

# NEWS FROM THE ROOFTOP



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## COME WITH ME TO THE MOUNTAINTOP

by Charlene Meyer

Come walk with me. We will visit some people in the rugged mountains that rise beyond the picturesque city of Matagalpa. We will put on sturdy shoes and prepare for a hike that could hold many surprises for you if you haven't been there before or maybe even if you have. It's not a tourist destination, but you will probably want to go back.

Our jeep takes us up the narrow, steep road to the top of the mountain. We then turn onto a rough dirt road that winds around the mountain as far as we can go in the jeep. The windswept, barren landscape is populated by scrubby trees, boulders, and a fine, gritty dirt that the wind hurls at us, getting pieces of dust and grit in our eyes and nose.

Now we leave the jeep and continue on foot. The path is very rocky and demands complete concentration to avoid twisting an ankle or torturing a bad knee or hip. It is also very, very steep with only an occasional root or spindly tree to grab hold of to keep from falling.

Imagine the mothers who must bring their infants, special needs children, children with



cerebral palsy, polio, paralysis, missing limbs, along these paths.

### Chronic illness Everywhere

We see, as we come around a bend, two or three shacks beside our path. They are perched on the mountainside like bare scarecrows, a few tattered garments or pieces of rope flapping in the wind. Skinny dogs bark at our approach. We are still talking, still groaning at the steepness, the rockiness, the heat. Yet we are about to be stunned. Over and over.

One after another, we enter the little shacks that comprise a village of sorts. These things they have in common—they are made of sheets of plastic, pieces of cardboard, tin, and scraps of wood. They have bare earth floors, an unvented stove, chinks in the walls big enough for rodents to climb through (and they do). There is a total absence of food of any kind, and a poverty so profound we are awed in its presence. But this too, they have—children so beautiful they take our breath away; mothers with a fervent belief that theirs are the most beautiful, precious children on earth, and a warmth and kindness and simple, natural hospital-

ity that pervades every nook and cranny of every ramshackle hut we visit. They have so little, but they will give it all to us. Why?

In every home we visit, there is chronic illness. Not just sniffles and allergies, but paralysis, brain damage, and severe malnutrition that leaves infants and toddlers with swollen stomachs. There are untended wounds and fevers. And, there is cancer,

*Continued on back page*



**BRINGING HOPE TO KIDS**

# HUGE SUCCESS FOR 2008 NICA NOCHE FUNDRAISER

Thanks to donors, sponsors, volunteers, and a matching grant, Nica Noche 2008 raised \$212,071 for Tin Roof Foundation's efforts to "bring hope to the kids" of Nicaragua.

Event receipts qualified this year's Nica Noche for the full \$100,000 matching grant set up by a generous Cincinnati family. "We are thrilled," says Charlene Meyer, co-founder of The Tin

Roof Foundation. "The matching grant inspired us all. The volunteers really went the extra mile in planning the event and gathering donations. Every donation, large and small, that came from patrons and friends of Tin Roof Foundation counted toward the final goal."

Thank you to our donors and sponsors for helping make Nica Noche such a huge success!



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**SAVE THE DATE NOW FOR**  
**2009 NICA NOCHE**  
 Saturday Evening, November 14  
 Sharonville Convention Center — Cincinnati, Ohio

# DON'T EAT THE SEEDS

by Romona Baker

*Romana is a volunteer who has traveled to Nicaragua over 20 times working with various mission programs.*

My group of six educators was at the top of the hill in Nicaragua beside a rocky, rutted and incredibly steep road. Even in super-low gear, the 4-wheel-drive vehicle I was piloting had not been able to drag us and our supplies to the top. I knew that without the extra 1,000 pounds of people and with just a fraction more speed over the boulders at the bottom, I would have had no trouble reaching the top (I had been there before). But today, it was not to be. So the rest of my group got out and walked up the rocky, twisted path to the top before I tried again.

They told me later that the Nicaraguan workers had gathered to greet the visitors and so they joined in watching and waiting for my 4x4 to crest the hill. Excited whispers of “Romona” passed often through the crowd. My arrival was met with much clapping and shouting, as though God had delivered me.

The gentle country men greeted me with wide smiles, handshakes, even a few hugs. Surrounded by these friends to whom I can't even speak in English, mud sucking at my boots, rain steaming the heavy air, I knew I was as close to heaven as I could remember.

