



¿Quien soy?



Autobiographies from the
Nicaragua to Vermont Exchange

January 2009



Sonia Castro

I was born on February 10th 1970. My mother's name is Agueda Castro and my father is Juan Urbina. My mother had twelve kids, three of her children died and nine are still with us. I am the youngest of the family.

I was born in a rural community where I lived until I was nine years old. Then we moved to

the city of Matagalpa with my mother, my siblings and seven nieces and nephews, who were left orphaned when my older sister died. My mother took them in and didn't leave them abandoned.

In the city my mother began making tortillas to sell. My older sisters made the tortillas, Lucia and I were younger and it was our job to take the tortillas in a big basket to give to a woman who bought them from us cheap and sold them for more money. It was a long distance to where we had to bring the tortillas. It wasn't easy to get to, we had to travel by foot and the basket was heavy and hot on our heads. After selling the tortillas, my mother bought food for the whole family. Upon returning home we had to go to the river to wash the clothes and bathe because at this time, the neighborhood didn't have drinking water. We had to get drinking water from a well, or find somebody who was willing to give it to us. When we lived in the country I didn't go to school because education wasn't important for the people who lived in the country.

It's difficult to be prosperous in the country, it is like being marginalized. Living in the city after the war of '79 the Sandinista government promoted education so that no child would be left without education and they all would be matriculated into school. I started to study first grade in 1980 in an evangelical church because in

my neighborhood there was only a small school that could fit around forty kids. In 1981, I began second grade in the September 11th School until 1986 when I finished primary school.

In 1987 I began secretarial studies in a private school, which was the only one in the center of Matagalpa that gave technical classes. However, in Nicaragua, the economic situation was decaying due to the internal war that existed. Six months into my studies I had to stop for economic reasons. I couldn't pay the monthly bill and my mother wasn't making a lot of money. She couldn't help me because she had to feed the family. At that time my siblings were working and helping with the expenses of the house. It was very difficult because the government took them out of work and made them serve in the army. My brother was killed in the war.

After that, I stayed home working with my mother making tortillas and selling them. I then met Beth, who was staying in our house when she came to help educate the kids in my neighborhood. She worked there for about four months and then returned to her country, but we always maintained contact with her and she returned every year or two to visit us. One day, Beth returned to visit us as well as other families in the community and asked us what we would like there to be in the community. The people of the community asked for a library for the kids. Beth initiated the library project, and asked me if I would like to work there. I accepted the job and since 2002 I have been working for El Organismo Sembrando Esperanzas. Presently, I am working and studying in my fourth year of secondary school on Sundays, and I hope to graduate next year, God willing.

Digna Cardoza

I was born in the city of Matagalpa on September 22, 1987 in the crowded neighborhood of Walter Mendoza, currently known as “La Chispa.” My origins come from a humble family, working and striving to achieve their dreams and goals.

My father is Mr. Etanislado Cardoza Brisuela who strains through his work as a builder to support us in any way he is able to, with whatever he has, to supply us with food and other necessities. My mother was Mrs. Justa Castillo Gonzalez who died in 1993 of natural causes. My siblings are: Eva, Eduardo, Antonio, Tania, Jose Luis and Hazzel; all are older than I with different responsibilities. I have eleven nieces and nephews that range between the age of 3 months and 23 years.



I spent 5 years in the preschool of my neighborhood. After preschool I started to study in the school of Cesar Amador Molina, today known as High School Tilburg, where I studied for 6 years. After finishing my studies in primary I went to the Instituto Nacional Eliseo Picado, INEP, where I got my bachelors degree with much effort during the course of 5 years.

I spent 5 years in the preschool of my neighborhood. After preschool I started to study in the school of Cesar Amador Molina, today known as High School Tilburg, where I studied for 6 years. After finishing my studies in primary I went to the Instituto Nacional Eliseo Picado, INEP, where I got my bachelors degree with much effort during the course of 5 years.

Then in 2006 I went to the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Nicaragua, UNAN-CURMAT. There I discovered the career of business administration, in which I hope to obtain much success to achieve a higher quality of life. Other experiences since my childhood that please me are the cultural artistic participation that I have seen reflected in dance, song, and my education. Another part is my participation in the cultural ceremony of my school.

