

Olympia/Santo Tomás Lincoln

Elementary and Escuela Rubén Darío

December 2011
update on the
Thurston–Santo Tomás
Sister County Association
US/Nicaragua Solidarity
since 1988

For the Lincoln community, which has a sister school in Nicaragua!

Lincoln has enjoyed a relationship with Escuela Ruben Dario in Santo Tomás, Chontales, Nicaragua for around 15 years. Four teachers and principals, as well as two students, from Ruben Dario have visited Lincoln during five separate visits. You may remember meeting Facunda, Griselda, Loreyna and Yessenia, as well as Mixi and Yimi. Many of you welcomed the Nicaraguan teachers with school assemblies as well as special classroom activities. Some of you hosted these guests in your homes. Marcela, Marty, Michi, and Cheryl (Petra) visited Santo Tomás some years ago, but the relationships have stayed alive through exchanges of letters and art. The Lincoln community has been very generous with sending much-needed school supplies to the Ruben Dario classrooms and the Options Community Council's annual financial commitment of \$1,000 helps many children with personal school supplies that the school in Santo Tomás purchases and distributes each year.

This April, the Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association will host its tenth community delegation from Santo



Ruben Dario teachers (and Seano) receiving school supplies from Lincoln.

Tomás. The TSTSCA will pay the expenses related to the visit of two teachers from Ruben Dario, who will spend over two weeks at Lincoln. Look out for a January update with the teachers' names and mini-biographies!

In the meantime, please enjoy reading about the experiences of Alan and Jane Mountjoy-Venning (whose children are Lincoln graduates), Moira Rice (who attended Lincoln) and Heather Earp (who volunteered at Escuela Ruben Dario) from their time in Santo Tomás earlier this year.

You are invited to start gathering items for the TSTSCA annual winter garage sale on January 21st (in Lincoln's Gym), which will help support the organization's ongoing activities, including bringing the teachers from Escuela Ruben Dario to Lincoln. You are also invited to consider traveling to Santo Tomás

through the TSTSCA sometime, to spend time at your sister school and get to know our sister community.

Contact us by email at tstsc@gmail.com or call Jean Eberhardt at (360) 943-8642 for more information.

TSTSCA and Projects in Santo Tomás

TSTSCA works with a sister community organization in Santo Tomás, the *Comité para Desarrollo Comunal* (Committee for Community Development or CDC) on projects that support basic needs, education, and human dignity. TSTSCA provides ongoing financial and other support for these CDC projects:

- ▶ **Comedor Infantil:** Children's Free Lunch Program
- ▶ **Biblioteca:** Public Library
- ▶ **Becas:** Scholarships for Higher Education
- ▶ **Sister School Relationship**

TSTSCA helps facilitate a sister school relationship between Lincoln Elementary School in Olympia and

Escuela Rubén Darío in Santo Tomás. Students and faculty from both schools correspond and families, teachers, and administrators have been part of exchange delegations.

The Thurston-Santo Tomás Sister County Association has led self-supporting Olympia area student and community delegations to learn, volunteer and build mutually supportive friendships in Santo Tomás—over 130 people from the Olympia area have personally visited Santo Tomás. We have also supported and welcomed nine delegations of 28 Tomasinos to learn, educate and build mutually supportive friendships in the Olympia area.

Nothing like the real thing

Alan and Jane Mountjoy-Venning

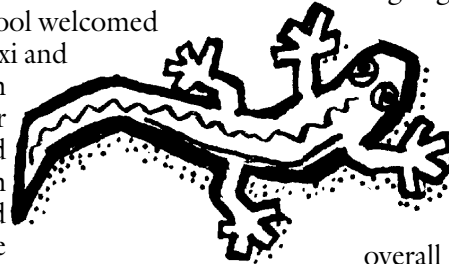
We have been associated with TSTSCA for a long time. Like many, we were distraught by the Reagan Administration's policies in Nicaragua. We remember and were heartened and inspired by the Olympia Construction Brigade's early work in the 80's and kept abreast of TSTSCA's progress. Our children, Cliff and Helen (called Abey), attended Lincoln Elementary school and we were delighted to be at assemblies and community events where members of the delegations from Santo Tomás told of their experiences. We remember the excitement at Lincoln as the school welcomed two students from Santo Tomás, Mixi and Yimi, who came to live with Stephen Bray, Diane Dakin and their kids for a month or so in 1998. We benefited from Lincoln teachers who went on a delegation to Santo Tomás and shared their stories and helped make real the lives of kids in another community for our students.

