effort will be the best recognition and reward for the men and women of this region of Nicaragua who, with dedication and perseverance, successfully carried out the literacy campaign known as 'Sandino Vive'.

## **Chapter 1 - Socioeconomic historical context in which illiteracy was wiped out**

This chapter was collectively produced by: Henry Madariaga, member of the Municipal Board of Reconstruction; Mario Francisco Ríos, responsible for the zonal organization of UNAG; Pedro Vásquez, an old resident of Cinco Pinos; Bayardo Aguilera, from the zonal agency of the National Development Bank; Humberto Izquierdo, zonal director of the Agrarian Reform; Manuel Ranaga G., advisor of the General Direction of Popular Adult Education, (Coordinator of the Collective)

*(Author's note in 2019: I am omitting general information on Nicaragua and the region of Somotillo which appears at the beginning of this chapter)*

Cinco Pinos is part of the municipalities of the region of Somotillo. To its north one finds the municipality of San Pedro, to its south that of Somotillo, to its east that of San Francisco and to its west Santo Tomás and the Republic of Honduras. Its border with Honduras is 2.5 km long.

It has a geographical extension of 59 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 6,811 inhabitants and 1,209 families, with a population density of 115 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

The majority of the population of the municipality, 5,416 inhabitants, that is 79.5% of the total, is rural and only 1,396, that is, 20.5% of the total, is urban. As in the whole of Nicaragua, the population of Cinco Pinos is very young, with 3,299 children from zero to 13 years old, which represents

almost half of the population. (Junta Municipal de Reconstrucción, 1987)

Cinco Pinos is formed of an urban area, San Juan de Cinco Pinos and by the following hamlets (comarcas): Zacatón, Asentamiento Villa Camilo Ortega, El Carrizal, El Granadillo, El Jícara, Las Pozas, Las Lajitas, La Montaña, El Pavón, Los Araditos, El Cerro. All the regions owe their name to the characteristics of the place where they are settled.

Its population is composed mainly of farmers who grow basic grains and raise livestock.

According to the records kept by the Junta Municipal de Reconstrucción of what was orally reported by the oldest inhabitants of Cinco Pinos, the first residents and founders of the municipality arrived between 1840 and 1850 and settled in a place called El Llano, which they called San Juan. Among those residents are Lázaro Ochoa, First Judge of Cañada, Cayetano and Rito Rivera, Catalina Venegas and Los Galindo. All of them were part of migrations from the Honduran territory and the fertile plan lands of the Department of Chinandega. The migrations from Honduras resulted from the growing pressure for land and expropriations and the economic crisis caused by the prolonged drought that afflicted that country. Those from Chinandega resulted from the fact that campesinos there were being violently thrown off their land by large cotton growers eager to increase their profits. (Junta Municipal de Reconstrucción, 1988)

Because the land where San Juan was located was too muddy and clayey, the inhabitants decided to move to where the town of Cinco Pinos is currently located. Following the religious tradition of giving towns the name of a saint, they named their new place San Juan, the same name they had given to their previous settlement. And because of the five large pine trees located on the very top of the San Rafael

Mountain, located to the north of the urban area. (Junta Municipal de Reconstrucción, 1988)

A fundamental element in the history of Cinco Pinos is that right from its beginnings some 80% of the peasants owned small farms of less than 17 acres, while the other 20%, though owning more than this, never did own large estates. This means that in this municipality large latifundia simply never did exist, and the situation remains unchanged to this day.

Referring to Cinco Pinos' social development Mr. Pedro Vázquez asserts the following:

“In the years from 1918 to 1935 there was only one grade school and one teacher in Cinco Pinos. Only a few of us learned to read and write. That's why older people like me who are 78 years old can hardly read. (Vázquez, 1988)

Health care was even more reduced. During the first century of existence of Cinco Pinos (1840-1940), the population had no medical attention whatsoever: “Here we only had healers and to address our health problems we used herbs, leaves, stems, roots and rinds that we found in the mountain.”

"(Vázquez, 1988)

It was not until 1915 that, with the agreement of the judges of Cañada of San Juan de Cinco Pinos and Somotillo, the road that united these towns was built. Before there were only 'trails' for horses.

If the agrarian structure of Cinco Pinos, characterized by small farms, remained essentially unaltered during the Somoza period, it is basically because land in this region was not productive enough to attract those carrying out violent expulsions in other parts of Nicaragua.

According to Humberto Izquierdo, the representative for this zone of the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform (MIDINRA), of the 3,000 blocks of land

open to production in the municipality, 2,200 were suitable for agriculture and 800 were increasingly used for pasture.

The irrationality of dependent capitalism that characterized Nicaragua under the Somoza dictatorship affected the Cinco Pinos region. Protected by a contract made with the dictatorship, a large American multinational in 1940 started overexploiting the region's precious woods, causing substantial deforestation. The region's pine forests were not spared; the multinational cut the pine trees, chemically treated the logs, and sold them to the government of Nicaragua as utility posts for electric power lines. (Madariaga and Vásquez, 1988)

The intensive deforestation caused serious ecological disturbances, causing soil erosion and the severe drought that affects the area today.

Under Somoza, the farmers of Cinco Pinos, like those of the whole area, did not have any technical and financial assistance from the government to develop their production. This of course meant very low and stagnating productivity.

Faced with this situation, peasants turned to the traditional way of coping: "they helped each other out and had recourse to bartering." (Ríos, 1988)

The social development of Cinco Pinos during the Somocista era was very limited and privileged only a few well-off families that hoarded the services and the food supply.

Until 1950, there was only one primary school in the urban area; it offered all six grades and had six teachers (Vásquez, 1988). By 1978, there were nine schools with 13 teachers throughout the municipality. The low school coverage left most of the children of school age out of school, which was aggravated by the fact that the majority of the families could not afford the expenses that school entailed. It is thus not surprising that before the triumph of the revolution, on July

19, 1979, 40.6% of the population of Cinco Pinos did not know how to read and write.

According to data provided by the Junta Municipal de Reconstrucción, a permanent health center was founded in the town of Cinco Pinos in the 1950s. However, this center was only attended from time to time by a doctor and a nurse who did not live in Cinco Pinos. Which meant that people often had to travel 30 km to Somotillo to receive medical attention. A situation that lasted until 1979.

“After the revolutionary triumph, Cinco Pinos realized that it was part of Nicaragua and started experiencing significant social progress: education was expanded at all levels, new schools and new health centers were built and staffed, peasants received both technical and financial assistance, and landless peasants received land.” (Madariaga, 1988)

### **1982-1985**

Cinco Pinos was freed from the Somoza dictatorship on June 4, 1979, a month and a half before the whole country. It was freed thanks to guerrilla columns of the Sandinista National Liberation Front that entered through San Pedro.

From this moment on, the organizational work of the population began with the formation of Civil Defense Committees, currently renamed Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS). Popular militias started military training to join the final offensive. The women movement became more organized and also the teachers who were now free to participate in the National Association of Educators of Nicaragua (ANDEN).

As of July 19, 1979, the Junta Municipal de Reconstrucción was set up and the first steps were taken in order to address and resolve the economic and social needs of the population.

In 1980, the National Literacy Crusade (CNA) was successfully carried out in Cinco Pinos, reducing illiteracy

from 40.6% to 15.6%. Most of the literacy workers originated from the municipality itself.

Thanks to the literacy crusade, the organizational level of both teachers (through ANDEN) and youth (through Sandinista Youth July 19) was strengthened.

By the end of 1980, primary schools had been created (they did not offer all six grades) in all 12 hamlets of the municipality. And the National Development Bank (BND) had opened its municipal branch and started offering both technical and financial assistance to peasant farmers.

### **1982-1985**

This stage is characterized by two things: the rise of the Contra and its attacks on the region, and, eventually, its weakening and virtual disappearance.

Due to its proximity with Honduras, Cinco Pinos was one of the areas where the Contra tried to initiate its penetration, causing serious damage between 1982 and 1985:

- Hamlets and cooperatives suffered attacks.
- Teachers, both regular and popular, and peasants were kidnapped.
- Roads were sabotaged and harassed.
- Livestock was robbed.

Because of this situation, the population had to mobilize to defend the border, and this harmed production and, in some periods, even stopped it altogether. Furthermore, communities that lived close to the border, such as Las Ventanas, Los Cedros, La Honda and part of the community of Los Araditos, had to abandon their villages, leaving behind approximately 9,500 acres of land of better quality, including a few coffee plantations. They settled in three newly created settlements – asentamientos – in the municipality. (Izquierdo, 1988)

However, despite the difficult situation imposed by its activity, the Contra ended up accelerating the popular process instead of slowing it down. The commitment and determination of the people only deepened: each comarca organized its own self-defense, new settlements were created for those who fleeing the Contra, more schools were built and other schools and the Health Center were repaired, ever more people benefited from services such as water, electricity, and roads, mass organizations and in particular the Sandinista Defense Committees and the Sandinista July 19<sup>th</sup> Youth Movement were consolidated, two food kitchens were built to serve 800 children, and five popular preschools were set up in various hamlets. "(Madariaga, 1988)

In this stage, the National Union of Farmers and Cattle Ranchers (UNAG) began its organizational activities with the farmers, resuming the work that had been done by the Association of Rural Workers (ACC). The seven existing Credit and Service Cooperatives (Credit and Service Cooperatives - CCS) were consolidated and six new ones were created. And four new Sandinista Agricultural Cooperatives (CAS) were established for peasants who had received land from some expropriated farms.

In 1983, the National Development Bank waived the peasant debt and later restructured this same debt.

In this period the cooperative movement in Cinco Pinos was formed of:

- 13 Credit and Service Cooperatives with 500 members and 1,581 acres.
- 14 Sandinista Agricultural Cooperatives with 36 members and 877 acres.

There were also 80 individual farmers affiliated to UNAG, and they owned 952 acres.

The Chinorte Project, whose purpose was to foster the economic and social development of the plains and dependent areas of northern Chinandega, was also implemented in this period. It was financed by Switzerland and has been of great benefit to the municipality of Cinco Pinos.

The objective of the Strategic Plan of the Chinorte Project was the following:

“To reduce the size of the ever-growing population of the northern area, where Cinco Pinos is located and the land is of low quality, by inciting people to move to the plains area of Chinandega, where there are virgin lands with great agricultural potential.” (Maradiaga, 1988)

It is a result of this strategic plan that three new communities were established in the plains area, namely Cañanlipe, San Ramón, and El Bonete.

The Chinorte Project also aimed to improve the socioeconomic conditions of the two zones through the following actions:

- Technical assistance to producers for the improvement of agricultural production.
- Construction and start-up of swine, poultry and beekeeping farms.
- Construction of water wells to improve health and help fight diarrhea.
- Health care for the population through brigadistas in all the districts of the municipality.
- Training of popular midwives.
- Attention to the cultivation of henequen for the traditional production of panniers, rope, belts, etc.
- Reforestation of the area in order to recover the land and avoid greater erosion.

### **1986-1987**

The period 1986 to 1987 is characterized by three basic elements.

1. The decrease in the actions of the Contra in this zone, which coincided with the beginning of their strategic defeat at the national level.
2. A severe drought that seriously affected both the economic and social advances that had been achieved in the previous period.
3. The success of the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign that eliminated illiteracy in Cinco Pinos and also facilitated other economic and social projects, and this despite the critical situation of drought.

#### *Conquering the Contra*

Unlike the previous stage, in which the Contra was intensely involved in the area, in 1986 it started losing momentum and limited itself to isolated and sporadic actions of sabotage such as blasting power lines and targeted murders of some leaders of cooperatives. This came about because of the powerful and well-organized defense effort, well organized in the previous stage, of the cooperatives and hamlets. Contra members started losing their motivation and many simply returned from Honduras and deserted, taking advantage of the amnesty decreed by the national government.

#### *The drought*

As indicated above, the intensive and irrational deforestation carried out in the Somoza period for several years led to increasing soil erosion and reduction of rainfall.

This process deepened after 1986, the year in which the most serious draught began in the area. The latter caused a sharp drop in agricultural production, thus increasing the region's dependence on external resources in order to survive.

This situation, added to the greater damage caused by the draught in the border area of Honduras, seriously affected the zone's economy. It led to the minor contraband of non-basic products such as soap, cosmetics, etc. and an increase in smuggling activities, diverting to Honduras basic products of agriculture as well as livestock.

*Material conditions allowing for the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign*

However, the economic and social projects of Cinco Pinos have not stopped, but continue to advance, overcoming the difficulties mentioned. New projects were even implemented, such as the Drought Plan that covers the entire northern Somotillo area.

All these projects, implemented in the municipality in these two years with the participation of popular organizations and under the dynamic leadership of the Comarca Committees, have proven to be, in this as well as other experiences, truly educational. These committees acted as integral management bodies of each region.

Among the main social projects of this period are the construction of the Rural Health Post in the Villa Camilo Ortega settlement, the annex of the Cinco Pinos Health Center, the construction of the municipal park, and the repair of streets. The struggle to overcome illiteracy was based on a holistic view education; two more primary schools were created, and two others were extended and repaired.

Since the beginning of the drought in 1986, a Drought Plan was implemented to counteract the effects of drought on production. In this plan, two types of coordinated actions are carried out:

1. The donation of food for the general population, such as rice, oil, flour, beans, corn and milk. In the municipality of Cinco Pinos, the plan guarantees a

daily glass of milk to each child in the school classroom, from preschool to high school, with the dual purpose of helping to solve the child's nutritional problem and avoid school desertion, counteracting the possible growth of illiteracy through the vegetative path.

2. In addition to these donations, the participation and organization of the communities has been fostered through a communal work plan carried out by each Comarca Committee, for the construction and deepening of winch wells, the repair of urban streets, the cleaning of the cemetery and power lines and the repair of schools in each region.

