



## Fabretto Trip Reflections November, 2013

Often we may ask ourselves, how can we make a meaningful difference  
when problems in the world seem to grow exponentially  
every time we turn on the news.

...There is a way...and you can have a wonderful time visiting Nicaragua with Friends of Fabretto  
at the same time...





I recently had the privilege of traveling with Fabretto Children's Foundation to Nicaragua. On the trip I met some of the incredible individuals who have had a hand in transforming the lives of underserved children through Fabretto's programs, and we also had fun!

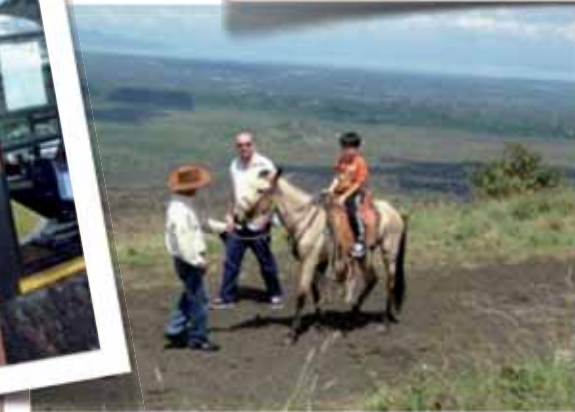
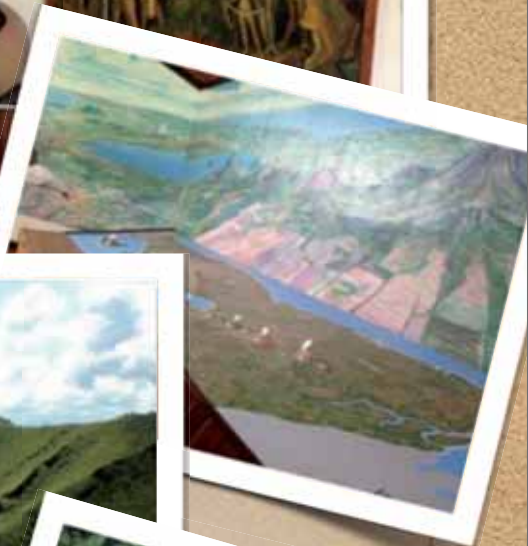
The Nicaraguan people, the Fabretto Centers and the amazing, warm friendly Fabretto staff will stay close, though I've journeyed back to the comforts of home in the States.





It was an easy group to get to know  
so it wasn't long before we became fast friends.





After a brief introduction,  
the first day was spent sight seeing the active Masaya volcano and museum...

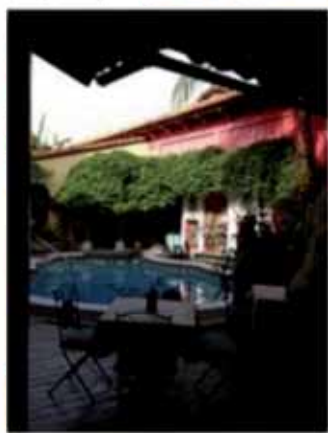
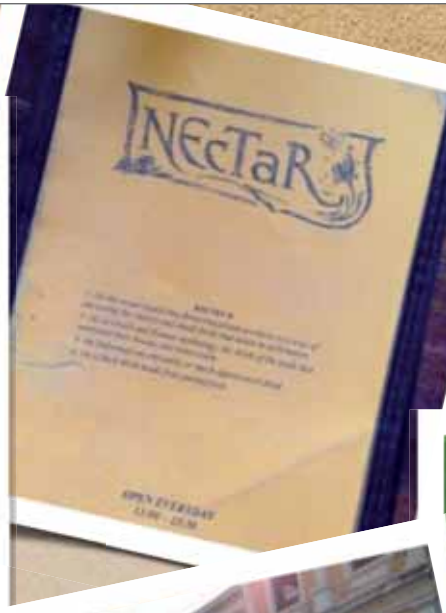


...stopping to the flea market...





