



As old as the revolution

By Debbie Howlett
Of the Emerald

Emerald editor Debbie Howlett recently returned from an 11-day trip to Nicaragua. This is the third in a five part series.

Among the many impressions of Nicaragua, a few are sharper, more focused than the rest. Some images stay in the mind longer, blotting out ones that are less dramatic.

The youthfulness of the Sandinistas is an image that lingers. The young children's faces come back to smile, to haunt.

A young boy stands guard near an airport terminal exit. His green fatigues hang limply on his slouching frame. His field cap tips rakishly to the right. An inch long cigarette butt droops from his lower lip, grey-blue smoke curling around his smooth chin. An automatic rifle hangs carelessly from his right shoulder.

Barefoot kids press toward the foreign tourists. Small, dirty palms reach out, begging for anything of value. Pesos, pens, candy.

But not all of the images haunt.

A group of neighborhood boys play baseball with a broomstick and a hard black ball that resembles the ball used in field hockey. A smaller, frustrated boy strikes out and storms off to sit alone in the tall grass of a vacant lot.

It is clear that politics and the Sandinista government mean very little to a 4-year-old child, that happiness is the measure

for everything.

The youngest Nicaraguans only want food in their bellies. They want clothes, and shoes to cover their bare feet. They want a home, with a roof that keeps the rain out.

The children, many of them as old as the revolution itself, won't equate food and health care with Marxism, Capitalism, or Communism. The older kids are taught that their government won't terrorize them as political leaders have in the past.

Sometime along the way a child begins to learn about the significance of U.S. intervention and Soviet economic aid. He comes to realize striking out in a neighborhood baseball game isn't as significant as it once was. Perhaps the realization will come as the child sits among the tall grass and cries for a his brother, who died at war last week.

Sometime along the way, the child grows up.

Story and Photos by Debbie Howlett

