

LOS HERMANOS

Villanueva Brigadistas Newsletter — Volume 11

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Profile of a Brigadista: Maria Antonia Osorio

Maria Antonia Osorio is one of the original and long-standing members of the Directiva, the leaders of the Brigadistas. She was born in a community outside of Villanueva called La Jolota. Her father died when she was only 5. Her mother remarried and then was widowed again. All told, her mother had 15 children, 13 of whom survived. She recalls that her mother had a difficult life, making ends meet by taking in laundry to wash and iron.

As a child, Maria Antonia grew up poor and had to travel a considerable distance to go to school each day in Villanueva. She got married at age 17, but continued to pursue her education. After giving birth to her first son, Gilbert, she left her son in the care of her mother-in-law while she studied nursing. Each weekend she would make the hour-long trip home to see her family from the city of Leon where she attended school.

While she went to school, her husband supported the family by working in construction. In her third year of nursing school, she had her second son, Mauriel.



Maria Antonia Osorio with a young member of her community

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Thirteen days after giving birth, she again left her newborn in the care of her mother-in-law to finish her nursing program.

Having earned her 3-year nursing degree, she was assigned to the remote community of San Pedro del Norte to complete her compulsory year of social work. As before, she would return on the weekends to see her family. After the year of service, she asked to be placed in Villanueva. It was at this time that she was given the position of community educator and became connected with Candida, a founding member of the Directiva. She also met Sr. Carolyn Sweeny, OSF and the two Maryknoll Sisters who would help create the Brigadista program, Sr. Pat Edmiston and Sr. Ann Hayden.

As a result of her training in social work, she began to realize how much of an impact she had on others. She would hear from her family members and those she served that she helped them to feel strong and to recognize how they could help others. In her travels, she talks with people and finds ways to respond to their needs whether it is with food, medicine, advice or encouragement.

Further, she says that she believes in God and studies the Bible. Her life's work is a response to the biblical call to love our neighbors as ourselves.

“Not Our Program But Theirs”

by Kip Hargrave

Ann Hayden and Pat Edmiston were two Maryknoll Sisters sent to St. Andrews to raise money for a project in Villanueva, Nicaragua. They came to our parish in the early 1990's to talk to us about their hope to organize the people of Villanueva to help stop a scourge of women dying in childbirth in the villages surrounding the town.

Baby Weighing

By Charles Clinton

In each of the 56 sectors in Villanueva, Brigadistas hold regular community health sessions to attend to the needs of their people. One of the most important functions is weighing babies. All children under two years old are weighed to make sure they have an appropriate weight for their age. It takes a team of three Brigadistas to do the work. One Brigadista holds an educational talk while another weighs the babies. A third volunteer counsels the mothers. If the baby has a normal weight, they congratulate the mother and ask how she's feeding the baby (breast feeding, supplementary food, etc.) and schedule the next appointment. If the baby is underweight, the Brigadista provides nutritional advice to the mother.

In order to best serve all the health needs of their communities, Brigadistas also

Baby Weighing



need to manage the flow of people coming to the session. There are three groups of people who attend—mothers with babies to weigh, pregnant women and people with chronic conditions—and each gets a number when they arrive to establish the order in which they will be seen. Some people need to be given medicine or referred to the doctors and nurses in the clinic in Villanueva. Finally, if the Brigadistas are made aware of people in their community who are too sick or pregnant to make it to the session, the Brigadistas visit them in their homes.

“Not Our Program But Theirs” Continued from page 2

Frank and Meme Woolever took a particular interest in the project and organized a trip to Villanueva in 1999 to see what St. Andrews could do to help. I had worked in Central America as a Maryknoll seminarian and in Bolivia with my wife and kids. So it seemed natural that I would join the travelers. But Terri and I had four little kids and two demanding jobs. There was no way, we decided, that either one of us could become heavily involved.

Many years later we changed our direction. By 2012, Pat and Ann had left Villanueva for other work; Frank Woolever had died; Meme had moved to New York City; St. Andrews was closed; and Kathy Nock and Coco Koseki -who had taken over the Villanueva project responsibility after Frank's death - decided they needed to turn to other life tasks.

That left the relationship with the project in Villanueva at loose ends. A few of us called a meeting at All Saints to see if there was still interest in keeping the relationship alive. We were surprised to see how many people arrived and decided, as a group, to put together one more trip in 2013 to determine if anything was still going on. Kathy and Coco introduced us by mail to the Nicaraguans who now ran the program and off we went.

The group that went to investigate the viability of the program was astonished by what they found. There were 80-100 people working in almost 20 villages providing help not only to pregnant women but also to their newborn babies. Furthermore, the Directiva (Maria Antonia, Candida, Lucas and Juanita) were so well organized that within a day of our arrival they

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had met with us and explained the need for a much better organized relationship between St. Lucy's, All Saints and the brigadista program. We were, and still are, their only source of outside funding and the Directiva needed to know exactly how much money we would send each year on what schedule. It was very clear from that first day that this was not our program but theirs. It wasn't as much us investigating them but them investigating us.

I couldn't help but remember a devastating talk given to some Maryknoll priests, sisters and lay missionaries in Bolivia many years before. Bishop Saintz told us that although he appreciated Maryknoll's many years in Bolivia, "If when you leave" he said, "your work does not continue, better had you never come."

I can truly say that the work that Ann, Pat, Frank, Meme, Kathy, Coco and so many others from St. Andrews, St. Lucy's and All Saints began in the 1990's continues today because we realized that it was never OUR project but theirs. The Brigadista Project is a Nicaraguan project that we help with around the edges. The current leadership both in Nicaragua and here in Syracuse realizes that the project will prosper and our contribution will be helpful as long as we maintain that attitude.

Annual Craft Sale sponsored by Peg Barnett will be held at Upstate Sewing & Vacuum Store, which is at 2628 Erie Blvd E between Midler & Thompson Road, from November 1 to the end of December 2021. Proceeds from the sale will go to our Sister Community. Many thanks to Peg!

Short Videos wanted!

Goal: sustain and deepen our parishes' relationship with our Sister Community in Nicaragua in a time when we can't travel to Nicaragua and to model how the Directiva could share more about their work with us in exchange.

Where to Send the Videos You Make: Save and keep the video file on your equipment and send a copy of it to Charles (cclinton515@gmail.com or 315-289-8493) and Waded (wadedtazz@yahoo.com or 315-256-4333). If the video is on your phone, send it via text. If it's on your computer, send it via email.

If you have technical issues or want video suggestions let one of us know!

Contributions Welcome

Thank you from both of our parishes for being so generous during this pandemic year!

If you wish to help support our Sister Community and their efforts, you can make a tax deductible contribution as follows:

Make checks payable to either

St. Lucy's Church, or

All Saints Church

Be sure to put in the memo section: "Sister Community".

Or place your contribution in the envelopes available in the back of each supporting church

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