In 2001, I met Beth Merrill with whom I had the opportunity to learn of the good intentions of “Sembrando Esperanza” in the neighborhood library, La Chispa. To participate in this moment I began to involve myself directly with the organization and I am still working with much pride and dedication.

Laura Estela Davies Rubio



I was born on the 13th of March, 1988, and I am 20 years old. My father is named Clark Sidney Davies Salmeron and my mother is Elena Rubio Escoto.

I live with my father and grandmother in the beautiful city of San Ramon because of the separation of my parents. My grandmother's name is Estela Salmeron. It has been nice to grow up with her and having all her support. I've become accustomed to calling her mamá.

I went to secondary school at the Friar Bartolome de Las Casas School and at the Adventist School of the city of Matagalpa, I have many friends and I have known and traveled through many beautiful places of my country.

My mother lives in the city of Leon, I am going to visit her during the vacation. She lives with her husband and her other two children there. I consider myself fortunate to belong to a local dance group; we have participated in many important events such as the inauguration of the city. Currently, I am in the second year of studying engineering in design and construction.

Josue Santana Garcia Aguilar

The Family History of my grandparents: Mr. Sebastian Garcia Martinez and Mrs. Lucia Blandin Figueroa. They had a child who they gave the name Jose Benito Garcia Blandin. He was born in Pueblo Viejo el Ocote in his parents' house. Jose Benito is a day laborer who has worked in agriculture, working the fields for his family since he didn't have a better education in science or knowledge, since his family was of limited economic resources. Also in the past of his



childhood and adolescents Jose Benito didn't study in school because it was very far away and there were no schools in the community, only a small house where the teachers slept and also taught class. Benito grew up and later married a young girl who was the daughter of Aplinar Granado Aguilar

and Maria Catalina Tellez Figueroa. Their daughter's name was Rosa Emilia Aguilar Tellez, a peasant of the native land of the community of Pueblo Viejo and here they resided. Jose Benito Garcia and Rosa Emilia were married in the Catholic Church of Pueblo Viejo.

On May 18th, 1983, after a few years had passed, they had their first child of their marriage. I am that child, writing to you now. I was born in the central sector, the Mercedes, in the community of Pueblo Viejo in the home of my grandparents. My parents decided to give me the name Josue Santana Garcia Aguilar. I was born on April 18th, 1985. After 6 years had passed, I was invited to study preschool at the La Esperanza School, where I passed the 3rd level of preschool. After studying primary, where I repeated 3 years, I didn't learn anything of letters. My teachers were Mr. Victor Averruv and Mrs. Teresa Cruz, who were determined to give their best effort to teach me to read and write. But I didn't learn anything of my letters and what's more I endured a pain in my brain and this inhibited my studies.

My worried parents decided not to send me to anymore classes. This is something that happened in the past in my life because now I read and write. I no longer have the pain in my brain. I was 12 years old before I learned to read or write anything, but thanks to an adult literacy campaign (even though I was too young to officially join this study circle, for me it was an obligation to learn). They decided to send me to this circle and for six months, where they least expected it, my efforts paid off and I was declared the best student in the circle. The literacy teacher who gave me this award was Magdaleno Mercado Hernández.

A little later, I was sent to the Esperanza La Calera School where I maintained the reputation of a good student. I was a student of Norma Molina who taught me third grade and decided to pass me to fourth grade because I was very intelligent. Later I studied 5th and 6th grade with the teacher, Aura Lila Maradiaga Arista from the community of El Chile. I was a good student during the school year and I finished the primary school with the teacher Marta Claudia Chavarria from the city of Matagalpa, La Chispa neighborhood.

Soon I began to go to high school at the National Institute of San Ramon, where I studied 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of high school. This 4th year of high school I am a student at the Autonomous Rube Dario High School in the community of Susuli, San Dionisio, Matagalpa.

I receive a scholarship from Planting Hope to help me with my studies. In exchange for this scholarship, I volunteer in my community, teaching adult literacy and education. I'm writing and at your service, Josue Santana Garcia Aguilar, Community of Pueblo Viejo, Matagalpa.