...then sightseeing and enjoying lunch in Granada.



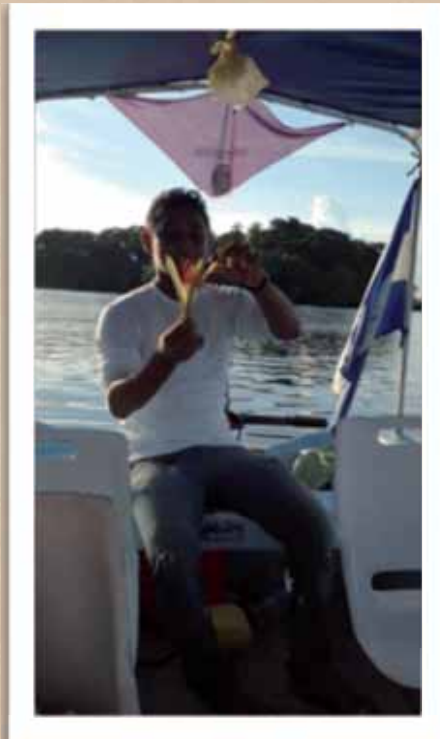


Taking a boat trip on Lake Nicaragua in the afternoon, we saw some lovely island homes in addition to visiting "monkey island," whose monkeys have names and came when called to the boat by our guide for granola bars.





Reaching into the trees, our boat guide even surprised us by pulling out a pod which discreetly and unexpectedly held a tropic flower which he gave to Chrissy, who plans Fabretto fundraising events in the United States.





It was a picture perfect day!



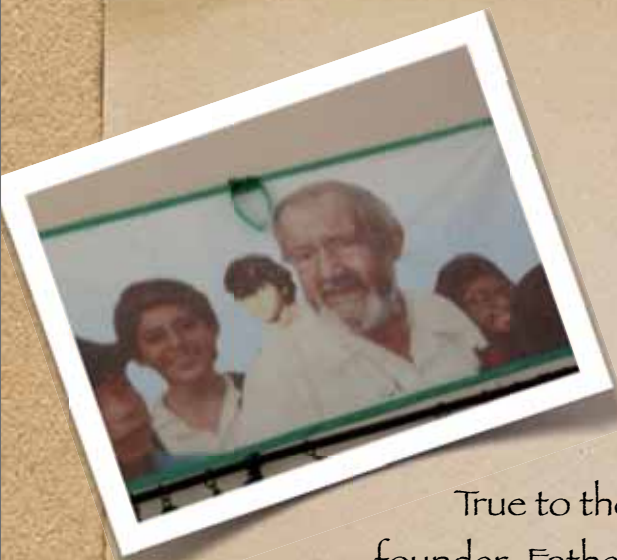




Thanks to teams in Nicaragua, the United States and Spain, guided by Kevin Marinacci, President and CEO of Fabretto, there has been a deep commitment to carry on the work of Father Fabretto who came to Nicaragua as a missionary in 1948, and stayed to help improve the lives of destitute children he found living in the streets.







True to the principles of it's founder, Father Fabretto — a legacy which is revered and remembered with smiles, appreciation, statues and pictures spotted in several places along the path of our journey — Kevin Marinacci, President of Fabretto, has not only managed to keep Father Fabretto's original spirit alive, but Kevin's life's work and dedication has been to organize and develop more programs.



Supported by a competent, sensitive staff, even with limited financial resources, Fabretto has steadily increased the number of children served each year, including in communities like Naranjo that rarely have visitors.







Thanks to Fabretto, there are less  
hungry children, more  
opportunities available and  
tangible ways to escape poverty  
and despair.

Fabretto makes a difference  
because Fabretto gives hope.

Not only did I enjoy traveling with a great group of Fabretto child sponsors and supporters, I was able to witness first-hand the positive impact of Fabretto, providing urban and rural educational support and healthful nutrition programs for children served by their programs.



