

Olympia/Santo Tomás Update

US/Nicaragua Solidarity—Since 1989

Fall 2018

An update
from the
Thurston–Santo Tomás
Sister County
Association

The Way Forward is Solidarity and Friendship...

“We have lessons to teach each other and stories to tell each other about how to survive and resist and thrive even when times are scary and dangerous. There is a way forward and the way forward is solidarity and friendship and figuring out the ways in which our interests are actually deeply aligned with one another.” —*Leo Ferguson, Movement Building Organizer at Jews For Racial & Economic Justice, from in an interview with On the Media on November 2 on the subject of the Synagogue Shooting in Pittsburg PA*

This quote befits all of us engaged in a myriad of critical issues, all overlapping in some way. Our collective response of horror to white supremacy, genocide and endless wars must always deepen our resolve and determination to go forward, to build the just world we all deserve to inhabit.

This is the story of our relationship with Santo Tomás, born in a time of war imposed by our government, that continues now to the very hard times the Nicaraguan people are facing in 2018.

While hosting a wonderful 12th delegation from our sister town in April-May, we watched in shock from a distance as many anti-government protests erupted in Nicaragua and ended with hundreds of deaths, with many more wounded, locked up or disappeared. This newsletter includes differing perspectives from our friends in Santo Tomás and from different websites. As always, the TSTSCA stands firmly against US Intervention in Nicaragua in any shape or form. Neither

do we accept the violence perpetrated by the Nicaraguan government or the protestors.

We, the steering committee of the TSTSCA, decided to cancel our summer community delegation as well as a proposed winter delegation due to instability in the country. As our relationship is deeply grounded in cultural and educational exchanges, we certainly look forward to resuming the visits to and from our sister town. At this time, we do not know when that will be.

Nicaragua has shifted from an acute, several month crisis to a protracted period of simmering tensions, economic uncertainty, and an escalation by the likes of John Bolton, US National Security Advisor, who calls Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela the “Axis of Evil” in the Western Hemisphere. While already funding anti-government groups in those three countries through USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy, we fear Bolton’s declaration is the prelude to much greater intervention. Because the US supported the military coup and subsequent electoral fraud of the president of Honduras, ignores the corruption scandals of the Guatemalan leader and applauds the

ultra-right presidents of Argentina, Chile and Brazil, it’s clear this move is not about bringing democracy to the “axis of evil” countries that have public access to medicine and education. For whatever one believes about the leadership of Nicaragua, Cuba and Venezuela, can we agree these are sovereign nations that the US should respect? ♦



Marily Aguilar Oporta, Yessenia Solis Miranda, Representative Beth Doglio, Elvis Javier Aguilar, and Cruz Murillo Sandoval in the WA State House Chambers in April 2018

Reflections from the Nicaraguan Delegates, Spring 2018

Marily: The trip to Olympia was very special for me; I would never have imagined I would visit your beautiful Olympia! I have every moment with all of you present in my heart, including all of the activities you planned for us. It was the most unique experience in my life.

Something that really impressed me was the love you showed us and the love the you have for supporting us. I remember the plant sale held in front of Jean's house, to raise money for the scholarships, of which I was a beneficiary. You worked hard to organize activities that allowed us to learn as well as to share. I enjoyed visiting different schools and childcare centers with Diane Dakin and Brandy Franco. I met so many people: at Procession of the Species, Safeplace, Proyecto CIELO, Teen Council, Olympia Family Center, the scholarship fundraising meetings in homes, and more.

The Wolfe family was so kind to me and I cannot thank them enough for their hospitality. The aquarium in Seattle was probably the most amazing place I've even been. Except Mt. Rainier was also amazing; I had never been in snow before!

Cruz: What I most remember about being with you all in Olympia is your heart and commitment of service to others. This is what I remember about each and every one of you to supported our visit and it's also about the relationship between our communities. I see the huge difference between the imperialist North Americans and the humanitarian North Americans, the latter being our brothers and sisters from Olympia. Thank you for existing. In particular, I see founding member Maureen Hill as a symbol of the sister organization who embodies a gesture of universal humanitarianism.

I stayed with two wonderful families who I hope will come visit my family soon. We await you with open arms and look forward to sharing unique experiences with you in Santo Tomás, as you did with me there. Baseball, soccer, hikes, making and eating food together, sharing life stories. I am also waiting for Grace (or anyone else) to drive down here with an old Ford pick-up truck for me. The older the better; I'll fix it up!