I attended a meeting of the families of the village. We met standing in the shade, in the road. There was time for everyone to speak. They are soft-spoken, eloquent people—mothers holding babies, toothless grandfathers leaning on sticks, alert young men, each dressed in a clean, if ragged, shirt. All spoke desperately about the loss of their crop because of too much rain.

Their young bean plants had simply drowned. The only things they eat—morning



**“SOME OF US JUST EAT THE SEED AND NEVER SOW IT FOR A HARVEST. SOMETIMES WE WEEP WITH JOY, MOVED BY SOME GIFT FROM GOD. IT GIVES US IMMEDIATE SATISFACTION, BUT NO HARVEST.” — BETH MOORE**

noon and night—are beans, rice, and tortillas. Each family poured out their concern for their children and the dry season ahead when the



usual malnutrition would become even more serious. Tears came to my eyes more than once. These were my friends and their problem was too big for me. They were thankful for the meal programs that would help feed their children, *but what would they plant next year with no harvest to supply seed?*

Finally, promises were made. Each family would receive seed beans. They were reminded the beans would be treated with red chemicals so they could not be eaten. “Don't feed them to your children; it will make them sick. You must save them for planting. Don't eat the seeds!”

And so I must remind myself: “Don't eat the seeds.” I dare not keep God's gifts to myself. As Beth Moore said in *Stepping Up*, “Some of us just eat the seed and never sow it for a harvest. Sometimes we weep with joy, moved by some gift from God. It gives us immediate satisfaction, but no harvest.” Like the bright red beans, God-given experiences must be sown. I must use them to ask others to share life with all those who surround us.

## THE TIN ROOF FOUNDATION WHO ARE WE?

The Tin Roof Foundation is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to “Bringing Hope to Kids” by providing educational opportunities, meal programs, healthcare to facilitate learning, and economic development assistance for their families, thereby enabling children to escape the spiral of poverty. There are no salaries. All administrative costs are funded by Tin Roof Foundation founders Al and Charlene Meyer. The Tin Roof Foundation, Inc. is incorporated in the State of Ohio. It is recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization. All contributions are tax deductible.

## PAIN & SUFFERING

# ILLNESS, DISEASE STALK MOUNTAIN FAMILIES

### HELP BRING HOPE TO THESE VERY ILL CHILDREN

If you want to know why we are in Nicaragua, you must go into the mountains. Today we have traveled high into the mountains in the northern part of Nicaragua near the border of Honduras. Towns, cities, even most villages have long since been left behind. We have come to a time and place totally alien to most of us, where narrow paths lead ever upward to groups of three or four huts made of sticks and mud. In every home we visit, we will encounter stories of terrible hunger, malnutrition and, most cruel of all, the resulting diseases and illnesses that ravage the children. The stories are heartbreaking, but they are why we have come. Here, we can help. Here, we can bring hope.

### SAVING CARLOS, SAVING CAROLINA: A STORY YOU WON'T FORGET

Carlos Noel Llanes Pineda is 6 years old. He was born with a birth defect called hypospadias, which is the absence or misplacement of a urinary opening.

This malformation should be corrected during the first months of a child's life, but in Carlos' case it was not. Surgery was not performed until last year, but it was not successful. As a result, Carlos has developed nephritic syndrome, a disorder in which the kidneys are damaged, causing them to leak large amounts of protein from the blood into the urine.

Carlos' father abandoned the family several years ago, and his mother, Carolina, age 29, supports four children from the income she makes by making soy drinks and cooking beans to resell. She also sews skirts to wear and sell. Her income is approximately \$2.50 a day. The extended family lives in a concrete block house with dirt floors.



*Martin, at top, is a 10-year-old stroke victim. Six-year-old Carlos, left, needs surgery to correct a birth defect to prevent further kidney damage. His mother Carolina has breast cancer and needs treatment. Despite her serious situation, Carolina took in baby Escarleth who was sick as an infant with leprosy, shown at right being fed by Al Meyer.*

### BAD NEWS FOR CAROLINA: CANCER TREATMENT A MUST

Carolina, Carlos' mother, was treated for breast cancer in 2006. The chemo treatment left her with vision problems and she is also suffering from a hernia. Last year, Carolina detected four new lumps. She has not had the necessary biopsies because of the cost.

