

NEWS FROM THE ROOFTOP



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Fall 2009

CARLOS: A BOY OUT OF TIME

by Charlene Meyer

As I look back on nearly 20 years of traveling to Nicaragua, I ask myself why I am so passionate about this country I have come to love. True, I am still not used to the raw beauty of tropical forests, smoking volcanoes dotting the mountains, natural waterfalls with beautiful flowers, and stars so bright you feel you can touch them. But what keeps bringing us back are the big brown eyes that follow us as we traipse through their mountainside settlements of dirt-floor shacks as we check on the projects funded by friends of The Tin Roof Foundation. We are searching for the most urgent needs and revisiting children and families who have touched our hearts.

Today, it is Carlos. His full name is Carlos Noel Llanes Pineda. We told you about him in our last *News from the Rooftop*, but today his plight has deepened and we are desperate to help him. He is 6 years old and was born with a birth defect called hypospadias, which is the absence of a urinary opening. I have been unable to forget this precious little boy since meeting him in March.

CARLOS WAITS FOR HELP

Our planned visit with Carlos, his mother Carolina, and his siblings proves to be a challenge. We received good news several weeks ago that Carolina had the lumps in her breast biopsied, thanks to a Tin Roof donor. We celebrated as we heard the news that the results were negative for the reoccurrence of breast cancer. However, we received sad news that Carlos has been back in the hospital. His condition has worsened as we wait for the doctor and hospital to set a date for the first of several needed surgeries.

I desperately want to see Carlos. We are told the family has moved from their village



in Somoto and no one seems to know where they live now. My frustrations intensify as we continue our search. We have only hours left before we must leave to make the long drive back to Managua. At the last minute, we receive word of his location. We quickly load up our 4-wheel drive truck and within 15 minutes we are descending a steep, rocky jeep trail that will lead us to him.

A MOTHER IS DESPERATE

In the distance I see a frail boy sitting on a plastic chair in the doorway of a humble house. His lap and legs are covered with a thin towel. His face is pale and the sparkle I remember in his eyes from our last visit has vanished. He is listless and barely responds to our questions.

Carolina, his mother, tells us he was just released from the hospital yesterday. She was given prescriptions for several tests and an appointment back at the Managua hospital in four days. Anything beyond physician and room cost is not covered. The family must pay for all needed medical tests and medications as well as care for the patient around the clock and bring in all the food. In desperation,

Carolina has rented her home and moved in with another family to get money for tests and transportation costs, but it is not enough. We give Carolina \$50 to help with the cost of tests and travel for his upcoming appointment. We know this is not enough to save Carlos.

My heart is broken. How is it possible this young boy is still waiting for surgery? His condition is deteriorating each day. We discuss our options. We can no longer wait for his turn on the long list at a government hospital. We can have surgery done privately. Carlos will need several surgeries at a projected cost of \$15,000 for private surgeries. We are out of options; it is a matter of life and death for Carlos.

HELP BRING HOPE TO CARLOS

We need your help to save this child. Won't you please help us with a donation? It is not too late for Carlos, and we know if we can just get him the surgeries he needs, he can be on his way to leading a better life, full of hope for the future. Please send your donation today to The Tin Roof Foundation, or call Charlene Meyer, (513) 474-4540 to discuss your contribution.

BRINGING HOPE TO KIDS

TIN ROOF FOUNDATION UPDATES

Here are some updates of Tin Roof Foundation projects we have written about in previous *News from the Rooftop*. Thanks to all the Tin Roof donors for making these projects possible!



Old House, New House

Maria Lourdes Lopez runs up the steep, rocky path as she sees our 4-wheel truck approaching. She gives us a big hug then takes my hand guiding me down the very steep, rocky path to her new home located in Quebrada Honda, a very poor community near the Honduras border. Maria thanks us over and over again for making it possible for her family to live in a home so beautiful, free from mud floors when it rains and wild animals stealing what little food the family has stored in the house. Maria is so proud. Another prayer has been answered.