All these activities, carried out in 1986 and 1987, have laid the basis for the launching of the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign whose purpose is to completely wipe out illiteracy. People have enough food to get buy despite the draught, and they are profoundly mobilized thanks to the work projects resting on work styles in which a close collaboration exists between the mass organizations, the state institutions, and the population in general.

## **Chapter 2 - Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign**

This chapter was collectively produced by: Francisco Mondragón, head of Adult Education, municipality of Cinco Pinos; Eddy Filemón Maradiaga, director of the Escuela Básica, Cinco Pinos; Chantal Gordon, French internationalist; Israel Soriano, adult education technician; Cony Cortés, promoter of AMNLAE; Roger Rivas Aguilera, popular teacher in Cinco Pinos; Eloísa Mejía Núñez, popular teacher in Cinco Pinos; Manuel Rabasa G., advisor to the General Directorate of Adult Popular Education; Socorro Aguilar M., regional manager of literacy (Coordinator of the Collective)

In this chapter we will discuss the development of the experience of the eradication of illiteracy in Cinco Pinos. It began with the National Literacy Crusade (CNA), continuing with a permanent literacy process that concluded successfully

in 1987 with the Final Offensive called Operativa Sandino Vive (hereafter referred to as Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign).

*The National Literacy Crusade*

In October of 1979 the National Literacy Crusade initiated its first operation in Cinco Pinos. A census was carried out with the help of high school students in order to find the rate of illiteracy in the municipality. The census showed that there were 1,241 illiterates, 174 originating from the urban sector and 1,067 from the rural sector. However, once account had been taken of those who were too old or sick to learn to read and write, that number was reduced to 1,186 illiterates, or a rate of illiteracy of 40.6%.

In February 1980, a Municipal Literacy Committee were established, whose members, all from Cinco Pinos, were the following: Francisco Mondragón Escalante, coordinator; Carmen María Méndez, of census and statistics; Nubia Sirias Juárez and Patricia Ríos, technical and methodology advisors; Rolando Cuadra, logistics advisor; and Narcisa González, secretary. The popular organizations and state institutions were also part of the committee.

This Municipal Literacy Committee was responsible for:

- Training the brigadistas and teachers in literacy teaching skills.
- Allocating the brigadistas and teachers in the urban and rural sector.
- Finding appropriate host families for the literacy workers.
- Providing regular technical assistance to all those involved in the literacy effort
- Monitoring and controlling the process of literacy through periodic comunicués, meetings, assemblies, workshops, etc.

- Forming a Literacy Committee in each comarca and in the town of Cinco Pinos, committees that would cooperate with the Municipal Literacy Committee in assuring the supply of pedagogical material, food, medicines, etc. to literacy workers.

Five squadrons, each comprising 30 literacy workers, were dispatched to the comarcas in the rural area, and 24 literacy workers were dispatched in the urban sector. The majority of these literacy workers, including 15 general technical assistants, originated from the municipality of Cinco Pinos itself. Only 20 out of a total of 174 originated from other parts of Nicaragua.

If the literacy crusade was such a success, it is primarily because of the profound involvement and mobilization of the entire population. The role played by mass organizations and state institutions was mainly one of sensitizing the population to the crucial importance of literacy and education.

The hard work of the literacy workers is particularly noteworthy. It produced the following results:

- Thanks to the crusade, illiteracy declined from 40.6% to 15.6%. And Cinco Pinos was the third municipality in Nicaragua to declare itself free of illiteracy.
- Profound bonds were created between the literacy workers, who came from the city, and the peasant communities.
- The literacy workers readily participated in community projects and accomplished the tasks entrusted to them by the community.
- At the same time that the literacy workers were teaching people to read and write, they were training those who would replace them as educators in the comarcas once the crusade was over.

Important achievements of the national literacy crusade in Cinco Pinos:

- Several of those who learned to read and write are presently grade school teachers in the various comarcas of the municipality.
- Others are leaders of mass organizations and various institutions.
- The crusade's impact went beyond literacy: latrines were built, malaria was controlled, and respiratory problems and gastro-intestinal diseases were treated.

This is how the crusade ended on August 23, 1980, leaving as a result the reduction of illiteracy from 40.6% that existed to 15.6%. This being the third nationwide municipality to declare itself victorious over illiteracy.

#### *Follow-up after crusade*

In order to assure that the newly literate would not simply forget their newly acquired reading and writing skills – including revolutionary values – but continue developing them, a follow-up session was launched in September 1980. Eighty-three coordinators and 14 facilitators pursued the training of the 826 newly literate, using as a basic pedagogical text the no. 1 and 2 issues of the *July 19<sup>th</sup> Magazine*. Of the newly literate, 780 persevered to the end of this training.

In March 1981, an Adult Education Program was launched to allow the newly literate to complete grade school. The teaching would be assured in each comarca by so-called popular teachers (maestro populares), who were simply the best among the newly literate. These teachers received training in the content and methodology of basic popular education and played the role of coordinator and facilitator in

the Popular Education Collective (Colectivo de educación popular, CEP) in each comarca.

By June 1981 the newly literate in the CEPs had completed the grade one level and were ready to start grade two.

In the interview he granted for the production of this report, Don Paco asserts: “Things became more difficult in 1982 because of the ever more intense Contra attacks from Honduras. However, our spirit of combat did not diminish. Our resolve to wipe out illiteracy and to raise the cultural level of our people only increased.”

The newly literate continued their basic popular education until the sixth grade. The first graduation of these students took place in Cinco Pinos in December 1984.

#### *Continuing the literacy effort*

Parallel to these efforts to develop adult education, efforts to continue teaching the remaining illiterate continued, the aim being to completely eliminate illiteracy in the municipality. In Cinco Pinos we realized, as of 1985, that illiteracy could be eradicated in the near future but that to do this it would be necessary to return to the spirit that existed during the crusade, in which literacy was seen as the task not only of the Ministry of Education but also of all the mass organizations and the people themselves.

Don Paco asserts: “We had the necessary resources; what had to be done was to mobilize and establish a global plan leading to the total elimination of illiteracy”. (Mondragón, 1988

Encouraged by the Regional Literacy Strategy (Estrategía regional de alfabetización - ERA), we, compañeros of Cinco Pinos, thus decided in the second semester to mobilize the entire population of the municipality through what we called the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign. That was the same

slogan adopted by the ERA to orient the literacy tasks for that period.

*Phase I – November 1985 to April 1986*

For this literacy campaign, we wanted to call on the popular teachers, in other words the top students among the newly literate and who, in each comarca, had been chosen to lead the CEPs. However, we were not very successful in our campaign because of the critical political and military situation.

Our region was suffering constant attacks by the Contra, and several of our students, teachers, and coordinators were being kidnapped. Instead of devoting themselves to literacy, many of those involved in Adult Education had to spend considerable time and energy in defense tasks.

This being said, we did move forward modestly. We carried out a census, which showed that there were still 322 illiterates in the municipality, and of these 39 subsequently became literate. We carried out a constant campaign showing the importance of literacy. We trained, using a variety of approaches, popular teachers. And we set up committees in each comarca, in which there was a representative of mass organizations, a representative of the formal teachers, and a representative of the ‘promotor’ or popular teachers, all of these democratically elected.

*Phase II – May 1986 to November 1987*

Conditions improved for the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign in this period. The Contra were starting to experience a strategic defeat and moving out of the region,<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> During my homestay with North South students in El Espino, Milton Zelaya explained how the FSLN had launched a massive and successful attack against the Contra in 1987. In my diary of January 7, 2001, which I wrote while sitting in front of Dali Casco Zepeda’s house, which he shared with his dad Ursulino and his mom Ermelinda, I noted: “As Milton and I sipped our beer, he started telling me about the Contra War. ‘The

and the organizational capacities of the municipality were also improving. A territorial team known as the Estado Mayor de Alfabetización, representing all mass organizations, all state institutions, and the National Association of Teachers (ANDEN), was set up in view of coordinating all municipal tasks. As a result, the literacy campaign became a priority and the comarca committees, which represented of the backbone of the literacy effort, were finally coordinated by a head committee in the town Cinco Pinos, known as the Junta municipal.

From May to December 1986 these structures gained solidity and efficiency, and concrete plans to eliminate illiteracy, in what was called 'a final offensive', were established.

In January and February 1987, the final offensive started being implemented, thanks to a mini-crusade carried out by a brigade of 24 normal school students from Chinandega, previously trained to this end. These students were placed in families in all of the comarcas of the municipality and assisted the Popular Education Committees (CEPs) in improving their pedagogical approach, and in assuring that

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Contra attacked a comarca (hamlet) not far from here. Eighteen people were killed, including a 14-year-old boy. When the latter refused to hand over his gun to the Contra as he was being ordered to do, they grabbed him, cut off his hands, and then shot him. Daniel Ortega came to the scene of the murders and invited a member of the Honduran government and human rights organizations to join him. Would you believe that the representative of the Honduran government had nothing to else to say but We're sorry. We had no idea that the Contra was operating from our territory. The hypocrites!!!

'In 1987 we waged a massive attack against the Contra. I participated in that operation. Five thousand of us penetrated about 20 kilometers into Honduras in the region of El Paraiso, the town that was home to the Contra headquarters. The 48-hour attack had been extremely well prepared and was a success. We lost seven hundred of our men -- killed or disappeared -- but we managed to destroy their entire communications system and the airport. Talk to Adín, he knows. He was part of the Contra.'

there was a systematic follow-up and that the progress being made by each student was closely monitored.

Eight popular teachers, 12 regular grade-school teachers, and 37 youth from the Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio also participated in this mini-crusade.

A group of technical experts – Adult Education Technicians - traveled from comarca to comarca, providing a helping hand to assure the quality of the literacy methodology being used, and organizing meetings to this end.

The Junta Municipal assisted the literacy workers in the comarcas in terms of lodging, food, and transportation, and in close collaboration with the Estado Mayor de Alfabetización, organized events whose purpose was to stimulate competition and excellence among literacy workers.

*Certitude that illiteracy would be totally eliminated*

The mini-crusade provided considerable dynamism to the literacy effort, and the Estado Mayor de Alfabetización and Comarca Committees cooperated very closely in resolving problems as soon as they would come up.

Asserts Don Paco: “We maintained an ongoing propaganda campaign. We were all – mass organizations, ANDEN, and state institutions – speaking with one single voice in that time period. We were convinced that we would soon manage to free ourselves from illiteracy, and the enthusiasm was such that it allowed both popular teachers and students to commit themselves to concrete goals”. (Mondragón, 1988)

The enthusiasm that was expressing itself in Cinco Pinos and in the entire Región II only increased when, during the National Literacy Strategy Workshop, the Ministry of Education awarded Cinco Pinos the Combat Flag, confident that they would manage to free their territory from illiteracy in 1987.

On May 1, 1987, the first graduation ceremony was held for 20 additional students in a comarca, rendering it totally free of illiteracy. This feat triggered even more enthusiasm in other comarcas which, one by one, started celebrating their own freedom from illiteracy.

In August 1987, we realized, after assessing the progress being made, that it would be necessary to make one last global push in order to free Cinco Pinos of illiteracy. We called this push the Final Offensive. It was launched on the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1980 National Literacy Crusade and at the very historical moment when the people of Nicaragua and their government were attempting to achieve peace in Central America.

The purpose of the Final Offensive was the following:

- Maintain an atmosphere of mobilization and enthusiasm.
- Raise the levels of retention and graduation of students.
- Raise the level of mobilization among mass organizations, ANDEN, and state institutions.
- Intensify the training of the popular teachers in order to assure the quality of the literacy effort.
- Make sure that the newly literate would immediately go on to completing their six years of primary school.
- Use all possible means to advertise and promote the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign in its final effort.
- Follow very closely the precise progress being made in teaching people how to read and write.

Thanks to the systematic and intense implementation of the Final Offensive, another 221 campesinos became literate. This meant that illiteracy was virtually wiped out of the

twelve comarcas of our municipality as well as in the town of Cinco Pinos itself. In 1987, the rate of illiteracy in Cinco Pinos was a mere 0.7%, only twelve of our fellow compañeros remaining illiterate. And by May 1988, these had also learned to read and write.

What needs to be emphasized is the sustained and systematic effort that we made in Cinco Pinos to produce reliable statistics on all those involved in the process of literacy as it developed: the various mobilizations that took place, those who were forced to resettle elsewhere, those who were killed, those who were kidnapped, those who abandoned their courses, the progress accomplished by students in class, those who managed to become literate, etc.

Besides attaining our fundamental goal of eliminating illiteracy, we made a difference in other respects:

- We emphasized the importance for the newly literate of completing their grade one.
- We built more schools in the comarcas.
- We managed to get the peasants involved in their own education and fostered their participation in the Comarca Committees.
- We reduced the number of multi-grade classes, thus improving the quality of education.
- We strengthened the cooperative movement throughout the municipality.
- We managed to obtain, under the leadership of the Federation of High School Students, the massive participation of high school students in the literacy crusade.
- We managed to obtain the sympathy of the population at various levels: regional, national, and international.

### **Chapter 3 - How we worked in the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign**

This chapter was collectively produced by Israel Soriano, adult education technician; Ramón Ochoa, head of the Basic general education team; Virginia Mondragón, adult education technician; Fredisvinda Zerón, promoter; Roger Aguilera, technician; Ercilia Alguera, methodologist at the head office (Coordinator of the Collective)

This chapter focuses on “the working style” and “systems of control” implemented in carrying out the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign.

#### *Working Style*

Until 1984 literacy efforts in Cinco Pinos were not well integrated. Those working in the formal education sector, or in what is called “Educación general básica” (EGB), those working in Adult Education (EDA), and those working in mass organizations all went their own way. In terms of pedagogy and literacy efforts undertaken at the grassroots level, each sector worked in virtual isolation, basically ignoring what the other was doing.