Carolina is a deeply caring person, even when the weight of what she already carries seems crushing. When a young mother from a remote village in the mountains gave up her sick child, Carolina took her in. The baby, Escarleth, was very ill and when Carolina took the infant to

the hospital, she was diagnosed with leprosy. Six months later the baby was released to Carolina. Today, Escarleth is 2 years old, and Carolina loves and provides for her as if she were her own child.

Both Carlos and Carolina desperately need our help. Carlos needs surgery for his life-threatening condition. His medical expenses will cost approximately \$2,000. Carolina's cost for each lump biopsy is \$13, plus transportation costs to and from the hospital. Your donation could help make a tremendous difference for this family. Please contact us today about making a donation to help Carlos and his courageous mother.

### DREAM OF A NEW WHEELCHAIR KEEPS TOBIEL GOING

As we walk down the boulder-strewn path toward Tobiel Castellon's home, we see him sitting on the porch. He is seated in a makeshift "wheelchair" made from a stack chair to which wheels have been attached. He is a handsome young man with a magical smile, but he cannot rise to greet us. Tobiel's legs are paralyzed.

As we gather around him, he begins to tell his story. His voice is weak and his breath comes in short gasps as he seems to use all his energy to tell us about his life.

Tobiel lives at home with his mother and four siblings in the tiny mountain village of Quebrada Honda near the Honduras border. At age 2 he contracted polio. His activities became limited. At age 5 after developing a high fever his condition worsened. At age 7 he was unable to walk and could no longer attend school or swim, his favorite activity. His friends moved on without him and his life became very lonely.

After five years Tobiel was able to begin attending school again. He is currently in the third year of high school at Las Sabanas, a one hour ride on a dirt path by horseback.

Tobiel's dream is to have a hand-driven wheelchair making it possible to be more mobile and independent. There is a Personal Energy

Transportation (PET) vehicle available. They are built in Columbia, Missouri, and can be shipped to Nicaragua. The cost is \$250 plus shipping.

Please consider helping Tobiel realize his dream to continue getting his education and to become more mobile.

### TEN-YEAR-OLD STROKE VICTIM MISSES FRIENDS, SCHOOL

From Cusmapa we travel for nearly one hour in our trusty jeep on steep rocky roads before arriving at Caressa, a tiny village in the mountains of northern Nicaragua. A small adobe house is home to Martin Hernandez, a 10-year-old boy we have come to see if we can help, along with six other family members. Martin is the youngest of six children.

As we enter the small house, we see Martin lying on a simple wood-frame bed with a thin foam mattress pad. He is just to the right of the front door so he can hear family members and friends playing outside. He is pale and very thin. His right hand is resting on his chest, fingers curled stiffly inward. His legs are covered with a small blanket. I touch his legs and feet. They are much too cool, as is his thin right arm. I suspect his circulation is very poor. We ask Alajandra, Martin's mother, to share his story.

Last September Martin became ill. He had a severe headache and a high fever. Alajandra and Martin traveled nearly seven miles to the nearest clinic. He received medications and the headaches and fever subsided. But one week later Martin was unable to walk and use his right hand. We suspect



*Tobiel is paralyzed and dreams of a new wheelchair to help him become more independent.*

Martin had suffered a stroke. He was no longer able to attend school. Since then, his condition has worsened and he now spends all day, every day, lying on his back near the door of his home.

Additional tests and therapy are badly needed for Martin. This very poor family does not have the money to pay for the necessary testing and treatment this young boy needs. With your help

and the proper treatment, Martin might have the opportunity to once again play with his friends and attend school, two things he desperately misses. Please make your donation to help Martin today.

### FALL FROM TREE MEANS LONG RECOVERY

He was just doing what many little boys like to do—climbing trees. Unfortunately, in April of last year, Jordy Otoniel Baez Maradiaga fell while on one of his climbing adventures. His fall resulted in a fractured pelvis and right leg. At the time of the accident, Jordy was diagnosed with moderate malnutrition, a condition which further complicated his recovery.

After almost a year and two visits to the orthopedic specialist (with the help of Fabretto Children's Foundation), Jordy's cast has been taken off, but he continues to need appointments to complete his process of rehabilitation. Because of the style of his injury, he spent so much time in bed that he failed the school year and will have to repeat second grade.