Surgery Saves Martin's Life



Martin Diaz Hernandez, age 10, is the youngest of six children. Last September he became very ill with a severe headache and a high fever. He received medications and the headaches and fevers subsided, but one week later Martin was unable to walk or use his right hand.

Martin was near death. The Tin Roof Foundation helped with hospital costs for testing to determine what was wrong. He was diagnosed with a tumor in his upper neck severely affecting his respiratory and nervous system. Martin's tumor was successfully removed.

After returning home, his family constructed 'rehabilitation equipment' to begin the long recovery process. Martin's family built a set of bars out of trees to use for his physical therapy needs. Martin's life has been saved.

New La Laguna Meal Center Opens



The villagers in La Laguna celebrate the construction of a community/meal center. This multi-purpose facility with a kitchen and storage area will be used to prepare and serve the children meals in a safe, clean area. It will also be used as a clinic for the doctor's bi-weekly visits as well as many other community needs.

Therapy Equipment Helps Special Needs Children

Families Especiales was thrilled to receive much-needed therapy equipment/supplies, which makes it possible to help many additional special needs children in the Matagalpa area.



Tobiel Castellon, paralyzed from polio, receives his new Personal Energy Transportation (PET) vehicle. Tobiel's dream has become a reality.



Polio Victim Receives Wheels

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.

THE TRUTH ABOUT FOOD SECURITY IN NICARAGUA

by Peter Schaller

Despite having the largest land mass in Central America and the smallest population, Nicaragua continues to be the poorest country in the region. Economic indicators have been declining over the past two years, due in part to the international economic crisis and also to the country's social and economic policies. Nicaragua has the lowest annual per capita income in Central America, barely reaching US\$1,000, according to sources such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Forty-eight percent of Nicaragua's population lives in poverty. Of those, the majority live in rural areas.

In the rural areas, particularly in northern Nicaragua, poverty rates are much higher, with as much as 70 percent of the population below the poverty line, meaning that they survive on less than \$2 per day. In the most critical areas, nearly half of the population lives in extreme poverty, surviving on less than \$1 a day.

MALNUTRITION: THE CHILDREN SUFFER MOST

One of the most telling indicators of poverty, particularly in areas like Matagalpa and Madriz, is the malnutrition rate among children. Nationally, 27 percent of Nicaragua's children suffer from some degree of malnutrition, though in the mountainous regions of the north, nearly 50 percent of the children are malnourished.

Malnourishment is a complex problem that has to do with social, economic and health factors. In most cases, poor families simply don't earn enough money to buy enough food for their families. The lack of access to nutritious foods also contributes to the problem, as many children do not get enough vitamins, minerals and proteins from the traditional diet of rice, beans and corn. In addition to these problems, most families in the rural areas have very little formal education, and thus a very limited understanding of nutrition. So, in few words, in order to reduce malnutrition, families need more income, better access to food products and health education—no simple matter.



INFLATION FORETELLS DISMAL OUTLOOK

Unfortunately, the outlook for Nicaragua in the coming years is bleak in terms of food security. With the global economic crisis, Nicaragua's floundering economy has receded. While economic growth rates in 2006 reached 4 percent, this year's growth will be much less, and inflation is also in the double digits. When petroleum prices sky rocketed on the international markets, food prices in Nicaragua increased substantially; however, while petroleum prices have fallen, food prices are still elevated. This means that most poor families will have even greater difficulty

securing enough food for their families, as minimum wage increases have not been commensurate with inflation rates.

Nicaragua's food prices are the highest among all countries in Central America. A study done by the Central American Integration System found that, despite having the lowest income levels, Nicaragua has the highest

food prices in the Central American region. According to data from June 2008, the average Nicaraguan family needs US \$282 a month to purchase the basic and essential food and hygiene products for their families. Since 2006, the price of these basic products in Nicaragua has increased an amazing 289 percent! Needless to say, this equation adds up to increased malnutrition rates in 2009 and 2010, assuming that economic conditions improve.