Yessenia: The was my second visit to Olympia and I felt much better and more confident than I did twenty years ago. My two host families were so special with me, the parents and kids left beautiful fingerprints in my memories and my heart. Everyone was so kind to me. To the teachers at Lincoln Elementary: I thank you for allowing me to learn from your work in the different classrooms I visited so I could return home

to share these things with the teachers in my school Rubén Darío. Thank you to Marcela and to all of the students and their parents who helped us with donations for books and school supplies for the children at our school. We celebrated twenty years of being sister schools! Thank you to the generous person who donated money for a computer for our center as well as a retractable screen. Words are inadequate to describe our beautiful friendship across the great distance.

I was deeply moved by our visit to Casa Latina and El Centro de la Raza in Seattle, the unions in support of immigrants and the birthday celebration in honor of César Chávez at Community to Community in Bellingham. The peaceful orange monarch butterfly march with immigrant families in Shelton was also very moving for me.

The only problem for me was the crisis unfolding back home in Nicaragua while we were with you. It was hard for me to concentrate on my work in Olympia while my son and husband were in danger with the protests in our country. We are still in difficult and painful times. I take solace in God and knowing everything will work out well.

Elvis: First, I have to say that it was so special to live with Emily and Seamus, Callum and my namesake Rustin Elvisito. I have known Emily since I was a young boy and she lived with my family in Santo Tomás.

It was a marvel to see the technique or pedagogy that Alice Nelson uses with her students in the Latin American Literature program at Evergreen. Students develop their rationality, share their perspectives freely and no one is criticized for what they think and express. If there were only more professors like her, we would see more acceptance and creativity in a better Nicaragua.

I was very impressed with the Teen Council meeting that Marily, Emily and I attended at Planned Parenthood. Tim is an incredible facilitator and the youth, including Aurora (Kathy Strauss' daughter), shared their opinions freely. The topic was sexuality, which is a taboo subject in Nicaragua and results in unplanned pregnancies. Religion, sexuality and politics are controversial subjects in my country.

The last dinner with TSTSCA members and host families was extraordinarily wonderful. I have never cooked in my life until that night, when Cruz and I cooked up a feast. I think growing up watching the women cook in our home gave me the confidence to try! I was so impressed that Emma Sinclair looked up the recipe for *güirila* and then made them for us!

Hello to everyone, please Facebook friend me! ◆

An enormous thank you...

... to our amazing 2018 Spring Delegates from Santo Tomás who shared their knowledge and friendship with the Olympia Community. This was the 12th group to visit since we began the delegations in 1990:

- ◆ Yessenia Solís Miranda, principal at Ruben Dario, which is sistered with Lincoln Elementary. She is also the Spanish language and literature teacher for Evergreen student delegations.
- ◆ Marily Aguilar Oporta, past scholarship recipient and now an elementary education teacher who is currently working at a state-supported daycare center
- ◆ Cruz Murillo Sandoval, member of our sister organization, and self-employed as a distributor of products throughout all of Nicaragua
- ◆ Elvis Javier Aguilar, past scholarship recipient and now an agro-chemical engineer who is in charge of quality control at a cheese production plant outside of Santo Tomás

Another big thank you to the people who hosted the Tomasinx delegation in Spring 2018 and to the many who provided interpretation at these venues.

- ◆ Multiple classroom visits and events in conjunction with Lincoln Elementary students, parents and staff.
- ◆ Multiple visits with faculty and students at The Evergreen State College
- ◆ SafePlace
- ◆ Proyecto CIELO
- ◆ South Puget Sound Community College
- ◆ Olympia High School
- ◆ Capital High School
- ◆ Olympia Regional Learning Academy's Montessori program
- ◆ TESC Daycare Center
- ◆ Garden Raised Urban Bounty (GRuB)
- ◆ Batdorf and Bronson Tour
- ◆ Thurston County Food Bank
- ◆ Pizza-making at Old School Pizzeria
- ◆ Arts Walk
- ◆ Olympia Family Support Center
- ◆ Puddle Jumpers Daycare and other daycares
- ◆ Procession of the Species
- ◆ Capitol Tour with WA State Representative Beth Doglio
- ◆ Meeting with IWW organizers and Concert in Sylvester Park
- ◆ NW Cooperative Development Center

- ◆ Planned Parenthood/Teen Council meeting
- ◆ Olympia Food Cooperative
- ◆ Various Farm Cooperatives
- ◆ Steamboat Island Goat Farm
- ◆ Evergreen Elementary School, Shelton
- ◆ Immigrant Rights March in Shelton
- ◆ Casa Latina and El Centro de La Raza in Seattle
- ◆ United Natural Foods, Inc
- ◆ Community to Community in Bellingham
- ◆ Familias Unidas por La Justicia
- ◆ Las Cafeteras concert at the Washington Center
- ◆ Fundraising event at the McLane Grange for Rubén Darío library
- ◆ Despedida at the Abigail Stuart House
- ◆ Westside Plant Sale Fundraiser for Scholarships