There are many stories I could share from the incredibly inspiring five days spent on sojourn in Nica, where we traveled primarily on a comfortable bus with a capable driver along roads that were sometimes paved, sometimes not, often hilly and occasionally steep and narrow...





The accommodations were always comfortable. Our first two and last night stays were at the Barcelo. Although Barcelo is very nice (and the breakfast buffet is great!), it is a typical hotel, so I think my favorite overnight stay was at the more rustic Cuallitlan

Hotel, probably because the “great room” outside where we met for evening drinks and breakfast the next morning, reminded me of the Tiki room with thatched roof and over-hanging bamboo.





By the time we shared rooms with bunk beds at the lodge in Cusmapa, we were all very comfortable. While in Cusmapa, we enjoyed a trip to see the women's cooperative make baskets out of pine needles with the straightest stitches you can imagine-and done entirely by hand!





I have been deeply touched by the joy of education  
and the power of hope,  
especially demonstrated by one mother living  
in the dump community of La Cruz, who  
boarded our bus to give hugs,  
kisses and thanks to Fabretto  
for helping to educate some her  
children at the school near the  
dump where families work daily  
to eke out a meager living. The  
school stands as a colorful  
beacon of hope amid the drab  
houses made of sticks and plastic  
bags which one can't help but notice  
along the dirt road we traveled to the  
Fabretto school.







Education isn't something to be taken for granted in many places around the world, and one can really appreciate this in an impoverished country like Nicaragua, where there are no givens, nothing to be taken for granted, and no safety net.





Traveling comfortably on the bus, we generally adhered to our schedule, thanks to Hanna's excellent planning. From San Isidro outside of Managua, to the depths of the inner city at Acahualinca, to the Estelí garbage dump at La



Cruz, to the majestic mountains where the Cusmapa center is located, to the isolated community, La Naranjo, hidden deep in the forest — only accessible by foot, horseback or in our case, an adventurous ride down the mountains in the Fabretto backroads vehicle, clearly one can see the many



ways that Fabretto makes a difference with school enrichment and nutrition programs tailored specifically to each community's needs.







At each of the centers we were greeted warmly with genuine appreciation, and were treated to samples of the children's work and programs. Happy, smiling children at each were learning math, computer, English, art and community appropriate skills that would contribute towards a successful life.









St. Centro María Auxiliadora  
Center in Estelí shared traditional music  
and dance with festive costumes...



...and at Somoto we enjoyed lunch with  
the children, which included a manna  
pack croquette that was very much like a  
tasty hash brown.







High up in the mountains at Cusmapa we were greeted by children with a mail delivery of peace, "El Correo de La Paz" and a dramatic arts program sponsored in cooperation with Coca Cola, "Leer es mágico" and prenatal classes.







Seasoned volunteers and professionals working and helping in communities can attest that even the most well-meaning programs are only effective if done in cooperation with people living there, who embrace synchronous goals. Fabretto reaches out into the community to be sure this happens effectively, maximizing its programs by working with the communities where students are also responsible to volunteer and “give back,” in cooperation with the Nicaraguan Department of Education, and cooperatively in alliance with the Nicaraguan Government Health Centers.







Each Centers' programs are specifically tailored to meet the needs of the community served. Whether enriching students' lives by teaching life skills through SAT (rural development program), music, dance, art, English or computer skills, the goal of Fabretto programs is to support public education and further development and curiosity of learning, encouraging service, developing entrepreneurs and cooperative teaching/economic models in food production, distribution and jewelry making.







There is an application process to be a Fabretto student, which evaluates need combined with motivation and student and parent interest. For the program to truly make a difference in a child's life, experience has shown that each component is vital to the student's success-and sometimes it's taken significant effort to prove authenticity to get people involved.