THE SEVENTY-FIVE DOLLAR CURE

Humanitarian organizations working in Nicaragua will be challenged to direct more energy and resources to food security initiatives, including school lunch programs, school gardens, family gardens, and public health programs. The current social and economic scenario is extremely dangerous, especially



for children living in poverty. Malnourished children also have great difficulties in school and are much more prone to drop out. When families don't have enough food to put on the table, education takes a back seat. Improving nutritional conditions for children alleviates some pressure on the family, and generally assures that they will remain in school.

Feeding children in Nicaragua is, comparatively, very inexpensive. Through wholesale purchasing, in kind donations of food supplies, and the use of local products, each meal served costs only 30 cents. This means that a child can receive a nutritious school lunch for less than \$75 a year. Seventy-five dollars is a small investment, though it can change a child's life and provide them with new hope for the future.

If you would like to sponsor a child's meals for a year, please contact Charlene Meyer, (513) 474-4540.

NO RICE, NO BEANS, JUST LOVE

by Romona Baker

For almost two weeks, I have been carrying a video camera in remote Nicaraguan communities among some of God's poorest followers. In the cities, we cringe to see children looking for food in the dumps, scrounging for a meal. Here where I am spending time, there is no luxury of such a dump. Here there is no place to forage for food. There is a barren landscape, a few meager little gardens that wilt and die from lack of water, and severely malnourished children, silent, watchful, totally lacking the lightness and sparkle of children who surround me at home.

Perhaps, since you cannot see the images caught on my video camera, I can convey the poverty, both physical and spiritual, that surrounds me here, that seeps through the landscape and haunts me as I review my videos later. With all the hopelessness, however, there is an equally profound beauty about these people and this place. I would like you to know both.



Here, on a desolate mountain at the end of a path, I bend to enter the four-foot door into a smoke-filled house. As my eyes adjust to the darkness, I see a woman seated on a tall wooden bench, which turns out to be where two grandchildren sleep on the worn boards. There are others in the house standing and sitting on another bench, her daughters and several other children. But the woman draws my attention and my love. Bent and elderly she welcomes us, amazingly undisturbed to have half a dozen, giant, white-skinned strangers loaded down with packs

and cameras suddenly come through her door. I believe this was the area they assured us had not had any North Americans visit.

I move to greet her with more than the usual handshake but the warmth of a hug and touching cheek to cheek with a gentle kiss. She has a rag tied around her head like a bandana, with one cor-

ner hanging over one eye. Someone asks about her eye. It has been sore and matted for several days but she has not seen the doctor yet. She rises to blow the fire from its smoky smolder to a flame as I film the big black pot of water with little un-ripe bananas floating in it. That means there is no rice or beans in the house for the family to eat that day. They have gathered the green bananas from the scrubby mountain forest around the hut.

As we walk away we meet her husband, a discouraged, old man with a machete who is returning from working in his small field of coffee. He does not have the money for the chemicals needed to return his plants to healthy production. It turns out this elderly couple is my age and I identify even more with their plight as I turn my back, determined not to forget them. Perhaps I can help others see them through my description and encourage another friend to give a little money that will permit them to get food for their children, medicine for her eye, and the few dollars it takes to make his coffee productive. I wish this for them and the hundreds of similar families I did not visit or come to love.

Perhaps that day it was the smoke that made me wipe my eyes as I left, but today it is the memory of her graciousness, a grace she willingly shared with others. Her acceptance of us and herself was devoid of the notion of status. She was so willing to tolerate our invasion of her hovel on a day when, like other days, she was sick and her grandchildren were hungry.

MEMORIAL GIFTS . . .

DONATED BY:

Bert & Mary Ann Argo

Mr. & Mrs. A. J. Bell

Judy & Guy Chandler

Bruce & Jan Douglas

Jerry & Bettie Douglas

Barry & Judy Evans

Pat & Lyndon Farmer

Gary & Peggy Goldschmidt

Jenny & Jessie Gormas

Sue & Lisa Green

Tony & Phyllis Iannelli

Barbara Ingram

Patrick Jolliff

Paul & Eileen Karl

Sarah Kilgore

Kathy Lisner

Kathy & Barry Lisner

IN MEMORY OF:

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Dr. Robert Thierauf

Pat Wallace

Greg Kaiser

Alice Savage

Amanda Bell

John Bell

Esther Morton

Pat Wallace

Al's Mom, Marian Meyer

Alice Cappel Savage

Marian Meyer

Marian Meyer

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Marian Meyer

Mary Ann Flynn

Al's Mom, Marian Meyer

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Marian Meyer

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Mr. & Mrs. R. W.