Furthermore, those working in formal education considered themselves somewhat superior to other literacy workers, given the fact that they were regular teachers.

The organogram of the Ministry of Education in the municipality of Cinco Pinos also did not allow any kind of coordinated effort: there were delegates in the zone for each program, and these were in different locations and carried out their work with no coordination whatsoever. (Ochoa, 1988)

All that changed in 1985. Cinco Pinos took a hard look at itself in terms of illiteracy and realized that, given the scarcity of educational resources in the region and its topography, and given also the ongoing Contra war, working closely together was a must. “At first cooperating together and acting in a coordinated manner was a bit hard. We had to adopt an

altogether different mindset than the traditional one”.  
(Soriano, 1988)

In 1986, the Ministry of Education revamped its structure at all levels, national, regional, and zonal. The headquarters for the zone remained in Somotillo, and, in Cinco Pinos, there was still one person responsible for formal education and another for adult education, but they and their teams shared the same office and thus started working together. Formal education actors and adult education actors started exchanging ideas and experiences, and this on a spontaneous and daily basis.

“We find it is necessary to plan and immediately implement a broad and global strategy in order to lower the rate of illiteracy and raise public awareness. To achieve this, it will be necessary to obtain the direct involvement and cooperation of all political, union and commercial organizations and state institutions.”<sup>41</sup>

It is in this context that those involved in adult education in Cinco Pinos, who earnestly wanted to eliminate illiteracy through the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign, called on the formal education sector, mass organizations, and other state institutions for their collaboration and support. And they made it ultra-clear in their public awareness efforts that the resources of the formal education sector, in terms of teachers and also high school students and grade six elementary students, were of vital importance in the struggle against illiteracy. They also pointed out the importance of raising the educational level of the population, if mass organizations and state institutions wanted to be successful in triggering and deepening public awareness (*conciencia popular*) and fostering the socioeconomic and technological development of the municipality.

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<sup>41</sup> Proyecto de Alfabetización Cinco Pinos, Cinco Pinos, Chinandega, Ministerio de educación de Nicaragua, 1986, pág. 5.

To assure the success of the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign, we requested that the Equipo Territorial, the top team managing the global affairs of the municipality of Cinco Pinos, adopt as its priority the offensive against illiteracy. This top team, inasmuch as it prioritized the struggle against illiteracy, was known as the “Estado Mayor”. It was made up of representatives of the following:

- Director of municipal Adult Education Program
- National Development Bank
- Municipal Government
- National Farmer and Cattle Association (UNAG)
- Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio
- National Association of Nicaraguan Teachers (ANDEN)
- Ministry of Health (MINSA)
- National Women’s Association (AMNLAE)
- Commerce Department (MICOIN)
- Territorial Representatives
- Ministry of Education (MED)
- Head of Border Patrol
- FSLN territorial director

The last mentioned - the FSLN territorial director - acted as coordinator of the Estado Mayor.

It is important to note that the collaboration of the various organizations and state institutions making up the Estado Mayor was not of a purely spontaneous nature. It was planned and systematic.

Notes García (1988): “Those of us representing each organization or institution would meet regularly. After meetings, each one of us would then meet with the members of our own organization or institution and transmit orientations and directives. In this way, when the latter members would arrive in the comarcas, they would all emphasize the importance of learning to read and write. They

would also note whatever problems would come up and relay these to those responsible for dealing with them. Cooperating thus did not mean replacing someone else in their work, but rather that each institution and organization fostered and explained policies at the grassroots level.”

The Comarca Committees represented the basis or grassroots structure of the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign. Their role was vital in all aspects of the communities: not only educational, but also socio-economic and political. Involved in these committees were representatives of cooperatives, of Sandinista Popular Militia, of Sandinista Defense Committees, of the national women organization AMNLAE, of health brigades, of rural youth organizations (Movimiento Juvenil Campesino, or MOJUCA), of teachers, of literacy workers, of the FSLN, and sometimes the pastor or priest.

“It was as if each one of us walked hand in hand so as not to lose sight of our goal” (Ochoa, 1988).

Those forming the Comarca Committees were all democratically elected by the members of their communities. This assured that they really cared about and prioritized the interests of their communities. In some cases, the coordinator of Comarca Committees was a teacher, given that teachers are often deeply involved in the global issues affecting their community.

“The Comarca Committees often played a propaganda role, inviting their community to respond to all mobilizations initiated by the leaders of the revolution, whether these concerned production or defense tasks”.<sup>42</sup>

“In 1985 our rural youth organization MOJUCA was still fairly weak organizationally speaking. It gained considerable strength thanks to its involvement in the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign. The latter campaign not only

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<sup>42</sup> Martínez (1988).

strengthened us, but also contributed to greater cohesion in the structure of the comarcas”. (Loza (1988)

Such close collaboration produced positive results:

- Formal and popular teachers collaborated, learning constantly from one another. Formal teachers started using in their classrooms the pedagogical tools that they had learned from popular teachers; and popular teachers started using, in their literacy efforts with campesinos in comarcas, the new insights and approaches that they had learned from regular teachers.
- Popular teachers gained considerable expertise.
- Regular and formal teachers grew considerably in their acceptance and appreciation of one another, and the same was true of technical participants in both the formal and popular education sectors.
- Comarca Committees and the “Consejos Consultativos en la base” grew stronger. (Ochoa, 1988)

*Work Plans – “Like Peeling Corn Off the Cob”*

Monthly work plans were elaborated collaboratively by the formal and popular education sectors, mass organizations and state institutions. These were based on the broad policies of the system of education and taking into account the special needs and characteristics of our region.

Remarks Israel Soriano, Adult Education Technician in Cinco Pinos:

“Once we had drawn out a crystal-clear plan, I would proceed to establish a timeline with the 13 collaborators (promotores) I had. I would establish a timeline for each one of the 13 comarcas. We would then carry out the plan, step by step, as if we were peeling corn off a cob, one grain at a time, until the cob, at the end of the month, was completely peeled. And we would do this in close collaboration with mass

organizations and state institutions. It is important to stress the fact that these plans were very detailed, and this from the very top of the leadership to the grassroots level. These plans were very clear, and not too ambitious or subjective.” (Soriano, 1988).

Fundamental in the elaboration of plans was a keen awareness of basic concrete needs. Without such awareness, never would we have managed to wipe out illiteracy.

“I arrived in the comarca La Montaña in order to have a word with Bruno Escalante, its leader. I explained that we had to integrate into the Adult Education Collective (CEP) all those in his comarca who still did not know how to read and write. And I gave him the first and last name of each person who was still illiterate. He immediately replied that he would collaborate in this task, calling on his social network to do so. I could see that my request had been very empowering for him, that it made him feel like someone who is important, the leader of a community.

“We are fully aware that the way in which we go about carrying out our tasks is very important. By treating people properly, we gain their esteem and respect, and manage to mobilize them. That is the only way to get mass organizations and institutions involved, and to move forward together.” (Soriano, 1988)

The Adult Education Technician and collaborators (promotores) represent the pillar of the literacy effort. However, the latter effort is not theirs alone; it also belongs to all the other grassroots instances that they manage to mobilize through their creativity.

“Making a good meal requires several ingredients. In order to assure the success of popular education, all mass organizations and institutions must be involved. If the Adult Education Technicians and their collaborators are not clear

about this, it is up to us authentic literacy cooks to add the necessary spices.” (Soriano, 1988)

Obviously, the Adult Education Technician team, in order to monitor and follow literacy efforts, must use various mechanisms to evaluate the work being performed.

One mechanism used was the ongoing evaluation of what was happening at the grassroots level. Every opportunity to do this was used: it could be on the occasion of a visit, a meeting, a chance encounter with a popular teacher, a student, a member of a mass organization or a state institution. This, no matter the place, the time, or the day; sometimes even Sundays were used for this. And this only happened because the importance of ongoing evaluation was deeply imbedded in the mind of the adult Education Technicians.

Another mechanism used was meeting up on regular basis with collaborators in each comarca. The latter would expose the problems they were encountering in their comarca, and then the Adult Education Technician would discuss with them to find a way to address and resolve these problems.

Furthermore, each Adult Education Technician would meet with his team periodically to assess the evolution and efficiency of the measures being taken. And in these meetings participants would exchange on their various experiences. When something came up that called for a meeting, such a meeting would be immediately organized to address the problem. Sometimes this would involve working with the general education sector and setting up various literacy approaches.

The process also involved a broader evaluation of all actions being taken in collaboration with members of the Estado Mayor of the municipality as well as with the comarca committees. Such an evaluation would allow each participant to be aware of the global situation and actions being taken.

Obviously, all evaluation results were made known and shared by the various adult education teams. One could thus determine what actions had been successful and what actions hadn't and how each instance had operated. And this in turn helped prepare the plan for the future steps to undertake.

These evaluations also represented a way of encouraging those - popular and regular teachers and also mass organizations - who had been most outstanding in the literacy effort.

It is because of this disciplined and collaborative evaluation effort, and the ensuing global and clear work plans, that Cinco Pinos managed to triumph in its literacy campaign.

*Common actions:*

Having clear and well-defined work plans is not enough. Also important is “walking hand in hand”, adopting a common language, and collaborating closely.

One of the first steps taken in the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign was the carrying out of a census in order to determine the remaining rate of illiteracy in the municipality. Once this was done, messages were sent to all the various sectors involved in the literacy effort and meetings were held with their leaders. And the Adult Education Team would provide to all of them a precise list – first and last name – of all those still unable to read and write.

These leaders responded by immediately engaging in the literacy effort in the following manner:

- The various mass organizations and state institutions met each one of their members who was still illiterate, chatted with him or her in order to come to an agreement concerning a suitable method of study and study schedule.

- Each organization and institution agreed to free up two hours in the regular work schedule, time that could be used by the Popular Education Collectives.
- Each organization and institution set up an ongoing campaign stressing the importance of literacy.
- The Ministry of Education decreed that all third, fourth and fifth grade primary school students would have to become involved in the literacy effort in order to obtain their diploma at the end of the year.

Furthermore, a series of measures were taken in order to encourage the illiterate to join the Popular Education Collective active in their area:

- In rural areas, UNAG and the National Development Bank set up a policy according to which those requesting their help would have to sign a request form.
- The national government – Junta de Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional – decreed that those wanting to register newborn children would have to do so in the future by signing a form. The purpose of this, of course, was to encourage everyone to learn how to read and write.
- The Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio and the National High School Student Federation also agreed to set up a campaign encouraging all those in any way involved in their organizations and who were illiterate, to join the Popular Education Collective of their area. To this end, they even paid visits to these illiterates, house by house.

*Impact of the massive publicity campaign*

So powerful and well organized was the massive literacy publicity campaign – reaching the illiterate through various means of communication, including personal contacts, and all speaking with one single powerful and united voice: let's eliminate illiteracy by November 8, 1987! – that the illiterate,

at the end of the day, were compelled to learn to read and write. And they ended up accepting the educational literacy projects that their organizations and institutions were offering them, projects whose schedule they themselves were free to determine.

The fact that these organizations and institutions went out of their way to contact, on an individual and personal level, their illiterate members, sensitizing them to the importance of literacy, made a huge difference. Also important was the fact that the literacy teachers (maestro populares) sat down with each individual to arrange a suitable and flexible study schedule, allowing the individual to continue working while also studying.

Another factor that helped is the fact that the illiterate became ever more aware of the immense gap separating them from those who knew how to read and write, not only their own children and also most other adults.

*How did we go about coordinating our literacy efforts?*

Such was the importance given by all mass organizations and state institutions to the common goal of completely eliminating illiteracy by 8 November 1987 that all other special tasks, such as “Jornadas Populares de Salud” (Health Workshop Days) and other training workshops, were left for Saturdays and Sundays. This was done so as not to hamper in any way the work and study schedules determined by those learning to read and write on week days.

When a leader of some mass organization or state institution would travel to a comarca to accomplish a task specifically related to his work, he or she would also take the time to supervise how the Popular Education Collective of that comarca was doing.

“The technicians of the National Development Bank would arrive in a cooperative, and by speaking with various individuals, would find out if their illiterate members were

actually studying. Then they would forward to us whatever information they had obtained – such and such a person or such and such a literacy teacher is having problems, etc.” (Soriano, 1988)

Mass organizations and state institutions were incredibly committed to and supportive of the immense literacy campaign. Asserts Soriano (1988):

“The literacy campaign was not limited to a specific place or to specific times. One would use every opportunity to promote literacy. When coming across someone while walking on a path, during celebrations, or while working, etc.

“Asking how the Popular Education Collectives were coming along had become a way of greeting people. And we would also do this with those who were learning to read and write. We knew the first and last names of each one of them.

“If we happened to have a relative, a girlfriend, or a friend in a comarca, we would use this relationship to find out how the Popular Education Collective was doing in their comarca, or to obtain information on the political and military situation in their community.”

Assuring the success of the literacy campaign meant learning to be very close to the grassroots level, learning to bond with campesinos in a very intimate manner, feeling the same feelings, talking the same language, carrying on as friends, brothers and sisters and viewing the problem of illiteracy as if it was our own problem.

Don Paco Mondragón (1988):

“When we would pay a visit to a Popular Education Collective in a comarca, we would chat with both students and literacy workers (maestro populares) after completing our technical work. We would learn from them and they would also learn from us. And when it came time to part and say goodbye, so abundant were the things they would give us –

peppers, squash, corn, etc. – that we didn't know what to do with all their gifts. These demonstrations of love, friendship and confidence are what united us. Our literacy work thus did not feel like a burden for us.”