Thank you to the Host Families:

Cruz:

- ◆ Connie Phegley and Kenny Pugh
- ◆ Bob Benck and Emma Sinclair

Marily:

- ◆ Lisa and Adrian Wolf

Elvis:

- ◆ Emily Calhoun Petrie and Seamus Walsh Petrie

Yessenia:

- ◆ Alicia and Jason Martinelli
- ◆ Yazna Ruiz and Jim Dick

Thank you to the lead accompaniers and planners of the delegation:

- ◆ Diego Lopez
- ◆ Rose Fox
- ◆ Wyatt Warner
- ◆ Grace Cox
- ◆ Emily Calhoun Petrie
- ◆ Seamus Walsh Petrie
- ◆ Yazna Ruiz
- ◆ Jean Eberhardt
- ◆ Audrey Levine
- ◆ Diane Dakin
- ◆ Heather McLeod
- ◆ Michi Thacker

Thank you to the dinner hosts and generous guests for raising funds for the Scholars Project:

- ◆ Audrey Levine and Nels Johnson
- ◆ Diane Dakin and Stephen Bray

Poetry from Nicaragua

Wilfredo Espinoza Lazo is a *Tomásino* poet, historian and author of several tomes. He was a member of the 2008 delegation to Olympia. As a historian, he sees his role as a neutral documentarian of the past and present, who takes no political positions as he writes what he sees.

Estación De Viaje en Santo Tomás De Lovigüisca

Cuántos se fueron y nadie
quiere dejar las entrañas del pueblo
por otra sábana. Nadie.
De Santo Tomás a toda Nicaragua,
América y España,
por todo el mundo para ser exacto:
La sangre ancestral del nuevo viaje.
Por el peso de la vida, el costo
del bocado, elevado, pesado.
Cuánto vale la vida,
perra la vida en la calle, exprime y aplasta.
Algunos de lejos se olvidaron del camino.
Otros sienten el palpitar del ombligo
y sufren por regresar
por un vaho, un nacatamal,
una güirila, un beso, un abrazo
(sin etiquetas de supermercado),
unas rosquillas, una tortilla de comal,
y la paz en el alma,
¡oh, las manos maternas!
El pueblo sigue en el mismo sitio
y ensancha sus caderas,
qué maravilla, aquí están sus patios frutales,
sus adoquines, su hermosa luna,
el olor del madroño,
las ranas en los charcos,
sus quesillos,
su meseta,
su asfalto tragándose la urbe,
su lluvia, la loma desmoronándose
de nostalgia,
el cerro San Martín que celebra
otro parto, diciendo “vuelve”
y “te estaba esperando”.
Mientras tanto, nos damos de golpe en las paredes
y la vida se vuelve más pesada, pesada.
Unos llegan con más hambre
de seguir viviendo.
Otros alistan maletas de esperanza.
Los sueños arden y no por falta de leña.
Desde tiempos primitivos
nadie emigra por abundancia.
“Porque un millón de Lovigüiskas
/hay en Costa Rica. Otro millón/

Travel Station in Santo Tomás De Lovigüisca

How many have left and nobody
wants to leave the heart of their town
for other bedsheets. No one.
From Santo Tomás to all of Nicaragua,
America and Spain,
all over the world to be exact:
The new journey's ancestral blood.
Because of life's weight, the cost
of a mouthful of food, high, heavy.
How much is life worth,
A dog's life on the streets - it squeezes and crushes.
Some, far away, forgot the way.
Others feel the beating of the bellybutton
and ache to return
for a vaho, a nacatamal,
a güirila, a kiss, a hug
(without supermarket labels),
some rosquillas, a tortilla cooked on a comal,
and peace in the soul,
Oh, the motherly hands!
The town is still in the same place
and widens its hips;
what a wonder, here are its patios of fruit trees,
its cobblestones, its beautiful moon,
the smell of the madroño,
the frogs in the puddles,
their quesillos,
its plateau,
its asphalt swallowing the city,
its rain, the hill crumbling
from nostalgia,
the San Martin hill that celebrates
another birth, saying “come back”
and “I was waiting for you”.
Meanwhile, we slam against the walls
and life becomes heavier, heavier.
Some arrive with more hunger
to continue living.
Others ready suitcases of hope.
Dreams burn and not for lack of firewood.
From primitive times
nobody emigrates from abundance.
“Because there are a million Lovigüiskas
/ in Costa Rica. A million more /