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Peggy & Russ Monjar

Barbara Parker

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Mrs. Virginia Schmidt

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Don & Linda Teasdale

Karl & Walt Thesing

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Grace Lohmueller

Al's Mom, Marian Meyer

Michael Murphy

Marian Meyer

Al's Mom, Marian Meyer

Donald Megison

Gretchen Geers

Richard Baker's Dad,

George H. Wade

Rich Wood

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Marge Wilbers

Marian Meyer

Al's Mom, Marian Meyer

Glen Garland

Marian Meyer

Rodger & Marian Schwarz

George H. Wade

Al's Mom, Marian Meyer

Marian Meyer

Marian Meyer

Bob

Robert Mullee

. . . HONOR GIFTS

DONATED BY:

Alexander & Carol Aronis

Wayne Barfels

Margaret Collins

Richard & Marilyn Cozzi

Rick & Patty Kanis

Ursula Kramer

Mr. & Mrs. Robert Kushner

Dan Maloney

Carl Marinacci

Peggy & Russ Monjar

Brian Myres

Don & Mary Lee Olinger

Debbie Schaller

Vickie & Doug Schneider

Jean Snook

Keata Tapp

Nancy Tidd

IN HONOR OF:

Al & Charlene Meyer

Kathy Lisner

Russ & Peggy Monjar

Charlene Farrell

Bill & Nancy Mullaney's

50th anniversary

Grandchildren, Trey, Reid,

Fiona, Ella & Liam

Karen Dyer's birthday

Tin Roof Foundation's work

Sue Keefe

Al & Charlene Meyer

Al Meyer's birthday

Martha Brattstrom's

dedication in educating children

Chuck & Judy Thom

My ESL students: Eleana,

Carmen, Luis, & Henrique

Al Meyer's birthday

Little Wilson Dick's 5th

birthday

Peggy Taylor's birthday

Bill Tidd

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 HIDDEN GIFTS OF SHARING

by Romona Baker

Tin Roof Foundation keeps asking me to share my bounty with those who have so little. My faith and my conscience agree, and yet I have found myself reacting a bit like my son when asked to share his toy truck with another toddler. It is difficult to open my hand, for this sharing is demanding what I worked hard for and what I might need in the future.

To my surprise and delight, however, I have discovered through my work in Nicaragua, a new meaning for the word "share" that makes giving to others so rewarding, I am eager for my next opportunity. It is the concept that instead of taking a pie or casserole to a neighbor in need, I am taking part in a pot-luck dinner. This banquet of love is the surprise that overtakes most visitors to

Nicaragua. Visitors able to give so little, receive so much! They experience the communion of loving acceptance, different from the status assessment necessary in the US that must happen between the shake of a hand and a hug. We find ourselves accepted in spite of our wealth and the privilege of being born in the USA.

Julie Blacksher, a Methodist pastor, said, "I went to Nicaragua planning to help the poor. I thought about how much I have and how much I wanted to share with those who were not as fortunate. I was taken by surprise that they had as much, if not more to share with us. It was humbling and an extremely emotional experience. It shook my reality, this blessing from God." Kathryn Boone said, "I expected to like them, I just never expected to love them so deeply."

As I watched a woman from the U.S. "sharing" a long, deeply felt hug with a Nicaraguan woman, I realized this was a different sharing than most of us intend with the poor. They had only met an hour before, yet they recognize each other. They knew that God blesses them by simply allowing them to meet and that they would never meet again. They soaked in each other's love.