Elvis Moncada

I was born on January 3, 1992. My parents are Aracely López and Agustín Moncada, my siblings are Erick, Seydi and Jullissa. Seydi is a teacher, Jullissa is a painter, Erick is an artisan.

I'm in my last year of high school. I am in a small musical group here in the town in which we take trips to different places near the town. I sometimes don't have much time because I have to go to classes, and in the afternoons I practice music. I'm also an artisan. I make jewelry from natural seeds. I visit Matagalpa every Saturday, a cultural center where I go to sell some of my things. In San Ramón, sometimes many tourists come, like Spaniards, Italians, and Americans, where I also go to sell my things. There are also friends that do us the favor of bringing them to the foreigners to sell them, and afterward, send us the money and part of it goes to some organizations like Planting Hope, Durham and San Ramon.

At the beginning it was very difficult for me. From when I was small, I liked making jewelry, but my brother didn't let me use his materials. I used his materials when he wasn't there, but with the time, everything changed. He lent me his drills and with the necklaces I sold, I was allowed to buy my own materials, and now I'm doing well. With my family, everything is calm, even though sometimes we go through economic difficulties. But we always find solutions to the things. I always help out however I can. Also, I like to travel. I have made a series of trips inside the country. I have always wanted to go outside the country. When I go to a place, I always bring my jewelry to continue to sell. I go with my brother and my friend Eleazar. We all work individually, but when we sell our jewelry, we do it together. I hope that all that I do in my life goes very well.

Maykeline Escorcía Zeldon

I was born in Matagalpa on September 24, 1993. I am 15 years old. My parent's names are Fausto Escorcía Mairena and Fátima Zeldón Altamirano. I was baptized in the Catholic Church of San Ramon.

In 1996, I enrolled in a preschool "Los Conejitos" which still exists. Then in 1997, I learned to read and write, and at age seven I enrolled in first grade at The Houses of Fray Bartolomé. When I was



thirteen years old I was admitted to the first year of secondary school and currently I am in the 4th year of secondary school at the National Institute of San Ramón. My favorite classes are math, physics, and chemistry.

My dad is a farmer and my mom teaches preschool, she was my preschool teacher. I am in the process of trying to get a scholarship for general economics. It is the dream of both my family and me to help my town. I have a lot of friends who entertain me and I have fun with. I am social, friendly, affectionate, and driven. Sometimes I visit many of my friends and family that live 35 KM outside of San Ramón. In 2006 I was admitted to a Nicaraguan School of Dance where I learned certain dances of our beloved Nicaragua. I really like to dance to Nicaraguan music. I also belong to the Christian Movement and participate in the different Christian retreats.

Christhell

I was born March 20, 1990 in Trinidad, Estelí. My mother, Maribel and my father Cornelio decided to send me to live with my grandparents so that they could both work. When I was five years old, they took me



out of the school which I was in only for half a year because my grandmother came to visit. I stayed with her for a week, but after that I didn't want to return home. I lost that year and later was accepted to first grade in the school, La Esperanza, where the organization worked.



The following year they sent me to another school, Ruben Dario Ocalca, until sixth grade. Being a student of that school, I still preferred to go to La Esperanza because in that school I danced and it had who would teach me. That's

how I got involved with the organization Sembrando Esperanza and began to work with them teaching arts and crafts classes and dance until one day the preschool teacher decided not to continue and that is how I became the preschool teacher that I still am.

Lisseth del Carmen Sánchez López

Hi, my name is Lisseth del Carmen Sánchez López. I was born in the district of Matagalpa, but I grew up in the community of “El Chile”. My date of birth is August 27th 1990.

My parents are Alejandra López Mendoza and Feliciano Antonio Sánchez Granados. My younger brother is called Lesbí Ariel Sánchez López. In 1999, I started studying for the first time at the age of 9 years, at a small school in my community. I went there with my brother Lesbí. Before I started studying, my parents had been divorced. I remember hardly anything, because I was very small. I only know that my mother and my grandparents raised me.

I got to know my father now that I’m grown up. I do not hate him; but it was bad that he left us. I thank God for having a good mother and grandparents. At the age of 12 years I started working in the “tejido” (weaving workshop) as well as my grandmother; the representative



of this work is Rosa. At the beginning I could not warp the loom nor combine the colors of the yarn, but step by step I was taught.

