



Casa Materna

Mary Ann Jackman

FRIENDS OF THE CASA NEWSLETTER

Connecting you with mothers in rural Nicaragua



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A Ray of Hope and Legacy of Friendship

by Kitty Madden

The nights here in Matagalpa grow longer as we await the coming of the Light. I take this moment to thank you for the light you have been for us all these years.

I am remembering tonight the warm invitation I received from Mary Ann Jackman in 1985 to "come and work with me and my people in Nicaragua." Though she did not live to see the Casa that would bear her name and welcome so many mothers, we feel her presence here with us daily.

This is the last letter that I will write from the Casa Materna, a project I have helped to nurture and one that has so lovingly nurtured me...for over 27 years. Perhaps this is the thousandth letter I am writing and yet the words do not come easily.

Those of you who have been with me from the beginning in 1991 remember the monthly black-and-white xeroxed letters I sent. As one response to the silent epidemic of maternal death in Nicaragua, I began to share the stories of our Casa mothers. I wanted to give you a sense of being right here in this sacred work of accompaniment. In time, my simple letters became this newsletter and our list grew from 300 to over 1,600. I had to discontinue my monthly "heart letters" with handwritten notes to more than 500 people a year in September 2014.

In total, more than \$1.75 million was sent in solidarity from you, our friends in the North. I wanted you to know how we used your generous donations, about the amazing work our Casa staff was doing on a shoestring, and of our deep gratitude. The Casa mothers and staff were always amazed that others so far away, who had never even met them, would care about their wellbeing.

Of course, many of you *did* meet the mothers and staff in person. Sometimes the Casa hosted groups for a week and often welcomed visitors for a few hours. All came to share

skills or to teach and, more importantly "to be with" the people here. Many of you stayed in the Casita, which for 17 years provided a welcoming space for visitors as well as financial support of the work.

And there were *so many* mothers! Referrals came through our network of midwives and mothers in follow-up communities as word spread that the Casa was a

welcoming place of loving care. By June of this year, we had welcomed more than 17,750 mothers and newborns. Each one a miracle!

The path was not always smooth. We nearly lost the Casa in 1995. How grateful we were for the mothers and midwives who came together to insure that the work could continue on! The recovery, actually a rebirth, of the Casa, also brought important lessons and renewed staff commitment to the vital mission.

But the Casa was not meant to continue forever. We had set out to make sure that women did not die in childbirth in Nicaragua and we were able to make such significant strides that a Detroit donor said to me recently, "Well, Kitty, I hear that you have worked yourselves out of a job." And wasn't that the goal of this project when it began? Nicaragua reports a 75% reduction in maternal deaths, in response to the UN Millennial Development Goals.

While I want this last letter to convey a sense of profound gratitude, peacefulness, and closure, I realize that, on many levels, the Casa Materna is not ending. It lives on in the 177 government Casa Maternas for which it was the prototype.

But most of all, our Casa continues in the lives of each mother and child, in their families, and in the lives of all who have helped to support us in our "heart work." The legacy of the Casa Materna Mary Ann Jackman is indeed a legacy of friendship that shines through every experience of darkness.

Peace, Kitty (kittynewmoon@gmail.com)



Marvin Ortega Vargas

Driver, 15 years



I remember painting the Casa with Manuel in the middle of the night and he taught me to drive the pick-up truck.

I am grateful to Jeronima for encouraging me in this work. I have learned so much.

Harold Gomez Gutierrez

Accountant, 20 years

I remember working in the early years with Sonya to review projects and expenditures. Everyone knows that I love working with figures and being sure that accounts balance. I also enjoy making graphs and charts to help other visualize and understand our work.



Manuel Talavera Ubeda

Driver, 22 years



I was very much affected by our visits to take provisions to families who experienced so much devastation from Hurricane Mitch. I also

transported the lifeless body of Susana Zeledon from the hospital morgue back to her home community. I am grateful that in all these years, I only had to do that once.

Marvin Segueira Valdivia

Driver, 20 years



My first year as a driver a mother gave birth in the ambulance on the way to the hospital.

I was amazed, and anxious, and then relieved when all turned out well. I will be forever grateful for my time at the Casa.

Gladis Ch

Primary Ca



also loved tea informally and foot, hand, and of the skills I share.

Marcia Valdivia Chavarria

Nurse educator, 17 years

I loved seeing the empowerment of the mothers as they began to recognize their sexual and reproductive rights through our workshops in the Casa and in the follow-up communities.



Norma Ochoa Lopez

Coordinator of everyday services, 15 years



My favorite memories center around receiving the babies back from the hospital, prenatal

exercises and working with the mothers in the kitchen as we learned from one other. I also loved our workshops on Alternatives to Violence.