Poetry continued from previous page

en los Estados Unidos, y centenares
/revueltos” con sureños,
dice el poeta Guillermo Rothsuh Tablada.
El pueblo parece estarse
abandonando en su propio reino
y una sonrisa se vuelve cara, cara.
Salimos a la esquina
y los saludos
no florecen como aquellos días.
Qué vacío, qué raquíico, qué tristeza,
noches fantasmas.
La gente anda en el aire con el puño
lleno de lágrimas, como brasas.
Qué quieres que escriba
si nadie es dueño de mis ojos.
Palabras sobran, palabras faltan.
Falta un nombre y otro nombre
que nadie y ningún otro puede llenarlo.

in the United States, and hundreds
/ mixed up” with southerners,
says the poet Guillermo Rothsuh Tablada.
The people seem to be
abandoned in their own kingdom
and a smile turns expensive, expensive.
We go out to the corner
and greetings
do not bloom as in days past.
How empty, how stunted, how sad,
ghost nights.
People walk in the air with their fists
full of tears, like embers.
What do you want me to write
if nobody owns my eyes.
Words are redundant, words are missing.
A name and then another one are missing,
which no one, no other can fill.

October 2018, Santo Tomás of Lovigüisca, Chontales, Nicaragua

Translated by Catalina Ocampo, poet and member of the faculty at The Evergreen State College

Description of a few Nicaraguan words in this poem:

Vaho—a traditional dish: a mix of beef brisket, green plantains, yuca steamed in banana leaves
Nacatamal—a rich tamale with corn masa, pork, rice, potato, tomato boiled in banana leaves
Güirila—tamales made from fresh corn, slightly sweet. Served with homemade cuajada (feta-like cheese)
Rosquillas—double baked corn masa, butter or oil, and cuajada cheese shaped into 2” or 3” rings
Comal—a flat sheet metal or cast iron surface for cooking as well as heating up tortillas
Madroño—the national tree of Nicaragua: a very tall, dense hardwood with sweet smelling white flowers
Quesillo—a flavorful, local string cheese made in sheets. Santo Tomás is the capitol of quesillo!
Lovigüiscas—the original peoples of the area where Santo Tomás was situated by the Spanish colonizers



Meet the two new scholarship students:

Osiris del Carmen Hernández and Arélys Martínez are both attending the local university in Santo Tomás. It offers Saturday classes, which allows students to work while they complete their degrees.

Interviews by Jean Eberhardt

Osiris was born in 1989 on the farm where she still lives with her mother, grandparents, uncles and young cousin. Their family farm is between Jicarito and El Alto, two rural communities outside of Santo Tomás. She traveled by bus to attend the public high school in town and it was there that she developed a deep interest in social sciences, especially history and geography. As her family members are subsistence farmers, growing corn, beans, bananas, tomatoes, etc. with a recent acquisition of dairy cows facilitated by a loan from our sister organization/CDC, there seemed to be no avenue open for further studies for Osiris after graduating from high school. Her mother doña Teodora, who suffers debilitating arthritis, comes to town once a week to sell produce at the *Mercado Campesino* at the edge of the town square, in front of the Catholic Church. The *Comité para Desarrollo Comunal* (CDC) members set up a long row of canopies and tables and chairs for the vendors every Sunday, rain or shine. Osiris accompanies her mom by horse, loaded down with items to sell, to the rural community of Jicarito to catch the bus to town, and then they walk the six blocks to the weekly market. It was at the market last year that they learned of the CDC/Olympia university scholarship opportunity and Osiris immediately applied. She was ecstatic when she learned she'd been selected and now at 29 years old, she is the first in her family to have completed high school and to head into higher education.



Osiris is in her first year, studying at the Universidad Martín Lútero with her sights set on becoming a high school social science teacher. Because of her already long commute from the farm, she isn't able to attend the public university, which is another hour away from Santo Tomás. There is talk of a high school opening someday in Jicarito, and a position there would be her dream come true. Her daily routine is this: she works four days farming with her uncles and grandfather, one day in classes with another day dedicated to homework, and then yet another trip back to town to sell farm surplus with her mom. Every week is the same routine of long hours of hard work. She laughs when mentioning she never has any days off!



During the most difficult time in the crisis of the roadblocks and gasoline shortages in May, June and half-way into July, the buses stopped running to Santo Tomás. Determined to not interrupt her studies, Osiris travelled to her Saturday university classes on horseback and again to the Sunday market with produce and *cuajada* (homemade salty cheese). When asked about the small university staying open during the crisis, she said the public universities closed as well as some of the private ones in the larger cities, but hers stayed open. Osiris has a vision to serve her community and is determined to move any ob-



Top: Osiris del Carmen Hernández

Center: Osiris and her mother doña Teodora selling plantains and root crops at the Farmers Market

Bottom: The weekly Mercado Campesino, with vendors and buyers of corn and cheese rosquillas made on farms in mud/clay domed wood-fired ovens.

stacles from her path.