In 2004 was my sixth grade elementary school graduation. Everything was very nice. This year I got to know Beth Merrill, a very nice and hardworking North American. I confided in Beth very much and she learned “el tejido”. This work is very difficult, but if you give your part, you will learn, you will get what you want. Beth was with me during my graduation. After my graduation I gave her a scholarship application letter. Beth had to return to the United

States and handed in my application after her return. My family is not very wealthy and for secondary school I have to go to a city, but couldn't afford going to the city with the money I was earning. But if there had been a high school near my community I wouldn't have applied for the scholarship. But thank God and the people who are helping me. And now I can travel to the city.

I studied my first and second year of the secondary in the mornings and in the afternoon I used to work for a while. In 2006 I decided to study my third year on Saturdays ("Sabatino") to have more time to work and dedicate to my studies. As the Planting Hope representative, Beth is the one who oversees my scholarship and the person who donated the money is called Sarah. I don't know her personally, but by photo.

In 2007 I got to know Julia Sendor, another North American, a very friendly and affectionate person. I was teaching her how to weave. I confided in her a lot and we experienced very nice adventures, which I will never forget. She is a friend forever.

In 2008 Beth had the idea of starting a little project of a mini-library in El Chile and that we, the students who receive scholarships would support the project. We take care of the books in exchange for the scholarship. It's a great support for the community, since now we can do the research we need for our homework in our community and don't need to travel to the city. I am the one who directs my friends, the other scholarship students. I'm in charge of the library. I am very happy with the job I've been authorized to do.

We support our community. We painted the elementary school and we reforested the school yard. Thanks to Beth and the brigade of North American students. They take the scholarship students along to carry out this work. It was all very nice. I'll never forget it. Beth had to return to her country, but she spent Mother's Day with us. We celebrated it in the community with games, gifts and surprises for all the mothers of the community. For me it was very sad that Beth left, since she spends a lot of time with us and we miss her.

The year 2008, a year of adventures and surprises. Mercedes who works with the organization Planting Hope, wanted some of the scholarship students to go to the US, but it was for a limited number. I waited a while for the answer and I was one of the ones chosen.

For me, it's something nice, but I still don't believe that it happened and that it's true. I never imagined that I would go to the States. It's like a dream, but it's true. As a Nicaraguan, I am willing to teach you all about Nicaragua's culture and also about the weaving work we do, as well as other things. I will study and practice my English, since that's the important thing we have to know in order to travel. For those who read my short biography who have not come to my country, Nicaragua, I invite you to visit my country. My country is very nice with lakes, volcanoes, mountains, plains, rivers, reserves, cultures and many other things.

I also hope you'll visit the indigenous community of "El Chile" where I live and to get to know that work that I do. Don't miss your chance to visit Nicaragua and get to know the marvels that the country offers. With much pride I write you, those who read this and tell you a little bit about my life. Thanks you for taking into account my short biography. Lisseth del Carmen Sánchez López writes to you from El Chile, Matagalpa, Nicaragua.

Berman Saul Hernandez Lopez

All my life, I have lived with my family, especially with my mother. My father is named Pablo, my mother Isabel, and I am one of six siblings: Juan A, Fatima, Meyling N., Bennis, Anyil Veronica, and me, Berman. I have two grandmothers, Dionicia and Arcadia. My grandfathers are dead.

All of the people that live in my house are very important to me. I will always carry my family with me wherever I go. During my childhood I was a happy lad with my family. My parents loved me very much and my siblings and I got along very well. Since I was a child I



have liked to follow my father wherever he went and sometimes he would bring me and if he didn't bring me I would start to cry and he would make fun of me because I was crying to go with him to the town. I will never forget him and I will never stop loving him because thanks

to my mother and father I am in this life and I have been raised healthy and safe from all danger. They have never abandoned me. They raised me and I would never do anything to harm them. They have always advised me every second of every day and thanks to their advice I am successful, especially in my studies.