*“The road to a friend is never long”*

Because of the topography of the region, the ongoing war, and transportation problems, etc., carrying out a literacy campaign in the municipality of Cinco Pinos was a very challenging endeavor. However, so profound was their commitment to the literacy campaign that nothing got in the way of Adult Education Technicians and literacy workers (maestro populares). They would walk, with or without food and water, three to eight kilometres, sometimes in pouring rain, sometimes under a blazing sun or facing strong winds, carrying on their back two bags full of educational supplies for the Popular Education Collectives they were visiting. Other times the promoter (promotor) would travel to the zone with his coordinators to make sure all students received the necessary educational supplies on time.

Such was the unconditional love of the literacy workers, that the literacy campaign moved forward, step by step and always assuring quality. And this, not only when their activities were backed by a budget but even in those times when literacy workers had to do without a single penny.

*“Not even military attacks would stop them!”*

“Why do we assert that not even military attacks stopped the literacy workers? Because of an incident that happened in February 1987 when we were in a comarca teaching people how to read and write. We were right in the middle of our workshop when, all of a sudden, we heard the sound of bombs that were so loud and so close that they plunged all of us into deep fear. The Adult Education Technicians, though experiencing fear just as everyone else, managed to calm people down and, in the ensuing discussion, some commented that if those in the Sandinista Popular Army were

courageous enough to defend the revolution by pushing back the Contra and fighting the enemy, it was up to us to resume our job of eliminating illiteracy. Love eliminated our fear.” (Zerón, 1988)

Comments Rivas, (1988):

“At the beginning of March, I was kidnapped by the Contra. In a matter of minutes everyone in the region knew about my kidnapping and this had a huge impact not only on me but also on all of my fellow literacy workers.

When I unexpectedly managed to escape from the Contra, I did not turn back to go home. I simply continued walking in the same direction as before. Such was my commitment to eliminating illiteracy in my region that I simply continued my literacy work. I felt that the literacy campaign was part of who I was.”

Pursuing the literacy campaign in a time of war, in extremely challenging conditions and when doing so meant risking one’s life every day, shows the depth of one’s awareness, patriotism, and commitment.

*“Not even sickness stopped us”*

“The literacy campaign was very intense in its final stage. We Adult Education Technicians worked tirelessly. Work timetables and vacations were unheard of. We would walk, walk, and walk, climbing hills and crossing ravines, often developing sores on our feet as we trudged along. These sores this did not stop us from moving on with our work. We simply tried to find ways to heal them. We felt that there was no way we could take a break, as doing so could mean that we would lose control of the Popular Education Collectives.

“The desire to overcome illiteracy healed all our physical ailments”. (Soriano, 1988)

### *Control systems*

It is worth noting that in order to carry out the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign it was necessary to establish a smooth functioning information and communication system, which allowed us to provide constant feedback to all involved.

To this end, we sought to develop a global plan for the municipality as a whole, targeting those economic and social sectors of the population whose needs were the greatest, and establishing various control systems or forms in order to achieve this, such as the following:

**Illiteracy census:** we carried out a census specifying the first and last name of each person who still did not know how to read and write in the municipality. Also included: their age, sex, comarca, organization or state institution to which they belonged, and whether it was possible or not to teach them literacy. This allowed us to pass on this information to the mass organizations and state institutions, so that they could monitor the literacy progress of each one of their illiterate members. (Appendix 1, Form A)

**Control by literacy workers:** This allowed the literacy workers in each community to control and establish the census, house by house and student by student, which made it possible to have more objective information, both qualitative and quantitative. (Appendix 1, Form B)

**Control of initial enrolment:** This form allowed us to follow the evolution, month by month, of every student who was learning to read and write. It indicated the name of the student, teacher, comarca, and the grade level and characteristics (from grades one to six) of each student. (Appendix 1, Form C)

### **Precise organization of each Popular Education**

**Collective:** This form allowed us to know the precise name and composition of each collective. The name of each student

and teacher, the house where he or she lived, the study timetable of each student, the precise comarca and where in the latter the literacy workshops took place, and the name of the coordinator of the collective. (Appendix 1, Form D)

**Report card:** This form allowed us to observe the evolution of the classes and progress being made by each student; the number of lessons taken and passed, etc. This allowed us to plan the dates of graduation. (Appendix 1, Form E)

**Midterm test:** This form allowed us to observe the grades of each student in each comarca after the first twelve lessons. We could then determine those students who were having greater problems and provide them greater attention. (Appendix 1, Form F)

**Final test:** This form allowed us to see which students, after finishing the 27 lessons, knew how to read and write. It also provided an objective criterion to decide who would be graduating. (Appendix 1, Form G)

**List of students who graduated:** The names of those who graduated were noted in a book that was archived. These students were then provided more advanced literacy training. (Appendix 1, Form H)

**Immigration and emigration control:** This form allowed us to keep track of those who would move out of a comarca or move into a comarca. The cause of this immigration or emigration was noted and these persons were given the special attention they needed. (Appendix 1, Form I)

**Control of those in cooperatives:** Given that the cooperative movement represents a prioritized sector, this form served to keep track of the illiterate members in the cooperatives. More precisely, to monitor the rate of illiteracy and to take into consideration, in the literacy effort, the special characteristics of individuals. (Appendix 1, Form J)

**Control of literacy workers (maestros populares):** This form allowed us to observe, on a monthly basis, the performance of the literacy workers. Also, to note, for training purposes, the address and academic level of each literacy worker. (Appendix 1, Form K)

**Control of those illiterate that have not been able to learn literacy:** This form allowed us to note the names of those unable to learn to read and write, and the reason for this. (Appendix 1, Form L)

**Control of the distribution of school supplies:** This form allowed us to keep track of the school supplies distributed to (and sometimes recuperated from) each sector and comarca. Such an ongoing control assured that supplies were being allocated in a fair manner to both students and teachers. (Appendix 1, Form LL)

**Bird's eye view of each sector by adult education technician responsible for that sector:** This form provided a global vision of the movement of both students and literacy workers in each sector and represented a useful tool for technicians so they could immediately address problems as they came up. (Appendix 1, Form M)<sup>43</sup>

Some of the forms listed above served for monthly controls, and others for bi-weekly controls. To this end, the promotor (person responsible for the Popular Education Collective) in each comarca would provide the reports, both qualitative and quantitative, to the technician. The latter would then carefully

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<sup>43</sup> At the end of chapter 3, one finds an appendix which I have omitted reproducing the fourteen forms used to control various aspects of the literacy crusade and ensuing adult education effort. For example, the form used to take the census to discover the rate of illiteracy; that noting the name, origin and comarca in which each literacy worker was working; that documenting deaths and migrations; that used to control the progress made by those learning to read and write, etc.

analyze each one of these reports and, after checking each concrete case at the grassroots level, would provide his recommendations as to the steps to take to resolve whatever shortcomings were observed.

It is worth noting that the bi-weekly and monthly reports were accompanied by an ongoing evaluation at the grassroots level.

Those working in the general and regular education sector held regular meetings and exchanged memos. They also regularly communicated with and met those working in the mass organizations and state institutions. Such memos and meetings also served to monitor and keep track of the global literacy effort

## **Chapter 4 - A shared social task**

This chapter was collectively produced by Eddy Filemón Maradiaga, director of the Escuela Base Arlen Siu; Trinidad García, regional delegate of the MED, Somotillo; Marcia Azucena G., promoter of AMNLAE; Ernesto Martínez, head of MICOIN at Cinco Pinos; Felipe Loza, territorial head of the Sandinista Youth 19 July; Mario Ríos, territorial head of UNAG; Henry Maradiaga, mayor of the municipality of Cinco Pinos; Francisco Mondragón, responsible for adult education in the Municipality of Cinco Pinos; Luis Rivera, territorial head of FSLN; Jeannette Baldelomar, head of the Literacy Research and Training Department (Colectivo Coordinator)

From the beginning of the national literacy crusade, the participation of the people has been a fundamental factor in carrying out all organizational and educational management tasks. In the course of all these years, community involvement has been the pillar of our educational, and specifically literacy efforts. It has been an indispensable condition in order to achieve the revolution's political, economic and social objectives.

It is because literacy represents a social phenomenon, and a key element in improving the technical skills of the

workforce, fostering innovation, increasing productivity and deepening public awareness of revolutionary values, that the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign. Our goal was to mobilize all social actors in order to eliminate illiteracy. A greater global and coordinated effort, and better planning to reach our goal.

#### *A - Background*

Despite the various actions of the National Literacy Crusade in Cinco Pinos in order to reduce illiteracy, the problem continued to persist: “Every year we taught people to read and write. However, at the grassroots level, we would constantly come across people who were still illiterate.” (Maradiaga, 1988)

Since 1985, the delegation of the Ministry of Education, with the head of adult education in the municipality, carried out a literacy project in order to reduce the level of illiteracy. Parallel to this, a relatively similar action was taking place in the delegation of the Ministry of Education in the region.

As a result of this same vision of literacy, is that 80% of the illiterates registered, with the participation of popular teachers, municipal commission of education and commissions, county. Within these structures all the mass organizations and institutions of the municipality were integrated.

In this stage, the Operative Sandino Vive obtains a better organization of work, which would serve later to consider new actions that allowed to overcome the difficulties that arose in the development of this first stage of the operation.

“We consider it necessary to structure, organize, plan and implement immediately a comprehensive literacy plan that contributes to lowering illiteracy levels and raising the level of awareness. For this, it is necessary to involve the different political, business and union organizations so that they participate directly in literacy.” (MED, 1986: 5)

In this framework of the second stage, is that a new task is inscribed the Mini-crusade of literacy, proposed at the regional level, where in the area, and specifically in the municipality of Cinco Pinos, takes on new lights in the fight against illiteracy . The task demanded therefore more efforts and cohesion of all social sectors in the continuity of the operation.

That is why, at the end of 1986, the entire educational movement pooled its energies into the Mini-crusade: youth got involved in communities, and so did teachers, technical advisers, state institutions and institutions and mass organizations.

Once again people start mobilizing around a fundamental goal: eliminating illiteracy.

“We were all clear about the task. We had to motivate people, achieve a better organization of the CEPs, support the popular teachers, and attract students who were still illiterate.”  
(Mondragón, 1980)

At the same time that the Mini Crusade was being launched, new organizational forms of operating were set up. One was the Estado Mayor Municipal, and the other was Comarca Committees.

This organizational revamping originated from the need to improve efficiency at all levels, to work in a more coordinated manner, and speaking “the same language, from the grassroots level in comarcas to the very highest levels of authority in the municipality, in order to wipe out illiteracy. From the need to avoid having energies dispersed, some going in one direction and others in another.

It is in this way that all of Cinco Pinos mobilized around one common goal, where each one assumes a different role, but with a common goal, and with the conviction that only united can the dream of Commander Carlos Fonseca come true:

“Not only free people from the dictatorship of Somoza, but also from that of ignorance: teach them to read and write!”

### *B - Comarca Committees*

In order to get people more involved in the solution of problems encountered in their communities and the latter's improvement, a new structure was created in 1986: Comarca Committees.

“Comarca Committees were created in order to simplify efforts in each one of the comarcas, so that information would flow more smoothly, thus speeding up the carrying out of various defined tasks.” (Martínez, 1988)

Cinco Pinos has a Town Council and twelve Comarca Committees.

These Comarca Committees are intermediate bodies between each comarca and the Town Council. They have become each comarca's tool of self-management. They meet monthly to evaluate, analyze and plan upcoming tasks. When special projects need to be carried out, they meet to coordinate tasks, reach agreements, and specify work plans.

The Comarca Committees focus on all aspects - social, economic, and political - of the communities.

All mass organizations and representative institutions in the comarcas participate in these committees: president of the cooperative, popular militias (MP), Sandinista defense committees (CDS), Luisa Amanda Espinosa women's association (AMNLAE), health brigades, head the youth campesino organization (MOJUCA), the teacher the community, the promoter of adult education, the representative of the FSLN and in some cases the pastor of the community.

Comarca Committees work in addressing the problems and demands of each comarca. Thus, members of these committees are elected democratically. This is an important

and fundamental characteristic of these committees. Their members must be people who really care for the community and are deeply committed to its interests.

It is worth mentioning that, in some cases, the coordinator of the Comarca Committee is the teacher because of his or her level of involvement in problem solving, in carrying out tasks, in the search for initiatives that respond to the demands of the community.

“Comarca Committees also serve as a propaganda brigade. They immediately come into action in matters pertaining to defense, or to economic goals.” (Martínez, 1988)

### **A) Comarca Committees and Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign**

Given that Comarca Committees represent the heart and soul of the development of each community, their role in eliminating illiteracy in the municipality was of utmost importance.

“Each Comarca Committee was committed to eliminating illiteracy. It was its top priority. Each committee mobilized its comarca around this goal.” (Maradiaga, 1988)

By committing themselves to this challenging but very beautiful task, the committees were fostering the future social and economic development of their communities. More precisely, they:

- Directed and coordinated tasks in their community
- Addressed difficulties encountered in the literacy process
- Guaranteed permanent and systematic propaganda throughout the literacy campaign
- Supported students in various ways: coming to their help, encouraging them to persevere, and organizing graduation activities

- Motivated rural workers, women and young people involved in literacy and promoted community participation

Comarca Committees assured, and this with great enthusiasm, that all illiterates of the comarca were integrated into adult education. To make this happen and to motivate all illiterates and guaranteeing their presence in the Colectivo de educación, they would make house-to-house visits.

### **B) The organisations and their involvement**

Comarca Committees provide each organization and institution with directives related to the literacy campaign, and implement them using their own ideas and creativity:

- UNAG, the main peasant organisation, was committed to incorporate all its members into literacy and to maintain an effective control of their progress
- The Ministry of Health, through its health programs, performed all direct propaganda tasks relating to the campaign
- The CDS and AMNLAE ensured the integral participation of families in the communities
- ANDEN mobilized teachers and students around the goal of literacy
- Popular militias (MP) protected the life of literacy teachers.