In particular, I recall hearing the story of Alahandra, who now works in the kitchen at the San Francisco center, working and encouraging mother volunteers preparing food, while continuing to inspire others to get involved. Challenged in many ways with several children, Mallory, Director of the Cooperatives at the San Francisco center, told how Alahandra was initially reluctant to get involved. Undaunted, Fabretto volunteer Deanna Ford, founder of the San Francisco Center's Nica-Hope jewelry program and now on the Fabretto Advisory Council, went to Alahandra's house on a regular basis, building a relationship while encouraging her to get involved, and was finally successful. Seeing Alahandra smiling from the kitchen window, there is no doubt that Deanna and the staff transformed her life.







The kitchens are a hub of activity in each of the Centers, which are primarily staffed by dedicated mothers from the community who volunteer their time to prepare huge nutritious batches of rice, soy, beans and Manna donated from "Feed My Starving Children," a USAID program, and whatever seasonal fruits and vegetables can be gleaned from the school gardens.



Fabretto urban school gardens were often found alongside the school buildings in raised beds made of pottery and tires. These gardens are an essential important resource for the program because fruits and veggies are contributed to the healthy school lunch program, where children are weighed and measured a couple times per year. The program has to assume that the nutritious school meal might be the only thing the child is eating, and since brain growth is stunted when early nutrition is sacrificed the future of starving children is compromised if they don't get fed an adequate diet..







SAT programs in rural areas, where the rich soil is worked by the school-farm cooperative, teaches seventh through eleventh graders methods of growing fruits and vegetables and how to raise chickens. Students have to be motivated since it isn't uncommon that the students walk several miles each day just to get to school. Their 8 hour school days are divided between learning theory and practicing on the farm, as they work independently with tutors who commit to working with the Fabretto program for five years to ensure continuity with the students. The Fabretto students' efforts are well rewarded in each of the centers where they have SAT programs as the fields are robust with lush vegetation, half of which is used for the cooperatives lunch program while the other half is sold at market to support class room resources.





Among the young people in the Fabretto program who impressed me are two fourteen year old men, Darwin and Diego, from whom I purchased Cafe El Sabanero, Savorsito Montañero

Coffee. I learned that Fabretto programs strive to encourage self sufficiency and entrepreneurship by teaching economic skills along with public speaking, while they help students to gain confidence. Diego shared that he walked an hour to get to school every day but that he and Darwin were excited for the opportunity to learn. They started the coffee business in 2012 and from Cusmapa, they travel by bus to San Lucas in Somoto to sell their coffee on Saturdays, which takes about 14 hours to earn 60 cordobas per month (about \$15). The 100% pure organic coffee sales helps to pay off their Fabretto start-up business loan and also provides materials needed for school. When asked about the future of their schooling and business, Diego, quickly replied, "It's in God's hands," and that he has the "strength and hope to study."