When I was two years old they put me in pre-school and I didn't want to study. It made me very nervous and a little scared. I was very scared of the teachers and I didn't want to be around them, but my parents said to me, "Go to the classes and they won't do anything to you." Then I went to the first day of classes and it went very well, much better than I expected and I continued learning and one day my parents picked me up from school without telling me why. They had picked me up and it was because we were going to live in another place, called Pueblo Viejo. My mother didn't like it. We were there many months and she couldn't

leave because there was a great river that you had to cross in the winter. It grew too large and people couldn't pass. If they crossed the water it dragged them, and my mother said that it would be better to return to the same place, but my father said no because this place was pretty and had everything. I never liked this place, and neither did my siblings, but when my dad saw we didn't like it, he said we were going to return to the same place. We left during a great storm, and the river hadn't risen, and we crossed. We walked and we walked. The more we walked, it seemed like the farther away we were. I was small. My feet were exhausted and my dad said, "Walk, keep going forward," and I didn't want to continue walking. We passed through crop fields, crossed alleyways, and still didn't get back to el Chile. It was five before we finally arrived. I got sick and stayed sick for many days. My papa made me a remedy.

I got better and we returned to bring my mother and the new baby Bennis, and we stayed for a week more and left on a Sunday, and on this day it rained a lot and the river rose. Papa crossed the river on with a rope and sent a cable back across the river but it didn't work. Afterwards, Papa said, "We're going to go one by one on the rope." Papa started to have us cross. Mama said that the current was going to carry us away. Papa said that it would be fine, but our clothes were so soaking wet, and finally we crossed. Thanks to my papa, we crossed the river and walked a long time to arrive at our home. We changed our clothes and shoes and put on dry coats. The year passed and papa said that I should go back to first grade and I was delighted to continue studying. I started and my friends were very good people and my teacher was phenomenal and I was punctual. I wasn't foolish or badly behaved because each time I left the house my mother told me not to fight or talk back to the teachers, and I followed her advice. I acted very well in the classroom, and thanks to God I didn't receive any complaints from my teachers, and they were proud of me and I studied a lot. It was when the classes ended and I entered second grade and each time classes finished I visited the mountains and I come home to spend my birthday in my house because my birthday is

each February 14th and I like to spend it with my family and to feel the company of my siblings. It's true that I've never celebrated my birthday with parties or food or any of this type of thing. We just spend it together hanging out. After February, I signed up for second grade and I began to study and to meet new friends that hadn't passed the grade and I also met a new teacher.

With my new friends I had good friendships and with my teacher, I behaved well and he told me that I was a formal young lad - not a nuisance or impolite. When I wanted to leave, I asked permission from my teacher. I never left unless he gave me permission. I began to know the other teachers. I didn't speak to them but I knew that they were good teachers. I did well on my tests and quizzes. The teacher told me that the more I studied, the more I'd learn, and this teacher made me happy. He always told me, "don't forget your manners," and I already knew what they were: to say "goodbye" to my mom when I leave the house, and when I arrive to class say "good morning," "come in," and my parents always ask the professor if I was well-behaved, or if I was a nuisance. And the professor says that I am a young lad that carries himself well. And they tell me, "behave yourself," and I answered them by saying, "Yes." I would get to school, greet my friends, teacher, and so on. I went on like this, passing the tests and quizzes that the teacher had me do, and I finished the year.

I passed third grade, and then began classes again the following year. I met a new teacher who was very friendly, pleasant, and was studious in learning, and he knew how to treat the students. He began teaching the new third grade section and he explained, taught, helped and sent us to the board to do the examples. We did homework, quizzes and lastly, exams to see if we'd pass the grade and I did well. There was one day that I got bad grades, but after I overcame this and passed with a much better grade. Later I went to fourth grade and I had the same teacher again because he taught two grades in one classroom. We began fourth grade very sharp. There were difficult topics for me, but I put a lot of interest into my studies and I understood more than I believed I could. I

managed to advance with my points and the more I participated, the more points I earned. But there was one day when I had to leave class I told my parents that I wasn't going to continue studying and they asked me why. I told them, "There's a boy who's threatening me and I don't like these problems at school." I left school and the teacher asked me "Why don't you come to class?" and I told him my motives for dropping out and he told me that I should pay any mind to that boy. But it was too late. The year went by and I was still in 4th grade. I started 4th grade again and I continued studying, although I had lost a year of classes. I studied a lot and passed to 5th grade.