Carmen Montoya Gutierrez

Nurse educator, 10 years



I have enjoyed watching the development of adolescents as they sought to make decisions about what they wanted to do with

their lives. Also loved seeing the socialization of the mothers in the Casa as they daily became less timid and expressed their concern for one another.

Lucila Mantilla Gonzalez (Dona Chila)

Lay midwife and cook - 24 years of service/retired



Remembering when Dr. Gloria Compte invited me to help out part-time in the early years with prenatal massage of the mothers as well as cooking, sewing and

crafts. I also shared my knowledge of natural medicine. (Pictured with her husband, Domingo)



María Pineda

Casa nurse – 20 years



It has been a blessing welcoming each new mother while assessing her physical condition. I have

...chasing formally and ...d massage (head, ...d back) is one ...have been able to

Rosa Lanzas Romero

Casa Promoter for Follow-up/weekend coordinator, 22 yrs



Being with the mothers and sharing their lives and experiences each weekend together with our weekly visits in their homes – this is what will remain in my memory. Also I am remembering happily all of the friends who have come to work

with us here and my special partners of FCM.

Miryam Garcia Hernandez

Administrator/accountant, 27 years



My favorite memory is that of learning to drive in two weeks and thus being able to help take the mothers to the hospital when we had only one driver.

Jerónima Ubeda Cruz

Casa coordinator (seamstress, cook, etc), 27 years



I feel very proud remembering those early years when we worked long shifts, often alone on weekends, and attended the women

who were the poorest and had serious health problems. And not one mother died!



Memories

Kitty Madden

Social worker/companion on the journey, 27 years



Walking with the mothers and leading exercises has truly been my "heart work."

Outstanding moments were: being with Telma, who was deaf and mute – I was the only one on duty and she came to tell me, with hand signals and a "whoosh" that her water had broken.

Gladys Sanchez Gonzelez

Nurse educator, 20 years



My favorite memory is being able to attend the mothers when they first arrived

and also helping to organize the network of rural midwives working with us.

Maura Mairena Martinez

Part-time Ob-Gyn overseeing medical care, 20 years



All these years I have watched the great care that the staff has had for the mothers. Though I also work for MINSA as my full

time job, I realize, with regret, that the Casa Materna has never been recognized for the amazing work that they began in 1991 and they are the prototype for all the government Casas that have followed. I am grateful to have been even a small part of this life affirming project.

Socorro Urbina Valle

Casa promoter for Follow-up/weekend coordinator, 23 yrs



For me, my favorite memory was just being with the mothers every other weekend, experiencing day to day life – cooking, singing, doing exercises, talking

about their lives. Also I enjoyed our follow-up visits with the mothers in their communities.

As the Casa staff shares memories, we of the Friends of Casa Materna board express our deepest gratitude for their faithful care of the mothers and newborns. Our thanks to Susan Lambert for the staff photos.

Walking Each Other Home

by Kitty Madden

"It is truly like coming home." Over and over again we heard these words from Casa mothers from years past as they returned for Thanksgiving Encounters over the past several months. And just as when they had lived in community at the Casa before their children's births, the mothers quickly returned to their daily routine of helping with cooking and cleaning, doing exercises, having medical checks, sharing art and educational sessions and, above all, sharing their lives and stories with one another.

Recent participants included Isaura, who had given birth to twin sons 22 years ago, and Yelka, who had given birth to her first child last year. (Yelka's mother had stayed at the Casa herself 20 years earlier awaiting Yelka's birth). As a single mom, Yelka perked up when Isaura mentioned her twin sons. "Are your sons handsome?" Yelka asked. Isaura assured her they were. Then, thinking of Yelka, I asked, "And are they married?" "One is and one isn't." At which point, Yelka smiled and cocked her head as she said to Isaura, "Um, you could maybe be my mother-in-law."

Watching the interaction between Yelka and Isaura who had met just a day earlier, I realized once again that this is the heart of what made the work of the Casa Materna so heartwarming and miraculous during these past 27 years. It is the way in which the mothers so naturally cared for each other that was at the heart of the success we have known. Younger mothers watched out for the older mothers who had perhaps never been out of their home communities and the older mothers lovingly prepared those awaiting their first child.

We are grateful for the grant from the **Quailroost Foundation** in honor/memory of our dear friend Dr. Loretta Ortiz y Pino which made it possible for us to invite mothers back for weekly Thanksgiving Encounters, truly mini retreats. Here we share in photos some of the experiences:

Massage, braiding, role plays, art work, exercises, cooking, finding their names and information in the Casa registry.

It is these mothers who will continue the legacy of the good work that has been Casa Materna. Yes, in the end, as Ram Dass reminds us, "We are all just walking each other home."



While the formal work of the Casa Materna MAJ ends December 31st, it is the hope of the staff that they will be able to continue to use the resources of the Casa, through rental or sale, in the service of the needs of the mothers organized in their home communities.

Thank you for your many years of support!