### **C) Youth participation**

Noteworthy in the development of the whole literacy campaign in its different stages, is the very determining participation and mobilization of youth, and of young women in particular. They committed themselves to this other goal of the revolution - the struggle against illiteracy - with that energy, joy, and dynamism that characterizes all youth. They carried out censuses, recruited students, organized CEPs, trained popular teachers, did a fantastic job in motivating

people and raising their awareness, prepared written propaganda, held assemblies and organized recreational activities.

“In 1985, our Peasant Youth Movement (MOJUCA) still remained fairly weak. The Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign brought them to get involved in adult education with peasants, something that increased their own cohesion and organizational strength and that of the comarcas.” (Loza, 1988)

### **C) The Estado Mayor Municipal**

The Comarca Committees played a fundamental role as a grassroots structure: they enhanced the participation of the communities. Without their participation, it would not have been possible to achieve the global goal - literacy of all - set by the various territorial structures. They became a tool for the educational self-empowerment of the comarcas.

The Estado Mayor Municipal deserves a special mention here. Its role was crucial in terms of organizing and coordinating various literacy efforts, fostering the mobilization and motivation of the various municipal players in the literacy campaign, following up to make sure the various guidelines and work plans were implemented, and addressing problems as they came up in the course of the campaign.

The Estado Mayor was made up of union and corporate organizations, state institutions and the municipal government. It included the National Development Bank (BND), AMNLAE, MINSA, the Ministry of Education (MED), the Ministry of internal trade (MICOIN), the National Union of farmers and ranchers (UNAG), the head of Adult Education, the National Association of Nicaraguan Educators (ANDEN), the Federation of secondary students (FES), and the border guard director. All of them under the leadership of the territorial head of the FSLN.

They had meetings every eight days where work was planned, issues, concerns and initiatives discussed, proposals made and agreements reached.

These meetings were an important aspect of the ongoing assessment of the literacy campaign, and the reorientation of actions at different levels when deemed necessary.

It is important to highlight the fact that the integral participation of all municipal players in the literacy campaign is not something that happened spontaneously. It was something well thought out and meticulously planned. This is made clear when one takes a look at how the Estado Mayor Municipal operated:

“Those in charge of organizations and institutions would meet. Then, each one would meet up with the members of their organizations and institutions in order to transmit the orientations that had been agreed upon. When they would arrive in a comarca, they would meet its members and highlight the benefits of knowing how to read and write. They would also note the problems encountered by the comarca and relay these to the appropriate instances. Integration does not mean carrying out the task someone else’s task. It consists in assuring that each mass organization and each institution carries out its own tasks, but while assuring unity of purpose.” (García, 1988)

The literacy campaign demonstrates the power and traditional fighting spirit of the Nicaraguan people. Cinco Pinos, in its remarkable effort to eliminate illiteracy, is a living example of this at this stage of the revolution. Mass organizations, state institutions, teachers, youth, and the population in general, represented fundamental pillars of this fantastic achievement. The elimination of illiteracy in Cinco Pinos, achieved on November 8, 1987, shows just how important mass propaganda is, and how important it is also to foster the motivation and mobilization of all municipal players in achieving a common goal.

## **Chapter 5 - Influence of the teacher in the educational development of the community**

This chapter was collectively produced by Eddy Filemón Maradiaga, director of the base school Arlen Siu; Trinidad García, regional delegate of the MED, Somotillo; Marcia Azucena G., promoter of AMNLAE; Ernesto Martínez, head of MICOIN in Cinco Pinos; Felipe Loza, territorial head of the Sandinista Youth 19 July; Mario Ríos, territorial head of UNAG; Henry Maradiaga, mayor of Cinco Pinos; Francisco Mondragón, head of Adult Education in Cinco Pinos; Luis Rivera, territorial head of the FSLN; Jeannette Baldelomar, head of the Literacy Research and Training Department (Colectivo Coordinador).

Speaking of the teacher is talking about a project whose goal is the wellbeing of society. A project that is at once social, political, and educational.

We cannot imagine educational advances without the presence of the teacher, heart and soul of the struggle to create a New Society.

### *A - Background*

Before the revolutionary triumph teachers were restricted in the exercise of their task. Due to the marginalization to which Nicaraguans were subjected by the Somoza dictatorship, few in the municipality of Cinco Pinos had access to education: there was one director and six teachers in the town itself, and ten in the rural area who worked in primary multi-grade classroom schools that offered grades one to three.

In 1977 a high school was created in the town of Cinco Pinos for students originating from the municipalities of Cinco Pinos, Santo Tomás, San Pedro and San Francisco. There were three teachers and only the first year of high school was offered.

Most of the primary teachers were ‘empíricos’. In other words, they taught without having previously received any normal technical training usually required by the Ministry of Education for teaching. The three teaching in the newly created high school came from Chinandega and Managua.

It was only in 1979 that Cinco Pinos started offering students all primary school grades, which in other countries are equivalent to grades one to eight.

The 266 students attending grade school – grades 1 to 3 – in the municipality of Cinco Pinos lacked teaching staff, classrooms and school supplies.

Such was the educational situation in the municipality as of July 19, 1979.

*B - The teacher and education in the revolutionary period*

The 1980 National Literacy Crusade (CNA) represents the foundation block of a broad educational movement whose purpose was to include the historically marginalized sectors. The participation of teachers constitutes a decisive and key element in this movement.

One of the first phases in this movement was the integration of all teachers into the national teachers' union - the National Association of Educators of Nicaragua (ANDEN), an accomplishment made possible thanks to the persuasive work of the leadership in this region of the country. Since its foundation during the Somoza dictatorship, ANDEN had been the object of repression.

It is from this movement that teachers got involved in the technical and organizational tasks of the National Literacy Crusade. Teachers participated as members of the Municipal Literacy Coordination, as advisors and as technical assistants.

The functions of the technical and organizational structures of the crusade were the following:

1. *Municipal literacy coordination.* It was in charge of directing the organization and functioning of those implementing the literacy crusade. To guarantee the fulfillment of its tasks, the work of this body was permanent and ongoing.

2. The Global Municipal Coordination Body, known as the *Estado Mayor*, was made up of members of the most representative bodies and institutions of the municipality, such as the Government Junta, the National Union of Farmers and Cattle Ranchers (UNAG), the Sandinista Defense Committee (CDS), the Association of Field Workers (ATC). ), Juventud Sandinista 19 de Julio, Association of Nicaraguan Women (AMLAE), National Association of Educators of Nicaragua (ANDEN), Ministry of Education (MED).
3. The *technical adviser* had as a function to orient the technical-methodological and organizational work of the technical assistants and to assure that policy orientations were respected.
4. The *technical assistant* was in charge of providing technical assistance to the literacy brigades, staying with them for the duration of the crusade, from March to August 1980.

*C - Birth and function of literacy workers (maestro populares)*

At the end of the National Literacy Crusade, a program was set up whose purpose was to continue developing the literacy skills acquired by the newly literate. It is here that the new type of literacy worker known as the *maestro popular* appeared.

When the literacy crusade came to an end, those among the newly literate whose performance had been outstanding were given the task of helping others learn how to read and write and were thereafter called *maestro populares*. However, the title and role of *maestro popular* was also given to regular formal sector teachers living in a comarca. The latter teachers performed various tasks as promoter, as coordinator, or as technical adviser.

The promoter is in charge of controlling and following up on the work carried out by the coordinators and brigadistas in the

CEPs. He guarantees the correct application of the guidelines on contents and teaching methods, distributes among its coordinators the study materials used by the students and maintains updated controls of enrollment, attendance and academic advancement of the students of the geographical area it serves. Finally, in coordination with mass organizations, he promotes tasks that contribute to the strengthening of education.

The coordinator is directly responsible for teaching students. He works in the Popular Education Collectives, attending an average of five students. He adapts his class schedule to the available time each student can afford.

He receives systematic and continuous training in workshops, meetings and visits in which contents of a methodological and programmatic organizational nature are developed according to the level of schooling of his students. His teaching work schedule is variable, with a predominance of two hours a day, Monday through Friday.

Like the promoter, he handles updated controls of the behavior and academic performance of his students, although the methods and procedures implemented for the study and evaluation of the contents are different from those applied in formal education.

The popular teacher does not receive a salary for his work, his participation being voluntary. Nor does he enjoy vacations, since to guarantee an ongoing education of the working classes his work is continuous. Normal formal sector teachers who assume the role of popular teacher do not receive any salary for their work, as their income comes from the work they do as regular teachers.

*D - Formal education teachers and adult education*

Adult education is characterized by its methodological flexibility and programmatic content. In the tasks of adult education, the participation of formal, regular teachers is well

known; they offer general support, acting as coordinators, as promoters, or as technical advisors.

The involvement of formal teachers has allowed the adult education program to be more profoundly embedded in and esteemed by the community and improved student retention rates. Their involvement strengthened mass organizations and they participated in defense tasks, health and production workshop days, as well as in the tasks demanded by the development of the revolutionary process.

The high degree of integration of formal teachers, brigades of literacy workers, mass organizations and state institutions during the crusade made it possible for the municipality of Cinco Pinos to be one of the first ones to completely wipe out illiteracy.

With the impulse given to education at all levels from 1981 to 1985, the most outstanding of those in the municipality who had learned to read and write during the crusade became what Nicaraguan call ‘empíricos’, i.e. teachers with no previous formal training for teaching. Also became empíricos the most outstanding of those who had acted as coordinators in adult education, as well as those post primary school students who had participated in the literacy brigades during the crusade. Some of these teachers are now part of regional technical teams of education, leaders of mass organizations or workers of state institutions.

Teachers with no formal training for teaching – empíricos – can upgrade their professional skills in the following ways:

- Attending professional development courses in the normal schools of Chinandega and Somotillo.
- Furthering the latter professional development by joining the Georgino Andrade<sup>44</sup> educational brigade, which travels

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<sup>44</sup> This brigade was named after Georgino Andrade, 28 years old and father of five children, who was the first brigadista of the National

to Cuba to attend intensive courses on teaching – basic fundamentals and pedagogy.

*E - Helping teachers improve their skills*

Building ever more schools in Cinco Pinos does not suffice; one must also provide those who teach in these schools with the professional development skills necessary to assure the quality of teaching. Following the revolutionary triumph, the global priority given to education involved offering schools and teachers improved monitoring in both organization and methodology:

- Technical training teams were created.
- Supervision and control teams were set up, whose function was to provide direct training in the different schools according to the needs of teachers.
- Workshops in adult education were organized for teachers.
- General education and adult education teams cooperated in their supervision tasks. The general education sector cooperated with adult education in improving contents, methods and work styles.
- A careful follow-up was given to make sure policy orientations originating from the top were respected at the grassroots level.
- When problems were found by those visiting and supervising schools and communities, help and training were offered to overcome these problems.

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Literacy Crusade to be assassinated by the Contra. He lived in the Municipality of San Francisco, Department of Chinandega. He was responsible for the (Sandinista Defense Committees) CDS of the area and of the Popular Militias. He was also in charge of the national literacy crusade in his comarca. On May 17, 1980, he stated, during a political rally, that he was willing to give his life for the safety of the brigadistas. The very next day he was assassinated by the Contra. See: <http://www.sandinovive.org/cna/CNA-hym.htm>, accessed on March 13, 2019.

*F - How do educational services work?*

In the municipality of Cinco Pinos, the following are responsible for advancing education:

- 73 elementary teachers,
- 11 high school teachers,
- 9 supervisors of methodology,
- A director and a deputy director of NER (Nucleos educativos rurales),
- 10 people in charge of administrative functions,
- 15 promoters and
- 86 coordinators of popular education.

To expand educational coverage at the urban and rural levels, a system known as school nuclearization was implemented. This model has the following structure: a base school, three sub-base schools and ten satellite schools with a total of 1,103 students; four popular preschools with 112 children from 3 to 6 years old; and a pre-school in the urban sector with 34 children. Teachers in the four popular preschools in the rural area are normal school students who are teaching as part of their field work, this on a voluntary basis and with no salary whatsoever.

At the level of secondary education, the 'Esteban Rodríguez Sánchez' High School had 266 students in 1977 in the three years of the basic cycle. These students faced the fight against illiteracy in the 1980 National Literacy Crusade with patriotism and determination. At present, with its complete basic and diversified cycle, this high school has a total of 320 students. Of these, 86 of the third and fifth-year students participated in the literacy brigades of the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign and continue today in follow-up actions.

*G - Participation of teachers in the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign*

The Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign involved precise steps whose goal was to reduce and eventually eliminate illiteracy.

It was implemented in stages since 1986 and the participation of teachers and students has been decisive in ensuring its success.

Careful planning in the initial stage of the campaign made possible the close collaboration, in the literacy effort, of the adult education program, basic general education and the teachers' union ANDEN. Thanks to such cooperation, teachers assumed the following tasks:

- Updating the illiteracy census.
- Participating (95% of them participated), during the 1987 school break period, in the mini-crusade.
- Participating as members of comarca committees.
- Supporting popular teachers in efforts to incorporate ever more students in the Popular Education Collectives, and to increase retention rates and graduation rates.
- Offering technical and methodological advice to promoters and coordinators.
- Contacting those who abandoned Popular Education Collectives and encouraging them to come back; contacting those in formal education who abandoned grade one and encouraging them to return to school. All this in an effort to have everyone complete their schooling up to grade four, and thus avoid falling back into illiteracy.
- Participating in cultural, recreational and social service activities in their community.
- The careful planning and execution of actions in a global and coordinated manner played a key role in the struggle to eliminate illiteracy and to raise the educational level of the population.