I forgot to mention, when I was a boy, all the teachers used to send me on errands. They sent me to the board when I was in sixth grade. Between all the students, or really my friends, we made a big garden with all types of natural plants. We watered it, cleaned it and to make this garden we had to do various things like haul soil, cut it, haul stones, look for posts to put around the garden and finally we had a garden. It began to flower and get very green and the students in the morning damaged it a lot and didn't care for it. Above all, I carried water, weeded the garden and planted trees with my friends. I met the teacher who taught in the afternoon and I was nervous to study with her. She told me not to be afraid and not to disobey her. She was excellent with the students. I would arrive, greet her and enter and I never lacked respect nor answered her back because she was a very good and friendly teacher. The exams came and thanks to God, I passed them and finished the year, advancing to sixth grade. Mama and Papa went to get my report card and I passed with high grades and began to study again in sixth grade with the same teacher.

Sixth grade was harder for me and the teacher explained and I reached the point where I understood and began to fix my grades and add to my points. The teacher told me, "you raised your grade and you're going to pass sixth grade and you'll be able to attend the graduations. I got excited and I continued studying more and more until I had high grades. I had new friends from the other local school and we went out to do activities- clean up the road, round up the garbage and burn it and then we made it to the graduation. We bought

suits, ties and other items for the graduation, but I had only a half-good time because my father wasn't with me. The only people who were there were my mother, my brothers and my sister who accompanied me down the graduation aisle. Her name is Fatima del Rosario Hernández López. They took a lot of photos of me and the teacher to put them in the school's book.

I wasn't going to continue studying, but my father told me that I should keep studying because there was more waiting for me after this 6th grade graduation. He inspired me and I sent my cousin to sign me up for the Institute in San Ramon and she registered me. Classes began and I went. I got to know the institute, the teachers and many new students. I finished the first semester and we began the second. But during second semester I dropped out because the pocket no longer gave the funds needed to continue studying. I dropped out with two months left to finish classes and then I didn't come back and classes began and I wasn't going to continue studying.

And then Julia Sendor came and communicated to me that they were going to help me with a scholarship which I had applied for the previous year. When she told me this, it gave me a lot of inspiration to continue studying and for this reason I am here today. I've put in a lot of efforts to pass the year and I hope I pass because it's a dream that I carry. When Julia came she showed us a lot of things to study and activities to do. Her last day we had a party and we had fun dancing with her and we didn't stop dancing until it was over. We visited her later and said goodbye and she left.

Now that I'm studying, I was chosen to help manage a mini-library with four other people. We arrive and clean the books each day and keep a journal of all the people who come. After Beth left, they sent word that some of the scholarship students could go to the US. They gave me a form which we all had to fill out and we sent them and they came to give us the great news of who had been selected. It turned out that I was selected, along with my cousin Lisseth.

It made me smile to have been chosen. I felt happy because I was selected and they gave me the honor of being able to go to this place. And then they told us that we had to meet in San Ramon. Lisseth and I both went, with my sister Meyling and Lisseth with our grandmother, Dionicia and we had a reunion, we played a game and we presented ourselves to each other. They asked for photos, birth certificates, photocopy of our id cards.

I got all the documents together and handed them in. We went to Immigration office and lined up. It was a long, slow and costly process, with a lot of stops and trips to the city. I wasn't sure if I should get my passport, but my cousin told me to do it. It's a costly process to make all these trips to process these documents, especially when you don't have money.

When I arrived at my house I would say hello and enter and eat. Then I would go to have fun with my friends at the soccer field, and arrived very late back to my house. My dad told me off because I didn't study and he told me, "Study, because if you don't, you're going to do bad in your exams." But thanks to God, I did excellent. I give thanks to God for having given me this gift of learning how to read and write.

I am a person who people really like to talk to and if they don't talk to me, I look for a way to chat with them. I like people who are chatty and who are smart, who aren't bitter or boring. When I want to do something, I do it, but if I don't want to, I don't say yes, because if I won't be excited about it. There are days that I spend, so bored and there's nothing to inspire me and so when I want to do something, I promise, I complete it and I enjoy it.