Jordy's family lives in a humble house in a rural community near Cusmapa.

Accidents happen to children in Nicaragua but unlike here, it is a country with few resources to help these children of the poorest-of-the-poor. There are so many children like Jordy and they desperately need our help. If you can help bring hope to these children, please contact Charlene Meyer at (513) 474-4540.

## NEW MENU REDUCES COST AND KIDS EAT RIGHT FOODS

by Kevin Russell

Mike Zelnik is a 22-year-old graduate of Northwestern University from Nashville, Tennessee. He's bright, hard working, and has opportunities in various career paths. Before pursuing a more traditional way, Mike has chosen to spend two years in Nicaragua working with the poorest of the poor through the La Familia Padre Fabretto (a partner of The Tin Roof Foundation). Mike lives and works in Somoto, Nicaragua and surrounding villages, a rural area about 130 kilometers northwest of Managua.

Mike's current project is designing a lunch menu that rotates every two weeks for Fabretto/Tin Roof-sponsored schools that is nutritious as well as good tasting. It's a very important project because for most, if not all of the children involved, lunches eaten at these schools are the only source of adequate food each day.

The menu is being created from nutrition paks (Vita Food) consisting of soy protein, rice, and locally grown herbs and greens (from a Fabretto/Tin Roof sponsored farm). Mike explains that the aim is for the food to supply most of an individual's

daily nutritional needs, and for it to taste good.

I had the opportunity recently to eat lunch at the school in Somoto. I found it to be tastier than the school lunches I remember 40 years ago growing up in the northern Kentucky area. It was quite obvious lunch was a hit with the children because all I saw were clean plates and the "thumbs up" sign as they were eating.

I believe we are called to lean into the world around us. I also believe that everyone deserves access to clean water and at least one square meal a day, wherever they live. There's a song named



*Crumbs From The Table* that simply says: "Where you live should not decide whether you live or whether you die." I believe Mike's work is helping to make that dream a reality at least for some in Nicaragua.

A great starting point for us in taking our next step toward hungry people having food to eat is to make a donation to The Tin Roof Foundation. Mike and volunteers like Mike are building relationships throughout Nicaragua. Great things happen when relationships form. Hungry people gain nourishment, friendships develop, and the walls that sometimes divide fall. Consider the opportunity you have today to give out of abundance in support of Tin Roof's work!

Give in support of people wherever they live: at least so they have the possibility of one great tasting, nutritious meal a day!

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**Why Give To The Tin Roof Foundation?**

- 100% of your gift goes directly to the project
- No salaries (all volunteers, all the time)
- No administrative costs paid from your donation

*Note: We will never share your name or information with any other organization.*

# THE GIRL WITH THE PURPLE PLATE

by Romona Baker

Just about a year ago I was behind my video camera in a children's meal center in Nicaragua. Children came to eat in the dim, little shack made from old, weathered boards and they stayed for the afternoon school run by volunteer teachers.

Most of the beautiful, dark-eyed, ragged children were caught up in the excitement of our troop of visiting, white-skinned tourists with water bottles, fanny packs, silly hats, and cameras. It was hard for me to capture the pathos of the hungry children distracted by the sideshow.

Then I saw her, the little girl who paid no attention to the North Americans. She was only interested in the contents of her plate. The light was from behind her, layering shadows on her face as she scooped up each heaping spoonful, hardly



chewing the last. I watched through the camera as she chased the last bits of rice around her plate.

My tears made it hard to see what I was filming as she raised her plate and licked off the last residue. In my mind, I still see the light

shining through that purple plate and her dark eyes looking at me over its edge. When I watched the video later, I witnessed again the magical details. Her tongue curls as it sweeps the moisture left on the plate. When she finally lowers it, still looking through the camera straight into my eyes, the shiny surface reflects purple light across her face.

Even amateur photographers like me recognize those as once-in-a-lifetime moments. Yet for me the haunting mental image represents the hundreds of children in Nicaragua I have seen cleaning their plates of every last morsel.

In the world, there are 16,000 children who die each day because of lack of food. Even my imagination and the photos of world photographers are not sufficient to translate my experience to comprehending the hunger present in other countries.

## 2008 ANNUAL REPORT

This has been an amazing year for Tin Roof Foundation. Even in the face of great economic uncertainty, friends of Tin Roof continued not only to support, but to expand, nearly every program we have undertaken. And, toward the end of the year when we were challenged to meet a \$100,000 matching "Nica Noche" grant, you did it!