We had always hoped to join a delegation and felt privileged that Alan, Jane and Cliff could travel to Santo Tomás with the July 2011 community delegation. Much of the advance material confirmed to us

that we were informed and prepared for the journey. That may have been true, but the actual experience of being among Tomasinos created a much deeper connection than facts and photos ever could.

We were honored to be in the Segura-Guerrero home during our stay this past summer—so much wisdom, energy, and spirit is found there. Encountering so many others involved with CDC projects or active with Escuela Rubén Darío made a deep impression. Despite Jane and Alan's limited Spanish skills, we had many opportunities to sense the legacy of two communities working together over many years. The strength and resiliency of that connection was visible in so many ways. It was both humbling and inspiring to witness the work *Tomasinos* give daily on behalf of their community.

Our support of CDC projects, while important, is but a small part of the overall fabric of the community. Projects are vital, but people and the connections between them are central to the Association. Our experience with the delegation and the many committed people we met in Santo Tomás confirmed to us that this local yet international effort is a worthy one to forge a deeper connection with. ☺



To the Olympia delegation

Thank you for the beautiful friendships cultivated and harvested over ten days in July.

Once again, I thank you for being part of the development of my *pueblo* and for bringing support to one of the critical needs of our community, social and solidarity development, which is in education. You provide university scholarships to youth of little economic resources, and I am thankful for being one of them. I am also grateful for your support of the library project, which is part the children's free lunch center, where many youth and kids do their research. I think these are the most beautiful projects of the C.D.C.



Elvis with Grace Cox

Thanks to Jean, Grace, Seano, Jane, Alan, Cliff, Moira, Kim, Maureen, and Whitney for your sincere

and true friendship, and for the work you do for and with our *pueblo*.

I hope you have enjoyed getting to know our culture, our traditions, our Nicaraguan past, present and future. Nicaragua will always be connected to Olympia because you are the most Nica Northamericans in the world!

May your hearts hold our images and our culture, which is unlike any other! May the *gallopinto* we shared with you continue to sustain our friendship.

Your friend for life,
Elvis Aguilar

Elvis is a student of agro-economic engineering who tells us he wakes each day and says, "I want to study, for myself, for my family, and for my community. I want to work, and I want to help my country eradicate poverty and promote education." ☺

Note: TSTSCA does not support individual travel costs to Nicaragua. All delegates travelling to Santo Tomás pay their own way. This includes community members, Evergreen students, and others.

Evergreen Student Reflection

Heather Earp: Last spring while living and learning in Santo Tomás, I was asked to teach English with a fellow Evergreen student in a preschool and also Escuela Rubén Darío. It was a beautifully frustrating task. I learned a lot, and I only wish I could do it again. I'd be better prepared this time to attempt to engage the children who are all very big bundles of energy.

We were just getting into the groove of having almost-40-minute sessions with each class on a rotating morning schedule when we found out that the school was going to have its roof replaced. Renovation meant that the upper grades would have class in the afternoon and evening instead of the

morning, which was the only time when we could volunteer. Surprise! Very little notice was given to the staff of Rubén Darío, but when the Ministry of Education offers to help replace the rusted-through corrugated metal roof right before the rainy season, there's no choice but to accept.

Yessenia Solis' 4th grade class was moved to the outside covered cement patio (Yessenia visited Lincoln and Olympia in 1998). Well, keeping a large class of ten-year olds focused becomes much more daunting when the class is located outside and at the main entrance to the

school! We tried not to be distracted by the comings and goings as we called out new words over the sound of hammering nails and sliding metal. While teaching in a 2nd grade classroom, we literally watched the roof disappear from over our heads. As a bonus, I guess we



Heather at Escuela Rubén Darío with Maritza Lazo and students

reached a broader audience; some of the construction workers learned "head, shoulders, knees and toes!" The outside play area became a danger zone as piles of rusty corrugated tin roof and old bent nails waited to be properly disposed.