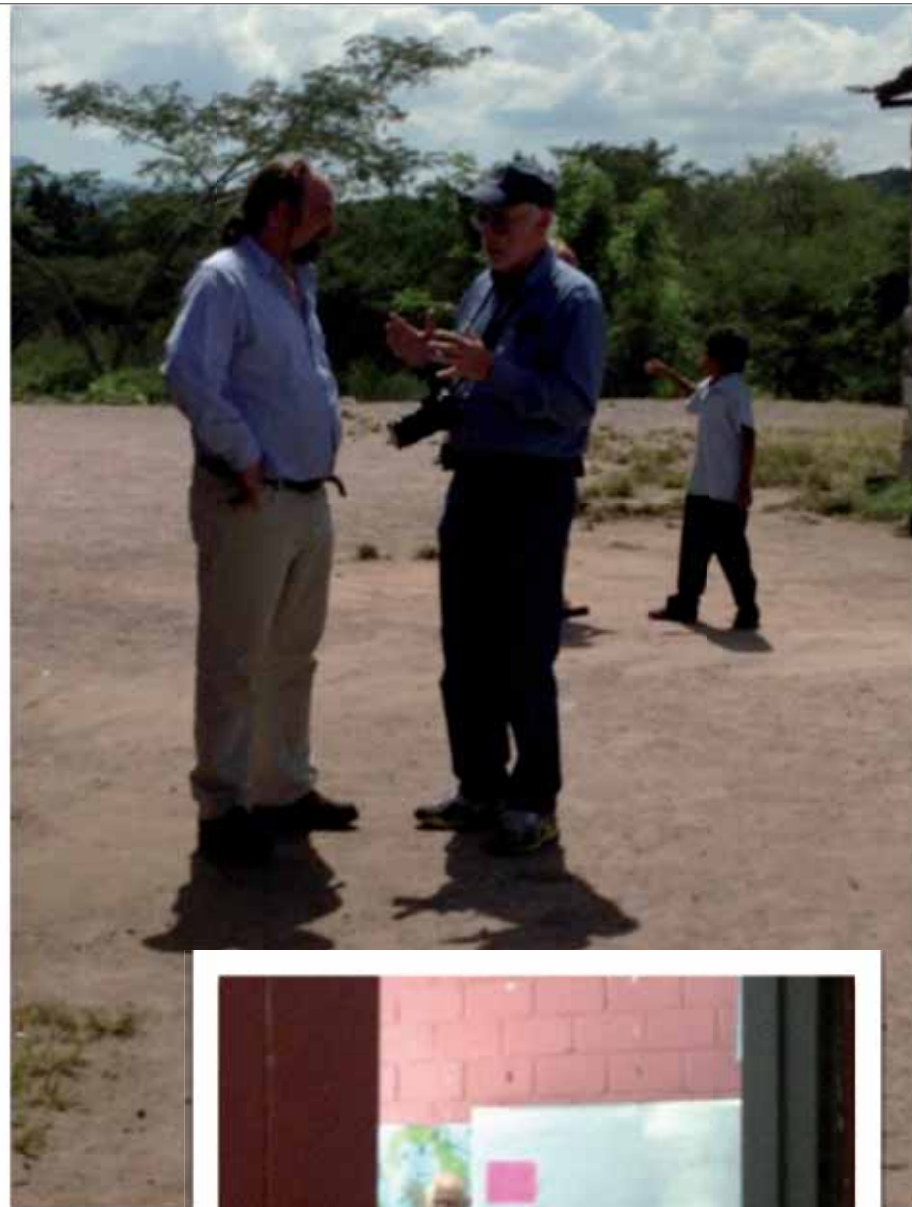


I would be remiss not to mention  
the number of  
people traveling with me  
who have been  
sponsoring children,  
some for a short while,  
others for years.





One gentleman who truly made an impression on me before I even knew of his extensive history with Fabretto is John Manley. It wasn't until well into our trip as we headed up the beautiful mountains towards Cusmapa, at the Fabretto Center in Somoto, that I learned of John's deep commitment to Fabretto, and how he transformed a tragedy in his and his family's life, into something meaningful and good. John's daughter died tragically in 9-11, her picture hangs in the Somoto Center's cafeteria, where donations raised in his daughter's memory helped to build the center which houses school rooms for enrichment programs and computer labs. Most touching though, was learning that John and his family have sponsored six children, and that one, graduated and now in college, came to the Somoto Center to make sure she met with him, for John has been her support sponsor for the last 8 years. The gratefulness was evident, the success — obvious. That's the power of Fabretto. Though regular correspondence and communications, a sponsor can really know the children who's lives are transformed, and many would be without hope for a future if Fabretto didn't exist. Seeing one of John's sponsored younger children hugging him tightly, I realized words fail to describe what these experiences and relationships with Fabretto and their sponsors really do for a child so in need of love and hope. To know someone cares is very powerful, and is what truly makes a tangible difference.







If one desires to  
make a meaningful  
impact, and  
wishes to have a

vehicle for personal interaction which  
deeply touches the life of a child, Fabretto  
can facilitate this special relationship with a  
child in need.



There's no doubt  
that by building  
relationships, one  
person at a time we  
really make a difference and can  
help to heal a world in need.