Arélys grew up near the large river Río San Juan that divides Nicaragua from Costa Rica. Her campesino

family of four surviving brothers, parents and grandparents, are farmers there. She enjoyed elementary school and wanted to continue but the closest high school was two hours away. Her aunt in Santo Tomás invited Arélys to move in with her family to attend the local high school, which she did. It was a huge transition for her at 14 to leave her family and rural way of life. She studied hard, graduated and decided to go on to the tuition-free public university in Juigalpa, an hour away, to study business administration. But Arélys had to quit before the first semester was over because she didn't have money for transportation and books. Arélys got a job cleaning at a hotel in Santo Tomás, got married and had a child. It was on a visit with her son to the *Clinica Popular*, a health care project of the CDC, that she learned of the CDC/Olympia scholarship and decided to try again. Selected, she chose nursing as her path of study and, at 23 in her first year of university, is the first in her family to seek a professional career. She has chosen, as has Osiris, to spend her modest scholarship on tuition at the local private university. Instead of paying for transportation to the national university branch in Juigalpa, she decided to stay close to her two-year old in case an emergency arises.

Arélys says her life is full of challenges. Her husband just left for Costa Rica at the end of October and doesn't expect to be back for a year.

He worked as a laborer in and out of Santo Tomás, and he, like many people, lost his job when the crisis hit. Construction across Nicaragua came to a grinding halt. The decision to leave his young family and coun-

try was very hard to make. The good news is that he's called to let Arélys know that he has already found work across the border. Their hope is that he'll return with enough money for them to get ahead of their bills. For Arélys, the math and science studies are demanding, yet she is nothing less than happy to be moving towards her goal of becoming a nurse. She especially enjoyed the class on patient care, medical standards and ethics. Her lack of a computer makes for a scramble to complete her homework. If she can't borrow one from someone, she has to pay for access at the *cíber* (cyber café). She works every other day at the hotel, from 8am until the work is done, usually between 7 and 8pm. For her 15 days of hard work, she earns just under \$100 per month. Her son attends the free public daycare for low-income families where Mar-

ily (spring 2018 delegation to Olympia) works. On the weekdays that Arélys is at the hotel, her mother-in-law/*la suegra* picks up her son when the Center for Infant Development closes at 4pm. Her *suegra* rises at 4am seven days a week to grind the corn into *masa* and make quantities of delicious, thick tortillas to sell until they run out in the early afternoon. The most challenging days are when Arélys works on

alternating Sundays, her *suegra* is busy with her small business, and she has no regular childcare. She often has to bring her son to university class on Saturdays, until her mother-in-law finishes her own work. Life is complicated.

Both Osiris and Arélys express their deep appreciation for their partial scholarships from people in Olympia they've never met, people who believe this is an important contribution to make in our sister town. These two new students will graduate their five-year programs at the end of 2022 and serve in their community, strengthening it one person at a time. **Please do-**

nate to support this life-changing program. For \$40 per month, you could make possible the dreams of one of the 13 hard-working, first-generation students in the current group. ♦



Top: Arélys Martínez

Center: University classroom

Bottom: Arélys and Osiris doing homework

Combined eyewitness perspectives from protestor friends in Santo Tomás, who need to remain anonymous:

When the protests against the Social Security (INSS) reforms began on April 18th in the larger cities like Managua and Leon, here in Santo Tomás there were no such protests. The problems here began when INSS workers and FSLN party members went into the streets for 3 consecutive days, yelling and cheering and firing off *morteros*. This was happening locally while in the protests in the cities the police had stopped using tear gas and rubber bullets and were now firing real bullets: shotguns and AK-47's were now being used to kill protestors armed only with rocks or with *morteros*, with many not armed at all.

On the third day of those marches here, and after dozens dead and hundreds injured in the larger cities, a small protest against the government oppression occurred spontaneously here in Santo Tomás. When this small protest met up with the marching *Sandinistas*, the FSLN secretary (party head) here in Santo Tomás attacked one of the opposition leaders with a belt and busted open his head. A high school teenager, was pushed off of his motorcycle to the ground and his motorcycle vandalized. The next night there was another protest, this time a little bigger, and another march of the government supporters. The local access television channel showed government supporters repeatedly sought out the opposition protestors in the streets and picked fights with them. From watching these incidents, it was clear that the *Sandinista* marchers were the aggressors and were trying to intimidate the opposition protestors.