## **Chapter 6 - In a permanent struggle against illiteracy**

This chapter is the product of the collective work of: Milton Zelaya, territorial technician; Francisco Mondragón, head of Adult Education in the municipality of Cinco Pinos; Rosa Amalia Lagos, zone technician for adult education; Eduardo Mejía T., promoter of Adult Education in the El Pavón comarca; Jackeline Desroches and Raymond Robitaille (Canadian internationalists); Octavia Pérez S., promoter of AMNLAE; Alicia Suazo Vásquez, adult education technician, head office (Coordinator of the collective).

### *A - Post-literacy initiatives in the struggle against illiteracy*

Thanks to the national literacy crusade, which ended on August 23, 1980, illiteracy had been sharply reduced in Cinco Pinos. However, the challenge now was to pursue the education of those who had just learned to read and write.

Great efforts were thus made, to ensure the success of the literacy campaign, to continue improving their reading and writing skills. This was done to prevent them from falling back into illiteracy for lack of practice and to strengthen and deepen the skills they had already acquired.

The first step taken to achieve this was the production of two issues of the *July 19 Magazine*. Each issue was accompanied by a study manual that coordinators could use in their ongoing literacy effort.

These magazines and others that were developed afterwards not only helped to strengthen reading and writing skills, but also served to help campesinos learn to take advantage of their free time outside of classes to develop the habit of reading, and to develop a passion for intellectual pursuit. The national literacy crusade hymn, and other songs, also considerably helped to foster such passion.

### *B - Other general initiatives to foster ongoing literacy*

Those who had just learned to read and write felt the need to move ahead in their learning experience. In order to meet the

new challenges arising from the revolution, they knew they needed greater skills and demanded an appropriate training to acquire them.

The Ministry of Education, through its Adult Education Program, met these demands by producing pedagogical manuals. These were organized by levels, from level 1 to level 6.

The timetable for the newly literate to complete these levels was the following:

- Levels 1 and 2 in 1981
- Level 3 in 1982
- Level 4 and 5 in 1983
- Level 6 in 1984

Two magazines were produced for the students of the first two levels. For those studying at level 1, *Caminemos 1*. And for those at level 2, *Caminemos 2*.

As these magazines were not accompanied by a teacher's guide, students used them as reading texts for classes.

*C - Specific initiatives in the municipality of Cinco Pinos*

At the end of their sixth level, the first graduates of basic popular education, especially the younger students, wanted to go on with their education, either by pursuing a technical career or by going on to high school. However, since the literacy campaign graduates did not receive an official primary school diploma, and since their intellectual development was considered inadequate in comparison to formal primary school graduates, they were not accepted in the Cinco Pinos high school.

Given that a technical team in Cinco Pinos had carried out a census to determine the study needs of the newly literate once they finished their sixth level of training, this obstacle only increased their frustration. The census had led them to build up expectations, which were now being crushed.

Most of the students in this situation originated from the La Montaña comarca. Through their popular teacher and promoter, they exerted considerable pressure to have their demands met.

This pressure eventually led the members of the technical team who had carried out the census to try to come up with a solution.

They told us, says Milton Zelaya (1988): “Go and talk to the teachers of the formal primary school, and find out what themes and skills would need to be developed so the training of the newly literates who had attained the 6<sup>th</sup> level would match that received by formal primary school graduates.

So, adult technicians such as Milton Zelaya followed that advice and also closely examined the primary school program and elaborated a list of topics and skills that they were going to teach to the 6<sup>th</sup> level literates.

Don Paco (Francisco Mondragón) explains the agreement reached .

“It was agreed that Milton Zelaya would teach them mathematics and history and that I would teach them Spanish and the natural sciences.

“We called these upgrading courses Saturday courses, as we taught them every Saturday. Not only did La Montaña students attend them, but eventually also leaders of the Sandinista Defense Committees. It was a very gratifying experience for everyone.”

As soon as campesinos among the 6<sup>th</sup> level newly literate in other comarcas heard about these courses, they did not want to miss out on this opportunity and also started attending them. These courses lasted approximately three to four months.

Many of the students who participated in these Saturday courses were members of the educational brigade "Georgino Andrade Rivera".

To meet the demands of the 6<sup>th</sup> level newly literate, the technical team that had carried out the census also made arrangements with institutions of the region such as:

1. SINACAP, the national training agency of the municipality of the El Viejo, department of Chinandega, accepted to train 30 these students in carpentry. However, only 18 of these ended up receiving this training. Some could not attend because of work commitments and others did not attend because carpentry did not interest them.

The course was given in El Viejo itself and lasted three months, from May 23 to August 21, 1985. Fifteen students ended up graduating, three having eventually abandoned the course.

When the 15 graduates returned home to Cinco Pinos, they managed to set up a carpentry school workshop, thanks to the help of the municipal technical team that had obtained financing for this project from an organization known as Servicios múltiples para el desarrollo de los pueblos (Multiple Services for the Development of Nations).

The workshop started operating very successfully, because it had all the necessary tools and wood. However, this did not last, as all 15 graduates were soon obliged to enrol in the Obligatory Military Service.

2. The Ministry of Health managed to offer two of the women among the 6<sup>th</sup> level literacy graduates a nurse's aide training course in El Viejo. And thanks to the cooperation of the Health Center of Cinco Pinos,

some 6<sup>th</sup> level women graduates were trained as midwives, so they could attend births in their comarcas.

Other 6<sup>th</sup> level women graduates were trained in first aid. One finds them in the health brigade in each one of the 13 comarcas of Cinco Pinos.

Ten 6<sup>th</sup> level literacy graduates are currently studying in the normal school Darwin Vallecillo Q. in Somotillo. Others are studying in the Esteban Rodríguez high school in Cinco Pinos.

Another 29 of these 6<sup>th</sup> level graduates are part of the Georgina Andrade Brigade, which traveled to Cuba to obtain formal training in teaching. Upon returning to their respective comarcas after their training was finished, they have become regular primary school teachers during the day, and at night, popular teachers in the Popular Education Collectives.

The remarkable creativity shown by the municipal technical team in coming up with pedagogical material is worth noting. In 1986, they started using brochures produced by the Ministry of Health to teach people about environment and health issues - for example, how to avoid and treat diarrhea - as reading material in class. This approach not only rendered teaching more efficient, but also allowed students, while perfecting their reading and writing skills, to learn things very down to earth and useful in improving their health and hygienic habits.

3. When they started the current school year, in March, the technicians in Cinco Pinos did not have study texts for the third level literacy students. So, what did they do? They decided to use an article on how Cinco Pinos managed to wipe out illiteracy, which was published in the newspaper *El Tayacán* (262).

In order to help teachers to make an intelligent use of this article, they elaborated a study guide that included various activities, some meant to improve reading and writing skills, others to improve mathematical skills.

The activities took up four weeks of class. And once they were complete, they showed the following:

- The material was found to be very user friendly for both popular teachers and students.
- The popular teachers managed to master and make good use of the study guide.
- Both teachers and students managed to develop their creativity. At the same time that students were learning literacy and mathematical skills, they were also discovering important information about their own communities, not only the social projects being implemented, but also the needs of their comarcas.
- Students found it easy to understand the material being used.

#### *D - Follow-up initiatives after the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign*

After the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign eliminated illiteracy on November 8, 1987 throughout the municipality of Cinco Pinos, the popular teachers used their creativity to find ways to assure their achievement would have a future, and the newly literate would not simply abandon studying.

One such initiative consisted in having the students review the literacy primer to strengthen literacy. But, for the most part, the post-literacy journal *Vencimos*, which is accompanied by a study guide, was used in the Popular Education Collectives.

According to the evaluation that has been made, following this pedagogical path has proven to be successful:

- Because its content, assignments and exercises are very diverse, students have found *Vencimos* very attractive and motivating.
- Its content was found to reflect the concrete daily lives of the campesinos and was thus very meaningful for them.
- Most of the readings in *Vencimos* are in large print, which facilitated reading for campesinos.
- It served to fill knowledge gaps.
- The exercises are graduated. The level of difficulty increases in a systematic manner.
- It helped students achieve the first level competencies without difficulty.
- The various practical tips in *Vencimos*, from home remedies to cooking recipes, were found to be very useful.
- In general, it is adapted to the level of the newly literate.

Among the difficulties noted, one finds the following:

- Some of the readings, due to their small print, made it difficult for older students to read because of eyesight problems.
- There was not enough time to cover all the material. Only a little more than half was covered.

Despite the relative success of the above initiatives, we still have a long way to go before really coping with the pedagogical challenge posed by basic popular education. Most of the texts presently designed for popular education

do not reflect the concrete interests of students. For this reason, a project is now in the works in an effort to produce more adequate material to help the newly literate carry on with their education.

*Project to prepare pedagogical material for post-literacy effort*

The project that is now in the works is being implemented thanks to the solidarity of the Canadian Institute of Adult Education and the financial help of the Canadian International Development Agency, this in coordination with the Ministry of Education of Nicaragua. Its purpose is to provide educational material corresponding to the interests and needs of the newly literate in Cinco Pinos.

1. Who is in charge of the project?

This project is being carried out by two Canadian educators, Jaqueline Desroches and Raymond Robitaille, as well as by the education technician of Cinco Pinos, Milton Zelaya Osorio and the French internationalist Chantal Gordon.

These Canadian cooperants came to support this literacy effort, following a tour made by Nicaraguans in Canada in which they explained the achievements of the national literacy crusade and the subsequent follow-up actions in order to promote the education of campesinos.

2. How was the project conceived?

The Canadian technicians arrived in Nicaragua for a period of two weeks. Then they submitted a report to the Canadian Institute of Adult Education (ICEA). The latter developed a project, based on this report, and presented it to the Canadian agency ACDI, which approved partial funding for it. The ICEA also presented their project to the Ministry of Education in Nicaragua, which also approved it.

### 3. Realization of the project

The first step taken was to present the project to the people of the municipality of Cinco Pinos, raising awareness about its importance. This was done by explaining it to the leaders of various state institutions and mass organizations and seeking their collaboration.

The mass organizations and state institutions that ended up supporting the project and collaborating in it are the following:

- UNAG
- ANDEN
- Juventud sandinista 19 de julio
- AMNLAE
- FSLN
- Communal Development Project of Chinandega Norte (CHINORTE)
- MINSA
- The National Development Bank of Nicaragua
- Ministerio de desarrollo al grupo acuario y Reforma agraria (MIDINRA)
- Ministry of Education
- Tropas Guarda fronteras
- Town hall of Cinco Pinos

After the project was presented to them, each one of the representatives of the mass organizations and state institutions explained the work they were doing and its impact in the communities and highlighted the problems and weaknesses these communities were experiencing.

Following this meeting, a list of topics was elaborated, that would serve to develop a research project, whose purpose would be to determine more precisely, at the grassroots level, the specific needs of the communities and how these could be met.

The research project was then carried out. Individuals were interviewed, visits were made and meetings held with people in the town of Cinco Pinos, in the various comarcas, asentamientos and cooperatives.

Once the research was finished, its results were systematized and shared with all state institutions and mass organizations. Then, the following list of topics was agreed upon, based on the difficulties outlined by the research:

- *Production*: importance of preserving the environment; reforestation and soil erosion measures; proper maintenance of and protection of sources of water; new crops that could possibly be grown; how to manage a project - budget, costs and profits - and how to seek financing from the National Development Bank and other institutions.
- *Defense*: youth and defense; the army, the Obligatory Military Service, the demobilized; civil defense, more precisely, what one should do when there is a military attack or a natural disaster; contraband; problem of speculation in comarcas.
- *Health*: importance of hygiene and a proper diet; pregnancy and breastfeeding; vaccinations; importance of exercise and sports; how to cope with wounds, burns, diarrhea, high temperature, malaria; rediscovering the secrets of traditional medicine; family planning.

- *Organization*: what is a community? what are Comarca Committees? importance of community participation and self-government; strengthening the cooperative movement; agrarian reform; life at home in the family.
- *Popular oral traditions*: cultural history of the people of Cinco Pinos; how the first high school came to be; popular stories and jokes; poems and songs; popular fiestas.
- *Education*: participating in the educational advancement of one's community.

#### 4. How was the research carried out?

What follows is one concrete example. The researcher arrives in the asentamiento, El Bonete. He chose this particular asentamiento, because it is fairly recent, and people are still going about trying to meet the challenge of resettling into a new place. They were forced to leave their homes, because they were living on the border with Honduras, in the heart of the Contra War.

The researcher, when meeting with the people of El Bonete, follows a guide. First he asks the people to describe life as it was in their previous homes on the border with Honduras. Then he asks them to describe life as they are presently experiencing it in their new home, the asentamiento. The difficulties encountered, etc.

The campesinos in El Bonete basically make a living by producing basic grains and raising livestock. They are still in the process of resettling, and most still do not have their houses built.

Therefore, the resettlement process in El Bonete can be appreciated with all its problems.

5. What issues are being discussed in the Popular Education Collectives?

The issues being discussed are the following: role of National Development Bank, resettlement, care of water, latrines, Comarca Committees, traditions, and planning.

All these issues are treated in a simple way. The language used is clear and easy to understand.

The teachers in the Popular Education Collectives discussed these issues with students of the three levels of basic popular education in ten Popular Education Collectives. They did this for one month, starting from June 20, 1988.

Each booklet has its guide, outlining a methodological approach, for the popular teachers. These guides not only have exercises relating to the content of each booklet, but also present suggestions for implementing other activities, where the popular teacher can choose which ones to develop. It is considered that supervision, support, and training will be the elements that will make the material effective.

