

Nicaraguan Night

By George L. Pauk MD

(Memories of a magical night in Jinotega, 2001)

Purísima, dark night, swirling breezes, and starry sky. Circulo de Amigas sleeps after another day of constant attention to and from the beautiful pairs of mothers and daughters. Mornings light to evenings dusk sees the pairs come to the doors for their assignments and support. They are dressed in clean and neat dresses. The daughters are in their best dresses and appear as miniature belles in period dress of some decade past. Their smiles and shy replies are wonderful rewards and they follow us with steady eyes. Certainly they are small goddesses appearing here in the midst of economic poverty.

Circulo de Amigas staff and friends gather and cheer each other. Fanny and her husband have



planned a treat for us. We walk into the evening, down the uneven gravel and dirt road, toward town. Cheerfully, and surrounded by an outpouring of good cheer, we follow the direction of the crowd. We are now growing accustomed to the nearly constant crack and boom of fire crackers and aerial explosions. We are filled with the energy of the festive people of Jinotega. Everywhere we are met with nods, smiles, handshakes, and the customary adios, adios, adios....a greeting and a respectful thought.

Purísima is a special day and night. It seems very appropriate for the Circulo de

Amigas. The mothers and daughters have a special relationship which is easily translated to the religious feeling of the day and night. Their kinship and friendship is an ancient universal band. Purísima, December 7, is the greatest Roman Catholic feast day in Nicaragua. Families joyfully walk the streets in the evening and night to visit homes and altars all over town. The altars are erected with statues, lace, flowers, candles, and paintings to honor Mary and her Immaculate Conception. Those families that put up altars in their homes give little gifts such as candy, fruit, and toys. The crowd sings special songs in return.

We are welcomed as special guests and ushered to the front of the crowd. Fanny's husband and artist, Hugo, has painted a magnificent Jubilee mural in this home. This is hospitality, friendship and Nicaraguan good will. Later, on the way back to Circulo de Amigas we walk in the warm night and see the bright stars above. We reflect on our own religious and other beliefs. Economic poverty is certainly not cultural poverty.