Meanwhile in the capital and other cities, the government oppression continued, with many more dead and injured. Because of this, the opposition protests here, which had been maybe 50-60 people, began to grow – by the end of the week, more than 500 protestors passed through all of the neighborhoods, with many more people lining the streets and showing their support. These protests were happening all throughout the country, not only in the cities, but also in the small towns and rural communities. These protests were met with more repression and more deaths. The free internet available in many central parks in Nicaragua was shut down so that people could not upload and download videos showing the repression. Nation-

al media outlets' reporters and cameramen assaulted, some being shut down for days by the government and an opposition radio station in Leon was burned. There was even the murder of journalist Angel Gahona in Bluefields, a crime committed by the police that was later blamed on two youths from the area. The evidence is ample for all these crimes, but the government and their supporters deny it even now. It is this government sponsored violence which has enraged the people, not the *gringo* or "the right" as claimed by the current regime. That is how things began in Santo Tomás, far from the fairy tale told by the government of a coup sponsored by the United States. Since the first protests in Santo Tomás, there have been several others, as in the rest of the country. The last large protest was in August because the government has now officially declared opposition marches illegal, even though government supporters are permitted to march at least twice a week here and elsewhere. Why do they have the right to march and we do not? *Sandinista* marches are not attacked – it is they who attack our marches, with the approval or even help of the *Orteguista* police and the paramilitaries. Is this the way of a free nation or of a dictatorship?

The intimidation takes place not only in the streets but also in the workplace. So-called "petitions" supporting the government are presented publicly to the personnel in the city hall, government-run health centers, public and private schools, and other government institutions. After a series of pro-government speeches by party officials and the supervisors of these institutions, workers are "invited" to publicly sign the petition. Of course, they do not say it openly, but the message is clear – your job is in jeopardy if you do not show your loyalty to the party and, more specifically, to the criminal Daniel Ortega who they say is president. The threat is real – across the country, there have been hundreds of doctors and medical personnel that have been fired for either participating in opposition marches or treating protestors injured by police and paramilitary gunfire. Many people sign the loyalty petitions even though they oppose the government and are horrified by the crimes committed by the president and his supporters, but they feel compelled to do so because they fear for their jobs and for reprisals against their families. Is this freedom of speech? Is this freedom of expression, when the ability to feed our



families depends on a loyalty oath to a criminal? Is this the so-called “reconciliation” they talk so much about?

If it is difficult for teachers or municipal workers to express their opposition to this dictatorship, that decision becomes nearly impossible for some government employees, like the police or the military. During the protests, Daniel Ortega used the national police to intimidate and murder opposition protestors. On July 6, officer Faber Antonio López Vivas, originally from Santo Tomás, called his mother. He told her that he had tried to resign from the national police due to the things he was being ordered to do as part of the breaking up of the *tranques*, or roadblocks, set up by protestors. His resignation was rejected and he was told by his superiors that if he insisted on resigning that they would kill his mother and his entire family. This brave young man then told his mother that he would rather die than let them kill his beloved mother. Two days later, on July 8, in an assault on an opposition roadblock in Jinotepe, Carazo, he was killed.

Faber López’ mother had to fight for them to release his body to her because the government wanted to use him for propaganda purposes as a Sandinista police officer killed by protestors. But really, they wanted to cover up the fact that he had been murdered by pro-government paramilitaries or even fellow police officers. She finally managed to recover his body and then publicly denounced the incident. She had been told that he had been killed by a shot to the head, however the truth was even more sinister. When his body arrived in Santo Tomás, his mother and other family members,



accompanied by a doctor, took off his clothes to dress him for his wake and funeral and found out the truth – Faber had been thoroughly tortured. Let us spare the details.

This is what it means to dissent in Ortega’s Nicaragua. His mother and other family members have since fled the country, like tens of thousands of other Nicaraguans whose only crime is to denounce the repression and abuses of power committed by the dictator Daniel Ortega. When local *Orteguistas* say “If they haven’t done anything, why do they flee?” we want to tell them they must be supporters of this dictatorship because in families that oppose Ortega, it is common to discuss leaving the country that we love. How can we stay?