On one of my last days in Santo Tomás, one of my 4th grade students approached me as I left the internet

café on the corner. She was laden with a heavy bucket of enchiladas for sale. After school she wasn't balancing soccer practice and piano lessons, she was selling her mom's enchiladas on the streets to contribute to her family's livelihood; she couldn't go home until she sold them all. I was struck by this young working student's reality, a reflection of the great disparities in our world. I am committed to working to change these inequities, and my relationships in Santo Tomás are a motivating force.

Heather is now an Americorps Volunteer with Mason County Literacy in Shelton, WA

Help support TSTSCA's Fabulous Winter-time Garage Sale

Sat. Jan. 21 from 9 to 3

Lincoln Elementary School Gym

Information: (360) 480-8720 or (360) 786-9505 or mlecalhoun@gmail.com

Help bring two teachers from Lincoln's sister school in Santo Tomás, Nicaragua, to visit here in April. Help support college scholarships for low-income youth in Santo Tomás.

Donate items Friday the 20th between 4 and 7 p.m. at the gym behind Lincoln. (No Saturday drop-off or early bird shoppers.) Donate art, CDs, DVDs, books, tools, sports equipment, clean linens and clothing, collectibles, nice garage sale items, working small kitchen appliances and gadgets, small furniture. (No large furniture or large appliances, please.)

Volunteer to collect items in advance, set up the sale, receive and sort items on Friday (4 p.m. to late), and/or help on Saturday (before 9 a.m., during the sale, and to clean-up after 3 p.m.) Please let us know if you're coming to help—see numbers above.

Thanks for pitching in for Santo Tomás!

Moira goes to Santo Tomás (with her mom)

A little background from Maureen Hill: The summer delegation to Santo Tomás consisted of nine persons, including the two coordinators. Our ages ranged from 9 to 69. Moira, our youngest delegate, had first learned about the relationship with Santo Tomás while she was attending kindergarten at Lincoln Elementary School.

(Lincoln has a sister-school relationship with Rubén Darío in Santo Tomás with teacher exchanges, pen pal student exchanges and financial support from Lincoln for Rubén Darío students with the greatest need.) On her own initiative, Moira undertook a special project in which she (and her team) took pictures in a Lincoln class, delivered them with letters and friendship necklaces to a class at Rubén Darío. She and her team then took pictures of the students in the class at Rubén Darío with the idea that she will share those pictures with the students at Lincoln who sent the original letters.

Hello! My name is Moira; I'm 10 years old, and last July I went to Nicaragua! I stayed with Pedro, Fátima and Franier (and, of course, my mom was there).

On my first day in Santo Tomás, there was a big welcome party. There was singing and dancing and I even made a friend! Her name is Joselín, she danced the traditional dance (*Baile Folklorico*). We all played Bingo and had a scavenger hunt.

After that my mom and I went home to go to sleep. When I woke up I heard this noise, it went *tromp tromp tromp* on the roof. *tromp tromp tromp*. My mom and I couldn't figure out what it was until it walked on the plastic part of the roof and we could see it was a bird.

In the morning, my mom and I walked out of our room to the main part of the house and saw watermelon and a pineapple drink sitting on the table that Fátima had made for us. Then, the cattle drive started and all these cows were running through the road in front of

the house; all these different colors everywhere black, brown, white, red and tan cows were everywhere!

A few days later I went to the Escuela Rubén Darío with Maureen, Whitney, my mom Kim, Cliff, Jane, Alan, Grace and Jean, who were the other people in the summer delegation to Santo Tomás.

When I walked in the gates to Rubén Darío all of the kids mobbed me. I couldn't understand what they were saying because it was all in Spanish. A couple of kids started playing hide and seek with me and then we played soccer with some other kids. Our team lost. Next, we played a game where all of the kids would make a circle and one of the kids would go

in the middle and dance. Everybody else would sing, then everybody would quickly sit down and the last person down would have to go be in the middle. I kept having to be in the middle because I didn't quite understand the rules of the game.

After about a week and a half we left to come home to Olympia. If you're a kid and you go to Santo Tomás, you will make lots of friends! ☺



Above, Moira with friends at Rubén Darío; right, with Delia Vallecillo receiving photos and letters from Lincoln students



Garage Sale Fundraiser
to support TSTSCA on
Saturday, Jan. 21
Lincoln Elementary gym
21st SE & Washington SE
9am-3pm