When I was in sixth grade, I was elected president of the student government and that encompassed all the classrooms of the school. I didn't want to do it, because I believed that I couldn't manage it, but the teacher inspired me and told me I could. And they asked me a lot of things. I answered what I could and after they invited me to a meeting to choose to choose a new director

for our school and they elected the new director by my companions' and teachers' votes. It was an honor to be president of my school and they told me that I was a good lad for president. When I was president, they had me draw the community and I did it as like to draw. So I put a lot of effort and inspiration into it and I drew it with the help of my classmates.

Wendy

My name is Wendy. I was born in 1992 and I am 16 years old. My Mom's name is Vilma Sanchez. I have two brothers and I am the younger sister.

When I was six, my mom traveled to Costa Rica, and

my grandmother took care of us. Her name is Romelia Martinez. When I was seven I met a friend, whose name was Cindy Melendez, with her and my friends, we used to play different types of games. Amongst these games, the most fun were, "saltar, landa, arriba, y futbol."

In my neighborhood they built a library called the Chispa Library. My friend and I used to study at the library. We met our English teacher, Beth Merrill, there. We learned to swim during swim class. When I was in fifth grade I entered a dance group and we had presentations different places in Matagalpa. When I was in the third year of secondary school I had a difficult physics class, but I graduated and now I am in my fourth year. I wish God would help me take care of my mom and granny.



Erick Antonio Lopez Quintero

My name is Erick Antonio Lopez Quintero. I was born on July 7th 1990. I have two siblings, one brother and one sister. Their names are Carlos Alberto Lopez Valdivia and Maria Emilia Quintero. My mom's name is Amparo Del Socarro Quintero Valdivia. My father's name is



Carlos Alberio Lopez Guzman. I live with my maternal grandmother Socorro Quintero in the city of Matagalpa in the neighborhood, La Chispa, where my family, friends and I share very happy moments. When I was 5 years old I started my studies in La Chispa preschool. After that, I studied at the September 11th School, where I finished my primary studies. Then I went to INEP (National Institute Eliseo Picado) where I spent two years. Then in 2006, I transferred to the Tilburg School where I am finishing my secondary education.

When I was 15, I began to study guitar with my professor and friend Norvin Fargas. Together we formed part of the church choir of Conception of Maria, our neighborhood church and we participated in different church activities. I was a coordinator of a small group of young leaders of the community, Member of the Celebrators of the Word. In 2007 I participated in a parochial youth exchange where I was in the municipality of San Dionisio. Upon returning I participated in a forgiveness talk in a place called La Cartuja in the city of Matagalpa.

Then I became the recipient of a La Chispa Library scholarship, where I've been enjoying the visits from the different groups of people. I started working at the library in April, 2007. I have also participated in trips with the brigades that have visited Nicaragua,

where I have made friends like Philip and now Eric and his family. My work at the library is to attend the students who visit us and to help them with their homework and to lend them the books that they need to use. It's a very fun activity because all those who visit are very nice to me, as well as the other workmates who work in the library. In this way, I've made more friends in my neighborhood, as well as other nearby neighborhoods like Sabadell, Carlos Roque and 2nd of March. At the library I met Cindy, Wendy and Sonia. For me, I am a little nervous about the trip because I've never been on



an airplane and I'm scared that it will fall, but at the same time I'm excited and happy because this is such a great opportunity.

In 2008 I became a member of a musical group named Ayote En Miel, we helped out in the church of Santa Maria de Guadalupe. I have also been a soccer player for the La Chispa Eagles team, where I play with my friends Deylin, The Russian and others. We won third place among the CELCTIC youth league where I played 8 games. Later on the Royal Chispa team. I like to study English, but I like history more, of my country and of the World. I participated in a history competition at the Brigadista Sports Court.

I also have two dogs called "Peludo" and "el niño." I have learned to make typical Nicaraguan meals, especially Matagalpan dishes like Indio Viejo, sweet tamales and baked corn rosquilla. I believe this is all of my biography. I hope you have enjoyed it.

Mercedes Guerrero Arista



One 25th of October in 1985, in a village far from the mountains of Matagalpa, the little girl, Mercedes Del Carmen Guerrero Arista was born. She was the last of five brothers and sisters. The little girl sits down on the rocks beneath a tree and barely can recall with wonder all the marvelous moments that she has lived.