We flee because they murder us. We flee because they try to intimidate us. We flee because they threaten our families. We flee because we are not allowed freedom of speech or expression. We flee because we are even denied the right to fair and free elections. We flee because we are denied the right to protest, a right expressly guaranteed in our Constitution. We flee because our youths are kidnapped by masked paramilitaries to be beaten or killed or delivered to the hands of the government to be jailed as political prisoners and subject to physical and psychological torture. We flee because Ortega controls the judges and we have no right to a fair trial. We flee because they denigrate us and call us delinquents, *golpistas*, terrorists, and even “a satanic cult that needs to be exorcised” (direct quote from Ortega). This is the peace and reconciliation promised by the government. What would you do? Many of us choose to flee. Some of us choose to fight. ♦

Web links critical of the Sandinista government:

- <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3904-the-battle-for-the-future-of-nicaragua> 7/02/18
- <http://rabble.ca/category/bios/lois-ross>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/29/nicaragua-journalist-killed-live-on-air-angel-gahona>
- <https://pulsemedia.org/2018/08/03/a-massacre-not-a-coup-a-response-to-misinformation-on-nicaragua/>
- <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5485> 5/18 April 2018: An insurrection of the nation’s consciousness

- <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5497> 6/18 A cornered regime is shooting at a mounting civic revolution
- <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5510> 7/17 Resisting the strategy of terror
- <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5522> 8/18 The world now knows what’s happening in Nicaragua
- <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5535> 9/18 Human rights violations and abuses in the context of protests in Nicaragua
- <http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5545> 10/18 “The regime is using the judicial system as a repressive political weapon”

Eyewitness perspectives from several friends in Santo Tomás who support the Sandinista government:

At first, we all thought the government was way out of line to attack the peaceful protestors who went to the streets to demonstrate against the changes to social security. It was so hard to watch the TV and social media accounts of elders and students being beaten bloody by young men wearing Sandinista T-Shirts. How could this be happening? And then the police began to use rubber bullets and then live ammunition to quell the protests. We did not want to believe what we were seeing.

When our president rescinded the order for the social security changes several days later, and yet the protests kept growing larger instead of calming down, we knew this was larger than what was being presented. Someone was funding this “soft coup” and this was the moment they’d been waiting for.

Well, it turns out that there were false narratives and false images being put up on social media. Anyone can put on a Sandinista T-shirt and swing clubs at people, but how do we know they were actually Sandinistas? Where did those guys come from? There has been extensive documentation of a number of the supposedly murdered students, whose faces and names were prominently displayed in the marches, who are actually alive and not dead. Some of those young people have put up their own Facebook and Twitter posts showing the opportunistic posters of themselves being touted as “martyrs” in contrast with them denouncing being used to sensationalize the numbers of the dead. We know now that murdered Sandinistas and people who died from accidents and other causes have been added to the total count of deaths. The protestors say Daniel Ortega is responsible for all of the bloodshed.

The roadblocks installed throughout the country were not peaceful. The narrative of this soft coup is that the students and all the protestors are unarmed and that all the violence is from the state. Some protestors were definitely armed because they extorted bribes to allow “paying” vehicles to pass. Individuals crossing the roadblocks on foot often had to pay bribes too. IDs were checked and those unlucky people carrying FSLN party membership cards sometimes paid the

heavy price with their lives. There are YouTube videos of Sandinistas being stripped, tortured and even burned. One young man in Leon was tortured in the presence of Catholic priests, who instructed the torturers to not upload the footage (but it was). Monseñor Silvio Báez was secretly recorded saying to get rid of this government, there had to be more deaths so the people would rise up. How is that this provocateur from the church still has impunity?

The company where I work moves large trailers with dairy products to El Salvador. I was told by more than one driver that they’d had to pay bribes at each roadblock and it came to an additional \$200 just to transport their goods. The roadblocks paralyzed the economy, 50% of the free trade zone businesses shut down, many people lost their jobs and had to leave the country to find work in Costa Rica. Many businesses stopped paying taxes in protest during the crisis causing the government to lay off employees.

We ran out of fuel in Santo Tomás and we ran out of food in the stores. Those of us who could stock up, spent any savings we had on non-perishable foods. If we had domestic employees helping with childcare and cleaning, we let them go. Campesino laborers lost their jobs. We saw families begging for food in the streets. We heard the *golpistas* would look for hungry people and offer to take them



to the roadblocks to support the protests in exchange for three meals a day. The only food we had in abundance was dairy (milk and cheeses) since it was hard to get to the city markets to the West.

In response to the outrage being poured on the government, our president ordered our police to stay in their barracks and not respond to the crisis. The destruction of over 40 government buildings and FSLN Headquarters, ambulances and many other government vehicles is glossed over by the *golpistas*, as if they didn’t happen or they were justifiable. The nights of terror were broadcast and we kept wondering if anything like that would happen in Santo Tomás. Each municipality tried its best to organize civilian patrols to protect its public buildings. We got angry that we

couldn't count on the police to protect us or our buildings from the vigilantes. One police outpost in San Miguelito (about an hour away) was attacked and all four police inside were murdered. There were people killed on both sides.

To make our country safe again, our government has taken the decisive step of prohibiting counterproductive marches. They've also gone looking for the instigators of the coup and, when they find them, they are taken into the judicial system, given a fair hearing and, if found guilty, they are sentenced to prison. There is really no other way to deal with the murderers and arsonists and looters.