*F - Conclusion*

As can be seen, literacy follow-up actions have been varied and very systematic. Which has allowed students to remain enthusiastic and motivated. This also demonstrates that even with scant educational resources, it is possible to advance in education.

All this has been possible, thanks to the spirit of struggle demonstrated by the people, who have fought and are still fighting against illiteracy, and this in a coordinated way with all the institutions and organizations.

## **Chapter 7 - Concluding remarks on how the municipality of Cinco Pinos managed to get rid of illiteracy**

This chapter was collectively produced by Trinidad García, zonal delegate of the MED, Somotillo; Francisco Mondragón, head of adult education in the municipality of Cinco Pinos; Israel Soriano, adult education technician in the municipality of Cinco Pinos; Rubén Aguilar V., UNICEF consultant (collective coordinator)

### *A - Introduction*

The literacy campaign carried out in the municipality of Cinco Pinos, which culminated with the total elimination of illiteracy in this small corner of Nicaragua, is an especially interesting experience, because it allows one to see, and this very clearly and in great detail given the size of the territory, the central and fundamental elements that rendered possible this amazing accomplishment.

What stands out loud and clear, both in the experience of Cinco Pinos as in that of Nicaragua as a whole, is that no literacy campaign can claim to be successful unless the newly literate are immediately provided with concrete avenues allowing them to pursue on the path of learning, so as not to eventually fall back into illiteracy. Of particular importance is guaranteeing, in each of the communities where a literacy campaign has taken place, the existence of the first grades of fundamental education ("Battle for fourth grade"). This is the most solid means to avoid them from eventually falling back into illiteracy.

Such a holistic approach to literacy is complex, it is true, but this is what is called for if one wants to avoid a problem experienced by many countries, including parts of Nicaragua. Following a successful literacy campaign, they saw the rate of illiteracy climbing once again, partly because the newly literate lost, for of lack of practice, their newly acquired skills, and partly because the old pattern of high literacy resulting from a lack of schooling, returned.

The experience of Cinco Pinos, a territory of 69 km<sup>2</sup> and thirteen comarcas, confirms some of the principles that Nicaragua considers essential, based on its 1980 National Literacy Crusade, if one wants to radically reduce, or even wipe out illiteracy.

The Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign clearly shows that eliminating illiteracy:

- Is not primarily a problem of technical nature, but rather a political decision.
- Is possible, even in conditions of war and severe poverty. Cinco Pinos experienced a drought of three years during its efforts to wipe out illiteracy.
- Is not something that can be done by simply relying on the resources and regular structures of the Ministry of Education, but absolutely calls for a global and coordinated effort by society as a whole.

*B - The elements that make for a successful literacy campaign*

According to the analysis and assessment of the global literacy experience that took place in Cinco Pinos, and in light of the principles mentioned above, the following fundamental elements seem to be the ones that allowed the municipality to achieve the total elimination of illiteracy:

*In society as a whole*

- Literacy was not viewed as the sole responsibility of the Ministry of Education but was seen as that of all state institutions and mass organizations, and of society as a whole.
- All inhabitants of the municipalities, all peasants, were made to understand that learning to read and write was necessary and useful for them.

- The new political and social conditions created in the region following the July 1979 revolution led peasants to experience new expectations and needs. Among them, the need to learn to read and write in order to be able to manage cooperatives, do the paperwork necessary to obtain bank loans, follow courses, and participate in workshops and meetings.
- The motivation and awareness of all the communities of the municipality was maintained permanently, and reached all places - church, school, workplace - and all sectors of society - children, youth, and women.
- Everyone in the region as a whole was aware of the ongoing literacy effort, and conscious that for Cinco Pinos to be able to declare itself one day "territory free of illiteracy" each and every person had been committed to this goal and pitch in.

*At the level of the comarca*

- Comarca Committees, made up of mass organizations and democratically elected natural leaders, assume the task of literacy as their own, and make it their top priority.
- The intense participation of the community, its high level of response, demands and obliges leaders and popular teachers to respond to the challenge. This establishes a kind of virtuous circle, the community pressuring its leaders to move forward, and the latter pressuring the community to embark in a process of self-empowerment.

*At the level of those responsible and popular teachers*

- The various actors involved in the literacy process - technicians, promoters, coordinators, popular teachers - establish a close relationship with the peasants. They even end up developing personal relationships with

them. This leads the peasants to view them with esteem and respect.

- Those involved in literacy, from leaders at the top to popular teachers at the grassroots level, assume their responsibilities with love and commitment.
- Popular teachers emerge from the region itself. Local resources are called upon to address the literacy challenge.
- Those most involved in the literacy effort are the youth and the teachers. Together they represent 95% of all popular teachers.
- Popular teachers, promoters and coordinators initiate a process of participatory research. They lead the members of the Popular Education Collectives in each comarca to become involved with them, both in discovering the basic problems of their community, and in finding ways to address these.

*At the level of the Ministry of education in its zonal and local structures*

- a) The programs implemented by the Ministry of Education in the municipality achieve a high level of integration. Basic general education, basic popular education and literacy work are not seen as individual programs, but rather as a single project whose goal is eliminating illiteracy.
- b) The comarcas of the entire municipality have at least the first two years of fundamental education before the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign was launched.
- c) The teachers of the different programs clearly assume that their work, that their fundamental task, is related to the whole community and not only to school.

- d) 80% of teachers in the school system participated in one way or another in the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign.
- e) There was virtually no turnover in the personnel of the Ministry of Education who participated in the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign. This stability fostered both efficiency and motivation.
- f) Higher instances of the Ministry of Education at the regional level, when seeing the development of the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign, decided to support it by providing it with human and material resources.

*At the level of the government and the FSLN*

- Local government structures and those of mass organizations achieved a high level of coordination in all actions and tasks related to the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign.
- Upon seeing the literacy effort in Cinco Pinos, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) also decided to give it its full support, both at the zonal and regional levels.

*C - The lessons flowing from the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign*

The various actors involved in the Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign believe that precious lessons can be learned from their successful experience. Lessons that could prove to be very useful for those involved in future literacy campaigns or popular education work:

*At the organizational level*

- One must have direct contact with the community and live with it. Make them feel that what they are experiencing in their daily lives is important, and that they really matter.

- When paying visits to members of the Popular Education Collectives, one must be 'subtle and careful'. One must learn to win their hearts and break the ice. One must make them feel that, though one is a technician or teacher, one is on the same level as them.
- It is necessary to do away with all bureaucracy and foster a horizontal work environment from the very beginning. In this type of action, very little is achieved with a hierarchical attitude and structure. One on one conversations, not meetings, are the best way to solve problems as they come up.
- Systematic, constant and rigorous follow-ups and controls are required if one wants to completely wipe out illiteracy in an area or region.
- One must learn to prioritize. This must not simply be some vague wish one has, but actually guide one's concrete daily practice. One must prioritize in various fields: in allocating human and material resources, in providing technical assistance, and in targeting communities (free from literacy by comarca and sector). It is important to take special care in determining what needs to be prioritized, and the different levels of priority.
- Before embarking on a literacy campaign, one must first start by getting an accurate picture of the problem that needs to be addressed. Carrying out a census is essential.

*At a pedagogical technical level*

- The literacy campaign must adapt to the reality of the one who is learning; not the student to the literacy campaign.

- Adult education has to be experiential. And for that reason, it must start from life and not be rigid and formal.
- As the experience develops, it becomes a school from which all participants can constantly learn. It helps to break schemes, change the ideas one may have about education, improve teaching methods, learn to work under pressure and in a more organized manner.
- Being flexible when dealing with adults is a must, and especially when determining their study schedule. They should be given full freedom in choosing such a schedule. Teachers must respect the fact that, when students are having problems, they may have to come and go from the Popular Education Collective during classes. The adult has to feel free, not pressured: “It is preferable to tolerate less attendance on the part of the student, but one decided by the adult himself or herself, than to impose a strict attendance requirement that ends up expelling an adult from the group.”
- Class contents must be open and have no rigid school structure. The program serves as a guide, the text also. It must not be used in a rigid and formal way.
- Student evaluation methods must be adapted to the reality of adults. One must break away from the whole idea of typical school exams. Care must be taken not impose deadlines. In any case, one must continue working with those who are having great difficulty in learning.

*At the level of continuity*

- Ever new learning possibilities are being discovered, ever more creative designs are being developed to allow adults to pursue their studies, despite very limited resources.

- In light of the previous point, finding ways for the newly literate to go on with their studies, and to deepen and expand their reading and writing skills, is a must.

*D - Final comment*

Each region, zone, or municipality of Nicaragua - and this is true of any country in the world - has specific conditions that determine and characterize it.

Actions purporting to wipe out illiteracy must therefore be flexible and varied and adapt to these specific characteristics.

This being acknowledged, it remains true that when attempting to come up with a concrete literacy campaign proposal, one can always learn from someone else's experience. Especially when this experience, though taking place in extremely difficult and taxing conditions, proved to be an amazing success.

The Sandino Vive Literacy Campaign has a lot to teach. Learning from it represents the best way to honor the great commitment shown by all the men and women in Cinco Pinos, who, with their constant and selfless work, wiped out illiteracy in the municipality, and this at a time when Nicaragua was being militarily attacked and fighting for its liberation with all its weapons, including the weapon of literacy.

Commander Modesto (Henry Ruiz) pointed out that what prompted the peasants of the mountains to collaborate with such enthusiasm in the revolutionary struggle was not the promise of the revolution to give them a house, medicine and food, but to teach them to read. Literacy was a key commitment of the revolution. And that meant not only teaching people to read and write, but also allowing them to be liberated. When Paolo Freire arrived in Nicaragua, he said that literacy was a political task with pedagogical implications, and not a pedagogical task with political implications.<sup>45</sup>

Ernesto Cardenal, *La Revolución Perdida*, Anama ediciones centroamericanas, 2003

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<sup>45</sup> This reference from Cardenal was not part of this report. I am adding it. Ernesto Cardenal, *La Revolución Perdida*, Anama ediciones centroamericanas, 2003.

## **List of those interviewed to produce this document**

Humberto Izquierdo, responsible for the agrarian reform in Cinco Pinos

Henry Madariaga, president of the Junta municipal de reconstrucción de Cinco Pinos

Mario Francisco Ríos, director of UNAG in Cinco Pinos

Pedro Vasquez, a former inhabitant of the town of Cinco Pinos

Roger Aguilera Rivas, popular teacher in Cinco Pinos and Territorial Technician in the Adult Education Team of Cinco Pinos

Chantal Gordon, a missionary nun from France, who was living in Cinco Pinos

Eloisa Mejia Nuñez, popular teacher in Cinco Pinos

Francisco Mondragón Escalante, director of the Literacy Crusade and director of Adult Education in Cinco Pinos

Israel Soriano, Adult Education Technician in Cinco Pinos

Virginia Mondragón, Territorial Technician in the Adult Education Team of the Ministry of Education (MED)

Ramón Ochoa, General and Basic Education Technician in Cinco Pinos

Fredisvinda Zerón Pastrán, Education Facilitator in the Asentamiento Villa Camilo, Cinco Pinos

Trinidad Garcia, delegate of the MED for the entire region, Somotillo

Felipe Loza, director of the Sandinista Youth Movement in Cinco Pinos

Eddy Filemón Maradiaga, director of the School 'Arlen Siu' in Cinco Pinos

Ernesto Martínez, director of Ministerio del comercio interior (MICOIN) in Cinco Pinos

Milton Zelaya, Territorial Technician, Cinco Pinos

# Annex 2 - Patrick Tansay Scholarship Report of 2011

Professor Francisco Mondragón Escalante (Don Paco)

Director of North South Studies Scholarships

Las Pozas, Cinco Pinos, December 24, 2011

## **Introduction**

The present 2011 report that I am presenting marks our eleventh anniversary. Dawson teachers and students from Montreal, Canada, it has now been eleven years that we have been sharing experiences and bonding with you. You have been coming to spend time with us as friends, brothers and sisters. As friends extending a hand of solidarity to help us cope with certain economic and cultural problems we are facing in Cinco Pinos and Santo Tomás del Norte, two municipalities north of Chinandega, Nicaragua.

During your annual visits in our families, deep bonds are created, and warm, sincere, and affectionate relationships developed. Our youth in the comarcas where student live partake in various activities with them: they play baseball, soccer, etc. And they follow English classes.

The high school scholarships you provide help students in the high schools in our region. Among the beneficiaries there are students from from Las Pozas, El Carrizal, Las Tablas, La Uva, El Rincón, El Espino, El Jícaro and the nearby comarcas of La Montaña, Las Lajitas and Santa Fe. Marginalized students who, thanks to your solidarity and unconditional support, are able to go on with their studies.

We would like to thank the people of Canada whose generosity, kindness and friendship we receive through the Dawson College students and teachers.

### **Management of scholarships**

In 2011 those who came on the North South Studies field trip left \$2000 (two thousand US dollars) for the Patrick Tansay scholarship project. This was meant to provide a 40-dollar scholarship to 50 students. However, given that there were too many scholarship applications, namely 61, I was forced to reduce the annual amount allocated to each student from 40 to 32.7 dollars.

This scholarship allowed each student to receive the following school supplies in 2011:

- A backpack
- School scribblers (twice in the year)
- A writing pad.
- A ruler
- Rubber erasers
- A Pencil sharpener
- Color pencils
- Lead pencils (several times a year)
- Pens
- Flipcharts
- Graph paper
- And other materials for the development of their studies.
- In addition, a school uniform and a pair of shoes were purchased once a year.

They were also provided with necessary follow-up in academic performance during the course of the school year, as well as in the different exams they had to take throughout the year. This follow-up was carried out in order to help them improve their academic performance.

The results are encouraging. Not a single student among those who received a scholarship abandoned school during the year. The highest grade obtained by a student was 96% and the lowest 64%.