Here are some of Tin Roof Foundation's 2008 achievements:

**Nutrition**—funded meal programs at La Chureca (near the Managua dump) for more than 600 children. The center not only provides hot, nutritious meals, it gives the children incentive to leave the dump to attend school.

**Las Sabanas**—In the municipality of Las Sabanas near the Honduras border, we helped provide basic nutrition, healthcare, and education for 800 children.

**San Ramon/La Dalia Regions**—funded two full-time doctors, including transportation costs and the medicines they dispense. Doctors serve approximately 15,000 people in the rugged mountains of northern Nicaragua. We are also continuing our commitment to sponsor the entire village of La Laguna by funding meal and educational opportunities for children, healthcare, and economic development programs.

### **Education: School Furniture, Supplies and Teaching Staff**

- Tin Roof volunteers shipped five 40-foot containers of school desks, tables, chairs, and a selection of other school supplies and furniture to education centers in Nicaragua.
- We presented a plastic file tote to 125 teachers, each containing much-needed teaching aids and basic supplies.

- The *Honest Answers* program, aimed at children from intermediate school through high school to help prevent "children having children," was given Tin Roof funds for manuals, teaching supplies, and teachers' education.
- We are also providing scholarships for primary through university students.

**Six 40-Foot Containers of Vita Food and Beans**—shipped six 40-foot containers of these precious products to the very poor children in Nicaragua. This is the equivalent of 285,120 meals per container or about 1,710,720 nutritious meals! This amazing Vita Food mixture helps improve the growth and physical well-being of children.

**Familias Especiales**—special needs children (children who are suffering from severe psychological, emotional and/or physical problems) from very poor families in the Matagalpa region come to Rebecca Trujillo's Familias Especiales center. We funded the purchase of much-needed therapy equipment, provided funds for a full-time equestrian therapist for the severely challenged children, as well as financially supporting a nutrition program for extremely malnourished infants.

Above all, thanks to you, we have shown the children of Nicaragua that we care deeply about them and about their future. We have brought them hope. We're looking forward to another year of helping these beautiful children escape the cycle of poverty of previous generations and realize their dreams for the future.

# THE MOUNTAINS

*Continued from front page*

especially among the women. At home, we would rally around families like these. We'd take up collections, buy baskets of food, connect them to government agencies, schedule casserole deliveries, and buy clothes for the kids. We would do something to ease our pain at seeing their pain.

## No Food, No water

In every home we visit, there is no food. There is no cooking fire with smoke filling the small hut, a normal sight in rural Nicaragua. Empty pots are placed on the cold rocks where wood fires usually burn, cooking beans and/or rice. Empty bags are hanging on rusty nails where food is usually stored. Not even stalks of green bananas are waiting to be cooked. Nothing.

Water must be purchased from water trucks in buckets (10 cents) or barrels (\$2) and carried up or down the steep, rocky paths. With an average income for most families of \$2 per day, water is a luxury. Some families are forced to get their water from the small river several meters from their house. This is the dry season and the river bed is nearly dry. The small pools of water in the river

are also used for laundry and a source of water for animals from nearby farms, making the water highly polluted—and dangerous.

We know somehow that we are responsible, collectively, for the way things are. We were supposed to lead, but our country's economic problems have crushed the very life out of countries where things were never that good to begin with. So, now what?

## What will you Do?

This is it. We can turn up the TV, go to aerobics, head out on vacation, grab a hot novel, or run a marathon, but we can never, ever do anything that will make us feel as good as helping these families, these mothers, fathers, and these beautiful children who simply cannot help themselves. They need food first. They also need medical care and medicine.



Where did our walk take us? Like most of our trips up these mountains and back down again, we have arrived at ourselves. We are the answer. We can help make something wonderful happen, not just for the children of Nicaragua, but for ourselves. Read more about the children and families in need on pages 4 and 5. Call Charlene Meyer today to volunteer and/or make your donation: (513) 474-4540.

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## YOUR GIFT COULD END THEIR SUFFERING



**They have no toys.  
They have no food.  
They did nothing wrong.  
They have hurt no one.  
And yet they suffer.**

**Please help bring hope to the children.**

## MAIL YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO

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