I was at a party at a popular bar in Santo Tomás a couple of weeks ago. There were a lot of young people drinking and dancing late into the night. I saw a Sandinista friend get deliberately shoved hard while on the dance floor; he moved himself and his partner away from the offending youth. At some point, my friend went to use the bathroom and it was there that he was jumped by several *golpistas* who began to beat him. My friend escaped the building and just wanted to get home quickly, taking his date to her home first. I saw the small drunken mob head after them so I intervened with a taxi to get my friends out of danger. I have been personally threatened but I refuse to hide who I am or my sense of justice.

We had to close the Escuela Hermandad's technical classes (the beauty school and the cooking school) during the crisis because many of the students came from outlying rural areas and the roads were blocked.

Web links in support of the Sandinista government:

<https://nacla.org/news/2016/09/16/nicaragua%E2%80%99s-authoritarian-turn-not-product-leftist-politics>

<https://nacla.org/news/2018/09/24/complicating-narrative-nicaragua>

<https://friendsatc.org/blog/the-situation-in-nicaragua-by-fausto-torrez/>

<https://friendsatc.org/blog/interview-with-atcs-edgardo-garcia-on-39th-anniversary-of-sandinista-revolution/>

<https://popularresistance.org/correcting-the-record-what-is-really-happening-in-nicaragua/> 7/10/18

<https://popularresistance.org/violent-coup-fails-in-nica/> 7/21/18

<https://afgj.org/nicanotes-fake-news-and-false-travel-advisory-take-action> 9/12/18

<https://afgj.org/refugee-caravan-where-are-the-nicaraguans> 11/07/18

The Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act has been floating around congress since 2015. The main idea behind the bill is to direct the U.S. Executive Branch to use its voting power in multilateral lending institutions to block any new loans for Nicaragua until a set of reforms regarding elections and transparency is implemented.

During the last week of September 2018, NICA Act was given new life with a companion bill introduced by Robert Menendez (D-NJ), called the Nicaragua Human Rights and Anti-Corruption Act of 2018 (S. 3233). The new bill was voted out of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on September 26, and is heading for a floor debate some time soon. This latest version will create a broad set of sanctions that will impact Nicaragua's access to international financial institutions while also punishing individuals in leadership in Nicaragua.

Please call your Senators at the Capitol Hill Switchboard at (202) 224-3121. Tell them "No to sanctions" in S. 3233, and yes to encouraging a return to dialogue unencumbered by U.S. intervention!

<https://www.quixote.org/nica-act-2-0-its-back-and-even-worse-than-before/>

We will reopen the programs next year. The sewing school at the Casa de la Mujer serves many local women, so it was able to stay open and they'll have their graduation soon.

The complaint about the loyalty petitions is unmerited. The government has a right to know who stands with it and who deserves to keep their employment. If I hire you in my home to work for me and find you stealing or talking badly about me to the neighbors, shouldn't I have the right to fire you? The doctors who've been fired had abandoned their posts in the hospitals to treat protestors at their private clinics, taking supplies from the public institutions with them. This is against the norms and unacceptable.

We do worry about the NICA Act being debated in the US Congress and the possibility of international loans to Nicaragua being cut off. Uncle Sam seems to have it out for our little country that's done nothing to provoke the US. Our country overwhelmingly elected Daniel Ortega for president and he will serve until the next elections in 2021.

Really, everything is fairly normal and calm now. The roads are open, the wifi in the park is back up again, people go to and from work, the stores have food, the school children are about to celebrate the end of the school year, the country feels safe again. We hope you'll come see for yourselves that the coup attempt is behind us now and your friends eagerly await your visit. We also hope you'll do everything you can to keep your government from intervening in Nicaragua. ◆



Thurston–Santo Tomás Sister County Association

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Inside:

- Thank you to all who supported our Spring Delegation from Santo Tomás
- Reflections from our Visitors
- New Scholarship Students!
- Differing Perspectives from about the crisis in Nicaragua

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Giant Annual Rummage Sale

Saturday, January 26th • 9am - 2pm • Lincoln School gym
21st and Washington, Olympia

to benefit education and nutrition programs in Santo Tomás



We'll accept your gently used donations on Friday, Jan. 25th from 4 to 7pm (to the gym please) and then encourage you to come back the next morning to buy other people's cool stuff.

Can you volunteer to help with the sale?

Call or text (360) 464-5264 or e-mail tstsca@gmail.com and our volunteer coordinator will find a shift for you!

Lincoln kindergarten
teacher Emily Calhoun Petrie
dancing with a
lampshade at the sale!