It is with this new definition of sharing that I want to share the love of Jesus Christ with the poor of Nicaragua. They are my uncles and sisters, my nieces and grandchildren, and my brothers. Just as it is my pleasure to send my aunt a flower on her birthday, it is a joy to feed a mother's child in Nicaragua or provide surgery for someone's grandfather. For we share the same Father.

GUSTAV AND THE CAT'S CRADLE

by Romona Baker

Gustov has the distinctive straw hat of an Ozark mountaineer and a ready smile. As he leads us around his land to see the fields of peppers and describe its irrigation and fertilization, it is apparent he is an experienced farmer, if only for these two-acre-sized fields. A small loan has permitted him to increase his production so that now he hires others in this poverty stricken community to harvest his crop. His productivity not only provides for his family, but places money from the outside into the pockets of others in his community.

The next day he watches the activities we do with the children—face painting, reading, and crafts. As I show several children tricks with a loop of string including Cup and Saucer, Jacob's Ladder, and Cat's in the Cradle, and even one that traps a

partner's hand then releases it, he became a participating captive.

The children run off to another activity, and I hand Gustav a loop. His short calloused fin-



gers struggle to follow the intricate catching and releasing of string. Again and again we started afresh as in my struggling Spanish I try to say, "Keep the thumbs and drop the others." Whether from excitement or nervousness, the shaking of his fingers did not help. His good humored persistence fascinates a number of his friends who come to watch the concentration required of such a silly pursuit.

Such interludes with Nicaraguans are not only intensely fun for me but they capture a snapshot of the Nicaraguan character: open friendliness, curiosity, and eagerness for every new idea, combined with a dignity and eloquence that is never lost even in friendliness and play. To share in such incidents of God's grace doesn't always require words. Sometimes it just takes smiles, hugs, and a piece of string.

MEETING AND LOVING MARINA

by Romona Baker

Our group of a dozen North Americans approaches the little fenced room serving as a preschool and meal center like a flock of chickens bunching, stopping, and scattering, but finally at the gate. A wiry little woman in a blue apron and a scarf around her head like a cap pops out of the gate. Her weathered 67-year-old face is delicately and delightfully framed by dangling golden earrings.

Startled by our presence, she immediately starts with the closest and hugs each of us, kissing each woman on the cheek. Then as quickly as she has descended on us, off she runs next door, returning a moment later with several plastic cups.

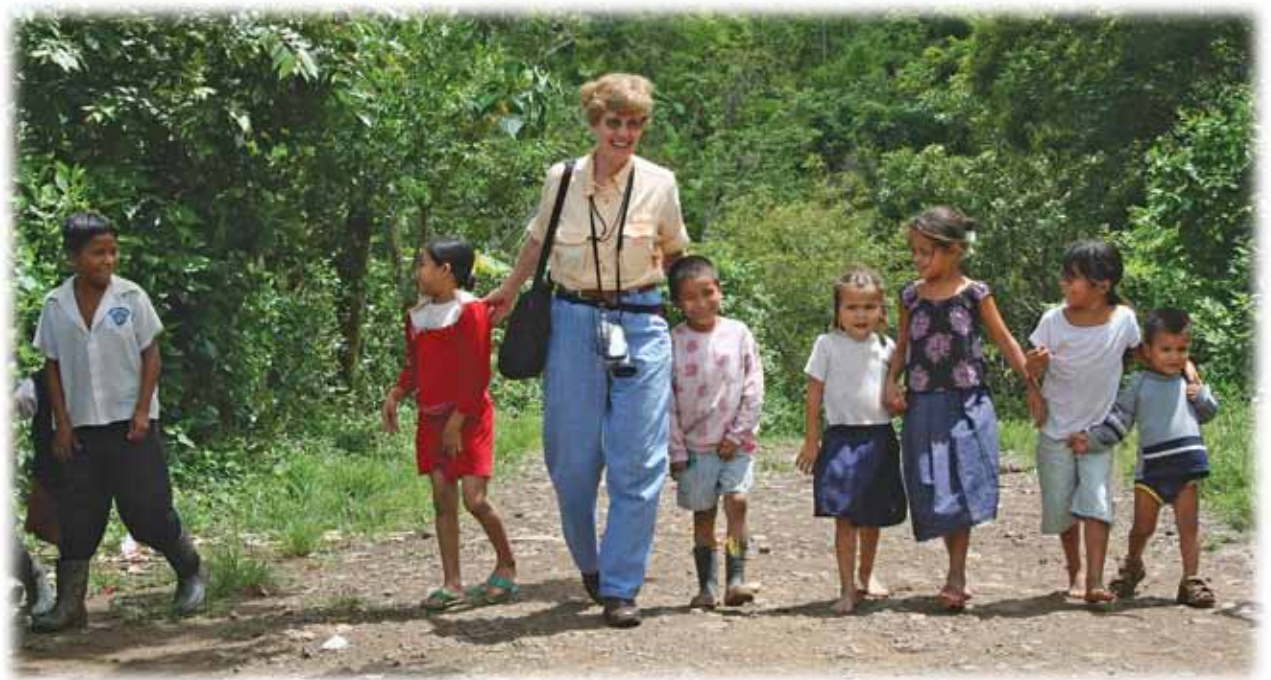
She has an ancient look but a striking quickness. As I try to film her I am always in her way as she methodically serves the children from a five-gallon bucket of gray, diluted oatmeal liquid drink. No wonder she hurries. Marina supervises the five cooks who serve over 100 children coming in waves to that little room. She dashes off and I literally run to follow her.