A total of 69 students receiving a Patrick Tansay scholarship have successfully finished their high school so far. Some have become teachers, others nurses, and others technicians, etc. Some are now pursuing university studies and the rest of them, just a few, are unable to go on to university because they do not have the economic resources necessary to do so.

This year students from Las Pozas, El Espino, El Jícaro, La Uva, Granadillo, El Carrizal, La Montaña and Las Lajitas and Santa Fe communities were attended.

Several meetings were held during the year with the students receiving scholarships and their parents. The purpose of these was to discuss and promote the academic performance of the students

In 2011 students receiving a scholarship attended the following high schools:

- Las Pozas high school
- Santo Tomas high school
- Paso Hondo high school

### **Grade level and number of scholarship students in each school:**

<i>Las Pozas High School</i>	<i>Santo Tomás Institute</i>	<i>Paso Hondo Institute</i>
First year 3	First year 3	First year 2
Second year 9	Second year 1	Second year 1
Third year 9	Third year 3	Third year 1
Fourth year 11	Fourth year 5	Fourth year 1
Fifth year 6	Fifth year 3	Fifth year 3
Total: 38	Total: 15	Total: 8

## Sex of scholarship students in each school

### *Las Pozas High School*

	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>Total</b>
First year	1	2	3
Second year	6	3	9
Third year	3	6	9
Fourth year	8	3	11
Fifth year	-	6	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>38</b>

### *Santo Tomas High School*

	<b>Varones</b>	<b>Mujeres</b>	<b>Total</b>
First year	1	2	3
Second year	-	1	1
Third year	2	1	3
Fourth year	3	2	5
Fifth year	1	2	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>15</b>

### *Paso Hondo High School*

	<b>Varones</b>	<b>Mujeres</b>	<b>Total</b>
First year	-	2	2
Second year	1	-	1
Third year	-	1	1
Fourth year	1	-	1
Fifth year	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8</b>

## Scholarship students in each comarca

### Las Pozas:

1. Hayken Fabricio Ochoa Mondragón II year
2. Lesby Michel Martínez Mejía II year
3. Kevin Uriel Martínez II year
4. José David Arce II year
5. Jordán Elías Martínez Mejía III year
6. Lesbia Idania Vallecillo Pineda III year
7. Anel Suleyca Martínez Espinal III year

### La Montaña:

1. Ronald de Jesús Martínez II year
2. Rosa Erminda Mondragón Arce III year
3. Joel Humberto Arce Mondragón III year
4. Alicia del Rosario Rivera Juárez IV year
5. Aleyda del Socorro Escalante IV year
6. Lorenzo Sánchez Reyes IV year
7. Nixon Juniel Zepeda Mondragón IV year
8. Henry Sánchez Escalante IV year
9. Rider Yovanis Rivera Guerra IV year
10. Darwin Arce Aguilar IV year
11. Hernán Antonio Arce Ponce IV year
12. Heydixon Gamaliel Rivera Cáliz IV year
13. Ninoska Isamar Escalante Ordoñez V year
14. Karla Vanessa Cruz Cárcamo V year

### El Espino:

1. Leyla de Jesús Andrade II year
2. Yessenia Alexandra Mejía López I year
3. Heydis Joseling Varela Herrera III year
4. José Fabricio Rodríguez Mondragón III year
5. Ana María Varela Zelaya III year
6. Itza Yassireth Andrade Gúnera III year
7. Rickcely Cadenas Mondragón IV year

### El Granadillo:

1. Maxiela Yunieth Mondragón Ríos V year

### El Jícara:

2. Gloria Lea Soriano Ordoñez I year
3. Anixia Ismania Gúnera Herrera I year

## Don Paco: His Life - Moments Shared

4. Dayron Josué Álvarez Varela II year
5. Dania Yulibeth Hernández Martínez III year
6. Marcos Antonio Gutiérrez Martínez IV year
7. Isamar Martínez Maradiaga V year
8. Yosmer Francisco Gutiérrez V year
9. Yelson Yobanis Martínez Ortiz V year

### **La Uva:**

1. Salvio Antonio Varela Tomas I year
2. Sugeyling Roxania Arauz Varela I year
3. Aura Lila Oviedo Quiroz II year
4. Erling Osmín Cruz Oviedo III year
5. Lidencia Lilieth Ordoñez Quiroz IV year
6. Martín Josué Pérez Aguilar IV year
7. Dolman Adán Varela Quiroz IV year
8. Jefrin José Varela Quiroz IV year
9. Karen Mileydis Cadenas Ríos V year
10. Roniel Alberto Martínez Quiroz V year

### **El Carrizal**

1. Andrieus Diosbel Rocha Cáceres I year
2. Arelis Isamar Rivera Oviedo II year
3. Ana Lisseth Martínez Pastrana III year
4. Yader Antonio Vásquez Láinez IV year
5. Yerlis María Colindres García V year

### **Las Lajitas:**

1. Kelin Yaritza Sandoval Martínez I year
2. Dania Elizabeth Martínez Andrade I year
3. Yenifer Carolina Herrera Molina III year
4. Oscar Danilo Aguilar Sandoval III year
5. Janixe Johana Aguilar Ordoñez V year
6. Enelbia Sorelis Aguilar Garache V year

### **Santa Fe:**

1. Marcos Antonio Tercero Rivera II year
2. José Oniel Mondragón Tercero II year

**Final Grades of Scholarship Students**

<b>No</b>	<b>First and last name</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Final grade%</b>
1.	Yelson Yobanis Martínez Ortiz	V year	96
2.	Lesby Michel Martínez Mejía	II year	96
3.	Lorenzo Sánchez Reyes	IV year	95
4.	Ayken Fabricio Ochoa Mondragón	II year	94
5.	Anel Suleyka Martínez Espinal	IV year	94
6.	Isamar Martínez Maradiaga	V year	93
7.	Yosmel Francisco Gutiérrez	V year	93
8.	Kevin Uriel Martínez Cruz	II year	92
9.	Anixia Ismania Gúnera Herrera	I year	92
10.	Yessenia Alexandra Mejía López	I year	92
11.	Rider Yobanis Rivera Gúnera	IV year	92
12.	Ronald de Jesús Martínez Mondragón	II year	90
13.	Ninoska Isamar Escalante Ordoñez	V year	90
14.	Janixe Yohana Aguilar Ordoñez	V year	90
15.	Nixon Yuniel López Zepeda	IV year	89
16.	Yerlis María Colindres	V year	89
17.	Masiela Mondragón Ríos	V year	89
18.	Lidemia Lilieth Ordoñez Quiroz	V year	89
19.	Henry Sánchez Escalante	IV year	88

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20.	Rickselis Cadenas Mondragón	IV year	87
21.	Eydicson Gamaliel Rivera Cálix	IV year	87
22.	Jennifer Carolina Herrera Molina	III year	85
23.	Itza Yassireth Andrade Gúnera	III year	85
24.	Marcos Antonio Gutiérrez Martínez	IV year	85
25.	Aura Lila Oviedo Ríos	II year	84
26.	Aleida del S. Escalante	IV year	84
27.	Jefri José Varela Quiroz	IV year	83
28.	Arely Rivera Oviedo	II year	83
29.	Heidi Joseling Varela Herrera	III year	83
30.	Ana Lisseth Martínez Pastrana	III year	83
31.	Kelin Yaritza Sandoval Martínez	I year	81
32.	Leyla de Jesús Andrade Pineda	II year	80
33.	Yordan Elías Martínez Mejía	III year	80
34.	Alicia del Rosario Rivera Juárez	IV year	80
35.	Karla Vanessa Cruz Carcano	V year	80
36.	Dania Yolibeth Hernández Martínez	III year	80
37.	Salvio Antonio Varela Tomas	I year	80
38.	Erling Osmín Oviedo Cruz	III year	80
39.	Karen Mileydis Cadenas Ríos	V year	79
40.	José David Arce	II year	78
41.	Darvin Alberto Arce Aguilar	IV year	78

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42.	Gloria Lea Soriano Ordoñez	I year	78
43.	José Fabricio Rodríguez Mondragón	III year	78
44.	Ana María Varela Zelaya	III year	78
45.	Tania Elizabeth Martínez Andrade	I year	77
46.	Sugeyling Roxania Arauz Varela	I year	77
47.	Yader Antonio Vásquez Láinez	IV year	76
48.	Dolman Adán Varela Mendoza	IV year	76
49.	Ronniel Alberto Quiroz	V year	76
50.	José Oniel Mondragón Tercero	II year	75
51.	Enelbis Sorelis Aguilar Garache	V year	75
52.	Lesbia Idania Vallecillo Pineda	III year	74
53.	Rosa Erminda Mondragón Arce	III year	74
54.	Oscar Danilo Sandoval Aguilar	III year	74
55.	Andreas Dios bel Rocha Cáceres	I year	73
56.	Marcos Antonio Tercero Rivera	II year	73
57.	Martin Josué Pérez Aguilera	IV year	73
58.	Hernán Antonio Arce Ponce	IV year	72
59.	María del Rosario Barrera Arce	V year	72
60.	Dairon Josué Álvarez Varela	II year	65
61.	Joel Humberto Arce Mondragón	III year	64

## Financial Report

### *Income:*

12-27-2010: \$ 2000 US or 45,200 córdobas (Rate of Exchange 1 US = 22.60 córdobas)

### *Expenses:*

01-31-11 Purchase of bags and backpacks (Chinandega) Invoice 0785 ...  
C \$ 5,295.00  
02-01-11. Purchase of study materials Bill 0784 ..... C \$ 9,710.00  
06-04-11. Purchase of reams of paper Invoice 53013 ..... C \$ 255.00  
05-16-11. Purchase of materials to students Invoice 54327 ...C \$ 262.00  
06-24-11. Cooperation with Las Pozas School Bill 0478 .....C \$ 504.00  
06-07-11. Purchase of school supplies Bill 22565 .....C \$ 133.50  
07-21-11. School supplies 2nd semester Invoice 94690 ... .....C \$ 6,742.00  
21-07-11 Payment of food and transportation expenses..... C \$ 196.00  
07-21-11 Transport of school supplies Chinandega-Cinco Pinos C \$ 70.00  
07-27-11. Purchase of school supplies Invoice 55853 .....C \$ 126.00  
06-12-11. Payment of travel expenses to Santo Tomas ..... C \$ 51.50  
09-07-11. Purchase of uniforms and shoes Bill 0237 ..... C \$ 21,355.00  
07-12-11. Cooperation scholarship students V year .....C \$ 500.00  
Total: ..... C \$ 45,200.00 Cordobas.

### Balance sheet

Income: C \$ 45,200.00

Expenses: C \$ 45,200.00

Balance: C \$ 00.00

## PROPOSALS FOR THE YEAR 2012

1. Continuity of the Scholarship Project
2. Increase of the Scholarship Fund to cover more students with limited resources.
3. Expansion of the Scholarship Program to university students.

## Other Books Published by Author

Chili: le coup divin published by “Les Éditions du Jour” in September 1974, in Montreal, Canada. Republished on Amazon as an eBook in 2014 and in paperback in 2015.

Chile: el golpe divino, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2017. It includes a new section, Epíloga 2017.

Chile: The Divine Coup published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2017. It also includes a new section, Epilogue 2017.

CHILE: Underside of Economic Miracle published as a class manual at Dawson College from 1995 to 2011. Updated and republished on Amazon as an eBook in 2014 and in paperback in 2015.

My 9/11 Awakening to America’s Moral Crisis (Diary and Letters, Chile: 11 September 1973 Military Coup), published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2015.

Love or Money: What Makes the World Go Round? published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2015.

Cry of the Earth – Cry of the Poor, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2015.

Globalization Under Attack, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2017.

Life of the Mind According to Aimé Forest, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

La vie de l’esprit selon Aimé Forest, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

Carl R. Rogers' Crisis: Subjectivity vs. Objectivity, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

La crise de Carl Rogers: Subjectivité vs objectivité, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

History of Zelaya Blandón Family, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

Historia de la Familia Zelaya Blandón, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

Roots of Crisis: Nicaragua 2018, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

Raíces de la crisis: Nicaragua 2018, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

Racines de la crise: Nicaragua 2018, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2018.

Nicaragua selon Maurice Lemoine: gauche ou fondamentalisme?, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2019.

¿Izquierda o fundamentalismo? Nicaragua según Maurice Lemoine, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2019.

Maurice Lemoine on Nicaragua: Leftwing or Fundamentalist?, published on Amazon as an eBook and in paperback in 2019.

## Conferences and Interviews

To see the talk I gave on Chile during the Social Forum in Ottawa on 22 August 2014:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LJqi5bSLN0c>

Christ Dayo from the CHRY News Collective interviewed me in late September 2014. To listen to this half-hour radio interview on the Chilean Coup:

<https://www.mixcloud.com/discover/ovide-bastien/>

To see my 5-minute 2014 homage (mostly in French) to Sister Marie Denise Dubois, a woman who dedicated her life to the marginalized in Chile and Honduras:

[Marie Denise Dubois ou l'autre visage de l'Église](#)

To see the talk I gave on Chile – I was invited by the Egyptian Canadian Coalition for Democracy – during the World Social Forum in Montreal on 10 August 2016, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D2YsYG0lzVU> (The talk is in French) : [Ovide Bastien | L'Égypte entre démocratie et dictature](#)

[For more information about the author:](#)

[http://www.amazon.com/kindle-dbs/author/ref=dbs\\_a\\_mng\\_awm\\_sens\\_share%3F\\_encoding=UTF8&asin=B015UHPY80](http://www.amazon.com/kindle-dbs/author/ref=dbs_a_mng_awm_sens_share%3F_encoding=UTF8&asin=B015UHPY80)