She smiles and remembers when she ran through the streets of her little town, San Ramon selling bread, buñuelos, corn pudding,

how much fun she had in those streets. And one man always took a piece of bread, bit it and told her that he didn't like it and that he wasn't going to pay her for it. She would get very sad, thinking that her mother would hit her if she got home with one piece of bread less.

All her brothers and sisters were hard workers in order to help their mother, Doña Marfa, who made with her marvelous hands the most delicious bread of the village. They all studied and when they got out of class, they washed their uniforms and put them out to dry for the next day and then they went out to sell. Later they did their homework. She always taught them their duties as children toward the family and household.

At night we had the opportunity to play. The game we always played was how to get closer to friends and boyfriends. We played "Lucky Rabbit" and the one who was left had to kiss the boy or girl who they liked most. We also placed "the Object" which consisted of putting a very valuable personal object, like a rubber band, bracelet or earrings into a bag. Whoever's object was drawn had to do a scary punishment, like go to the river and back and we were afraid

of meeting up with the spooky ghosts and witches of our town. If you weren't able to complete the punishment, the person who drew your object got to keep it.

The little girl was always very social. In her free time she played baseball with the children from her neighborhood and also danced with the dance groups, especially Nicaraguan folkloric dance. She liked to play cars, ride horses, swim, play marbles and sing. She dreamed that one day when she was older she would be a singer and would travel to Mexico to be with other famous people like Shakira, Selena and Thalía. She never stopped hoping to one day sing together with the ranchero singer Vicente Fernández.

The loveliest stage of childhood ended, when we have no worries, where all the responsibilities and obligations are given or we believe belong to our parents. And the more complicated state arrived: Adolescence. Mercedes began to study high school in Matagalpa. She traveled each day from the village to the city in the public bus and in order to be able to cover the costs of high school, she continued selling, but now it was drinks and popcicles. Thus at 14 years she met a young man who came to her village with a priest and she fell in love. She believed that this was the love of her life- it was just like a soap opera. My mother gave me advice and I always believed that I was right and that no one understood me. With time, I realized that what I wanted was more freedom, understanding and love, but I didn't have the strength to talk to my mother about it, for lack of trust.

At seventeen, I married that young man and nothing went right. I was a big little girl and I didn't know about responsibilities, much less about husbands. We were together for a year and then I began to experience living in a *machista* society, where the woman is in the house working and has not reason to go out on the street to enjoy herself or even to have the opportunity to study.

I, like all young girls, had dreams and illusions that I couldn't make happen with him. I couldn't take it anymore and I couldn't stand that the people in the village believed that if I separated from my

husband, that God was going to punish me or that I should have the children that God wanted me to have and that I needed to accept if the man had two or more women. What a horrible situation we lived in and still live in in a society where the one who loses is the woman.

It was then that I met a great woman who gave me strength, in the moment when I most needed it. At that time, I saw her like a mother or like a sister, but in reality she was my friend. I write to you about someone who lives and shares in the state of Vermont whom many of you have been lucky enough to meet. I'm talking about Beth, the woman who lives in Nicaragua and Vermont, whose marvelous qualities have her fighting for Nicaragua and all of the people who make up this wonderful country. It was she who showed me the path that I find myself on today, studying my last year of sociology with so many sacrifices, hoping to be able to support the development of my province, through the knowledge that I've obtained.

At 20, I met a marvelous man who showed me how to respect, love and value myself. I greatly appreciate all he has done for my development at a person. This man is named Jose and he is from Spain and 7 years my senior. He is very kind and above all has a great heart. Together we are fighting together to obtain our dream as a couple: to change the world – a world that's more just and in which we humans don't waste so much, that we always think in a sustainable way to leave it as our inheritance to our children.

Many might say that I write too much, but I want to tell them that what I've put is the truth and from my heart because I have so many wishes that you all- friends, Planting Hope co-workers, continue to know me, since I feel like you're part of my family. It's for this reason that I write with so much trust and without shame about my life, in order to share it with each one of you who wishes to know a little more about me, the little girl who now is 23 years old and with a great desire to make something of her life in order to help her country.