Seeing Nicaragua, Remembering My Father
by Brandon Friebur, son of PeaceWorks Founder Jim Burchell

As a kid, I knew that my father raised money and material aid donations for the people of Nicaragua. But I never went with him on one of his many trips. I actually thought the delegations were a kind of vacation. LOL.

So, when I went on this year’s “vacation,” I finally saw the close bonds my dad had created with so many Nicaraguans, like 19 year-old Anielka who we met through the Axayacatl Center for Women.

While showing us these beautiful dresses she made with a sewing machine from one of the PeaceWorks humanitarian aid shipments, Anielka couldn’t hold back her tears. She told us that the money she earned from sewing helped her go back to school. She said my father promised not to forget her, and didn’t. I gave her a hug and our delegation members promised that PeaceWorks wouldn’t forget her either.

Every organization we visited had a picture, plaque or some other way to express their friendship with my dad and PeaceWorks. I had never fully appreciated what my father did and the lives he touched. I couldn’t be prouder.

Photos by Dave Sanders
his father, Jim. When we arrived, Maria Teresa, the coop’s administrator, shared a story about the loss of her own father and how much Jim meant to the cooperative. Brandon, along with the rest of us, were deeply touched.

Maria Teresa told us another story that we’d hear throughout the delegation — she said traditional weather patterns were changing and there has been a three-year drought. The coop membership has decreased from 42 to 32 women, a fact they attribute to families leaving the community to find work elsewhere. Nonetheless, the women weavers had worked hard on newly designed products, stocking the shelves with a beautiful inventory to bring in badly needed income. We were happy to leave a $2,300 PeaceWorks donation for coop members whose homes have leaky roofs and dirt floors — so they may continue to develop their work in healthier and more peaceful surroundings.

Donation $2,300: home improvements for coop members.

FEDICAMP

A Miraculous Transformation

by Tom Berry, Environmental and Agricultural Policy Advisor to Senator Patrick Leahy

Just outside Cusmapa we crossed a narrow creek on the way to visit a small farm. In the following two weeks it would be our last creek we’d see that held water, and it was low.

And yet, a quarter mile down the road we visited a diverse fruit and vegetable farm on a steep hillside. There were many newly planted trees, like avocado and banana. In spite of all the talk about the three-year drought, climate change and the effects of El Niño, this farm was getting by. This farmer had transitioned to a more resilient and sustainable model: low-input, organic production of diverse high value fruits and vegetables thanks to the technical and financial assistance from the Federation for the Development of Rural Farmers, FEDICAMP.

A year ago PeaceWorks board member Micha Loughlin recalled a conversation with another farmer just down the road. Looking out over a dry field of stumps and rocks, the farmer dreamed of cultivated fields and a home for his family. A year later, we all looked out over the thriving field of cabbages and a new house with running potable water. Beans, sugar cane, yucca, avocados, bananas, papaya and coffee were all planted nearby, sustained by an artesian spring fed cistern and irrigation system. “I am just stunned by this miraculous transformation,” Micha kept telling us.

Donation $17,700: water conservation, irrigation and climate change adaptation projects.
Marvin Hernandez and I share a passion for sea turtles. While I help rescue stranded sea turtles on Cape Cod, Marvin works to rescue and hatch sea turtle eggs on Nicaragua’s Isla Juan Venado Natural Reserve.

People living along Nicaragua’s Pacific coast traditionally retrieve sea turtle eggs to sell in markets for human consumption. But with nearly all species of sea turtles now endangered, Marvin’s Palo de Oro Sea Turtle Project tries to purchase the eggs first, and then brings them to their beachside sanctuary located a half hour by boat through a mangrove forest.

At the sanctuary the staff carefully place the eggs in sacks of sand to mimic the conditions of natural nests, while keeping them protected from predators. When they babies hatch, the next generation of sea turtles are released into the Pacific, much to the delight of visitors, like us. This season 2964 hatchlings were released, with many more still waiting for maturity.

**Donation $1200: sea turtle monitoring and egg recovery**

El Porvenir Coffee Co-op

Growing Coffee, Getting By

By Austin Haeberle, Television Producer

Making a living is challenging for the 50 families of the El Porvenir Coffee Co-op. One year the price may be up, but the yield is down. The next year the harvest is bountiful, but then the price falls. Even more infuriating, their success may be dependent on another’s misery: a storm or disease wiping out harvests in Kenya or Brazil. We saw their daily challenges for ourselves during our day-long visit to the mountaintop community of about 300 people.

But we also saw the improvements they’ve been making to the “Jim Burchell” health clinic, like a new solar panel. What a difference it has made - expectant mothers no longer slogging six hours down the mountain for an ultrasound that a visiting doctor can now do by just plugging in. And in the case of a medical emergency, the truck that PeaceWorks just helped purchase can get people to the nearest hospital. With more of their basic needs met, the coop continues to produce what we think is the best coffee in the world!

**Donation $7500: truck purchase and medicine.**
Inhijambia Program for Street Children

I See the Progress

By Steve Latimer, Retired Immigration Attorney

I fell in love with Inhijambia the first time I visited two years ago. I found the center to be such a warm and joyful place--full of love, just like the personality of its long-time director Mirna Sanchez. Nowhere was Mirna’s love and joy for the children better seen than at the focos, located in Managua’s huge street market. Kids come rushing out of the stalls to hug her and walk by her side. Inhijambia street educators work the foco every day, providing instruction, guidance, food and clothing for 130 youngsters. Returning after two years, I see the progress these kids have made.

One young woman, Ingrid, is now a promotora, an Inhijambia educator teaching on the streets she once worked. One of my other favorites, 15 year-old Anna, is blossoming, leading Inhijambia’s sewing program for girls. Enrique, who came to Inhijambia 3 years ago, is now studying computer science at the university and teaching computer skills to the other kids.

Donation $14,000: General Programming Support

Pipitos Program for Disabled Children

What a transformation!

by Micha Loughlin, Retired Immigration Attorney and PeaceWorks Board Member

Our visit to Los Pipitos was full of wonderful surprises. We first went to see the children who participate in the hydrotherapy program. I was delighted to see Francisca, a fifteen year-old, in the pool with her therapist splashing up a storm with her arms and legs. It brought tears to my eyes because last year Francisca was flat on her back on a therapy mat unable to even move her limbs. In addition to hydrotherapy, equine therapy has been added to the program. Those children able to ride the horses can benefit from improved muscle tone, balance and coordination. Donation $2000

Axayacatl Women’s Collective

Holding Up Half the World

by Maggie Joralemon, Retired ESL Teacher

“Women hold up half the world.” The Axacatl Women’s Collective in Masaya recognizes and empowers the women who carry this load. While hearing stories of women who had escaped domestic abuse, we learned that holding up half the world is really hard without economic support.

Doña Yadira’s story is a great example of what Axayacatl is doing for women and their families.

Yadira introduced us to Muñeco (Baby Doll), the huge, virile hog she received through Axayacatl’s rural economic development program. The sale of Muñeco’s offspring generates the capital to buy essential items for her family, including books and school uniforms.

We saw for ourselves the benefits of Axayacatl through Yadira’s hard work and graciousness-- economic independence and the dignity that comes with it. She is indeed holding up half the world, and then some. Donation: $2000 for microloans, $35,000 for construction of a new Axayacatl Center