Her house next door provides opportunity to meet a half dozen of her 37 grandchildren. Her sturdy, mustached husband and six offspring, including a month-old baby, share this board and tin house, subdivided by sheets with dirt floors trod to a smooth hardness. As I film, she sweeps

her yard and describes the grinding and boiling of the armadillo shells that hang on the fence. The ground up shells will provide folk medicine for all who come to her.

Just as the spirit and spunk of our own rural grandmothers and grandfathers provided the hope and inspiration for their children, Marina helps provide the hope for this new generation. In a mirror of her energy and action, perhaps the next

generation of Nicaraguan children will learn how to acquire adequate food, an education, and an opportunity for parents to start a little business to provide the basics of clothes and shelter for their family. It is amazing what The Tin Roof Foundation-funded programs have already accomplished for the children of our Nicaraguan brothers and sisters. Women, like Marina, is one of the reasons why.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW FOR NICA NOCHE 2009

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14

Live and silent auctions, a live band, and great food—it's Nica Noche 2009 on Saturday evening, November 14, at Cincinnati's Sharonville Convention Center.

At Nica Noche (Nicaragua Night) we focus on the children of Nicaragua and provide a festive setting for fundraising that you won't soon forget. Join your friends. Make new friends. Mark your calendar now!

The live and silent auctions will feature 1960s Charley Harper artwork, a stay at a lovely vacation condo in Italy, beautiful handmade Nicaraguan art and craft items, a private day of sailing and lunch

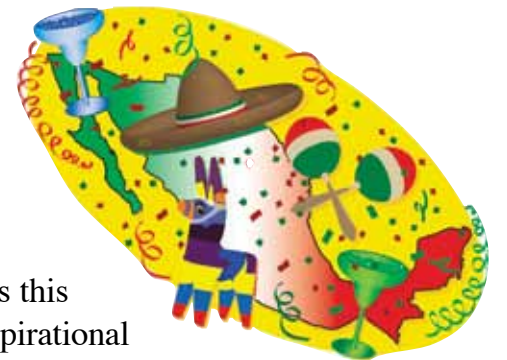
around the beautiful Charlotte Harbor near Ft. Myers, Florida, golf/dinner packages, dining gift certificates, valuable gift baskets (just in time for the holidays), and much more.



Don't miss this exciting, inspirational evening. The cost is \$75 per person or a reserved table of eight people for \$600, which provides you an energized evening of entertainment, food, and a chance to bid on some fabulous items.

More importantly, your support "Helps Bring Hope" to countless children in Nicaragua.

Seating is limited, so confirm your reservations by October 31. Contact Russ Monjar at (513) 340-4269, or e-mail him at rmonjar@cinci.rr.com.



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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